

The following excerpts are sourced from three online articles that highlight significant global sustainability news and climate-related stories of local interest in Ireland from the past week. You can find detailed references for all the content listed below.

In this week's news feature, the Irish Times (2024) highlights how energy-intensive data centres could assist Ireland in achieving its green energy goals by fostering investments in offshore wind initiatives. Additionally, WMO.com (2024) provides a brief overview of COP29, detailing how its "Declaration on Water for Climate Action" prioritises water in both global and national climate policies. Lastly, we also celebrate Ireland's enhanced international ranking in climate performance.



Data centres could aid offshore wind development

Irish Times (2024) reveals how data centres could potentially open up a significant market opportunity for the huge amounts of offshore wind power Ireland plans to generate in the future:

Consultants argue data centres could soak up excess power generation from renewables that could reach 55% above demand. Power-hungry data centres could help the Republic meet its green energy targets by supporting investment in offshore wind projects, a new report argues. Government targets require developers to build coastal wind farms capable of generating 5,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity, enough to supply the Republic at peak demand, by 2030, up from 25MW now. Experts commissioned by data centre industry group Cloud Infrastructure Ireland (CII) argue its members' facilities will be key to getting many offshore wind farms built as they can buy the electricity generated.

CII maintains that construction of the offshore power plants will rely on their developers getting corporate power purchase agreements – deals through which large energy users such as data centres contract to buy electricity. Those deals will give the developers certainty, allowing them to raise the necessary finance to fund the projects in the first place, according to CII, which is part of employers' lobby Ibec.

Irish Times (2024)

Despite recent resistance and lobbying against the continued development of these 'power-hungry' data centres, Irish Times (2024) explains how large technology companies already support renewable energy development elsewhere in the world through corporate power purchase deals:



Earlier this week the independent Climate Change Performance Index called for a moratorium on data centres, which the organisation predicted could account for 30 per cent of energy use here by 2030. The facilities have been under scrutiny for several years as the Republic's energy networks have struggled to keep up with rapidly rising demand, while high electricity prices have focused attention on big consumers of power.

Opponents of such developments, including environment groups, want such projects stalled. However, the CII report, by UK-based consultancy Baringa, points out that large technology companies already support renewable energy elsewhere in the world through corporate power purchase deals.

Baringa also believes they could help cut business and household electricity bills as such deals would mean wind farms would not have to rely on the State's renewable energy support schemes, funded through contributions from electricity consumers. Corporate power purchase agreements could "avoid up to €73 million in State-backed payments under the Offshore Renewable Energy Support Scheme", the report claims. Baringa also maintains that as the Republic continues to build offshore wind farms it could end up with a surplus of electricity, potentially forcing operators to periodically shut down some, or all, generation.

Using grid operator Eirgrid's demand predictions, the consultants say that by 2040 supply from renewables could be 29 per cent to 55 per cent higher than demand. Instead of losing some of this power the firm says data centres could use it.

Dr Mark Turner, Baringa partner, said the findings show how "data centres sit at the intersection of Ireland's twin digitalisation and offshore wind" goals.

Irish Times (2024)



Water is an integral part of the global climate agenda

This week's major news revolves around COP29, with WMO.com highlighting a strong emphasis on water initiatives following the introduction of The COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action. This declaration aims to promote the complete integration of water actions into the global climate agenda.

The COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action has been issued by the Azerbaijan Presidency in order to anchor water more firmly within the global climate agenda.

The Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action is intended to provide continuity between the annual UN climate negotiations and promote coherence and collaboration. It aims to ensure a consistent focus on water and its interplay with climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and desertification, focusing on actions at the international, regional, river and basin levels.

"Water is not just a victim of climate change but it is also a vital solution. Water is at the heart of achieving many Sustainable Development Goals. Without water there is no sustainable development," said COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev. "Water must be integrated into full aspects of the global climate agenda." He said that the Caspian Sea – the world's largest inland water body and an integral part of Azerbaijan's national identity and economy – is shrinking, alongside the degradation of biodiversity. "This is an alarming prospect," he said. WMO is one of the founding partners of the Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action, which will be hosted by the UN Environment Programme. The Baku Dialogue declaration resolves to:

- promote dialogue and partnerships among countries at international, regional, river and basin levels,
- strengthen the generation of scientific evidence on the causes and impacts of climate change on water resources, water basins and water-related ecosystems,
- enhance water-related climate policy actions.

It received a ringing endorsement from speakers at a high-level side event in the closing stages of COP29.

WMO.com (2024)

WMO.com continues with its State of Global Water Resources Report which shows that the water cycle is spinning out of control, becoming more erratic, more unpredictable and more extreme. Plus it reminds us of the significant economic impact of climate change on water resources:

"2023 was the driest for rivers globally in more than three decades of records. Almost half of the planet experienced lower than normal annual river flows. The world's glaciers experienced their largest mass loss in almost fifty years of record-keeping. This is a worrying omen for future water security for billions of people," WMO Deputy Secretary-General Ko Barrett told the high-level event.

"Water is at the heart of the international disaster risk reduction agenda and the Early Warnings for All initiative. This is essential, given that water-related hazards are the leading cause of human and economic losses in many countries," she said.

WMO.com (2024)

Water is vital for climate change mitigation as a key enabler of greenhouse gas emission reductions. Water supports renewables like biofuels, hydropower, and is needed for cooling of low-emission power plants. Finally, water is essential for hydrogen and for producing minerals vital for battery technology.

“This makes the necessary green energy transition a thirsty business and is why we need integrated water and climate policies,” said Ko Barrett.

WMO.com (2024)

The need for water action.

The impacts of climate change are felt through water.

- One-fifth of the world’s river basins are experiencing rapid changes in the area covered by surface waters
- Glaciers have suffered the largest mass loss in 50 years.
- Around 2.2 billion people still do not have access to safe drinking water, 3.5 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation,³ and at least 50% of the world’s population – around 4 billion people – live under highly water-stressed conditions, with the most vulnerable hit the hardest.
- Over 90 percent of disaster-affected people and nearly 95 percent of infrastructure loss and damage were impacted by water-related disasters, while floods are one of the major sources of water pollution, threatening water quality and human health and safety.

The economic impacts of climate change on water resources are significant. Some regions could experience GDP declines of up to 6% by 2050 due to water-related impacts on agriculture, health, and incomes. Without mitigating actions, global GDP could decrease by up to 18% by mid-century if temperatures rise by 3.2°C. These findings underscore the substantial economic risk posed by climate-induced disruptions to the hydrological cycle.

WMO.com (2024)

CCPI Ranking Results



Source: The Climate Change Performance Index

Ireland achieves best ranking yet on global emissions scale.

RTE (2024) celebrates Ireland's improved international ranking for climate performance, meaning for the first time it is now considered to be a medium performer on climate action. The COP report cites Ireland's continuing legislative framework for climate change and legally-binding carbon budgets as significant contributors:

The international ranking of Ireland's climate performance has improved substantially over the past 12 months, according to a new report published at the COP29 climate conference taking place in Baku in Azerbaijan. The analysis covers 63 countries which account for 90% of global greenhouse emissions. Ireland ranks 29th, having climbed 14 places since last year to achieve its best ever result. It means that, for the first time, the Republic is now considered to be a medium performer on climate action. Ireland's ranking was helped by a significant increase in renewable energy capacity along with improvements in energy use, climate policy and laws. For the fourth year in a row, Denmark topped the index. It is followed, in order, by The Netherlands, the UK, the Philippines and Morocco. The United States is ranked 57th in the international climate performance index.

The ranking was produced by German watch, an environmental organisation that, for two decades, has monitored and ranked various countries' efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve the goal established in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. German watch officials have expressed concern that the US could slip further down the rankings following the election of Donald Trump as President.

The report noted Ireland's introduction of legally binding five-year carbon budgets as well as sectoral emissions ceilings, along with the completion of a legislative framework for annually revised climate action plans. It also acknowledges that Ireland's solar power capacity has doubled in just one year thanks to a surge in utility-scale solar projects, as well as a significant rise in small and domestic rooftop solar installations. Minister for the Environment, Eamon Ryan declared that Ireland has not just jumped, but "vaulted" 14 places in this year's rankings, and is "leaving our climate laggard tag behind". He welcomed the acknowledgement of the progress made on solar energy, which he said was the result of "a rooftop revolution".

RTE (2024)

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