

Report to the federal Parliament

Offshore wind farms: construction, connection and use



In order to meet the European renewable energy targets, the federal policy supports the development of offshore wind energy. The Belgian Court of Audit examined whether the legal and organisational framework has provided adequate safeguards for a fast, sustainable and efficient construction and connection, and whether the financial support mechanisms have been cost-efficient. The analysis focused on the nine implemented wind farms in the eastern zone of the Belgian part of the North Sea, but also gathered insight for the wind farms yet to be developed in the new Princess Elisabeth Zone.

The Court of Audit found that the development of the wind farms has taken a relatively long time. That was mainly due to the time needed by developers for conducting studies and arranging their project financing prior to applying for the building permit and other authorisations. For the wind farms that were implemented later, uncertainties about and delays in the construction of the offshore transmission network and the reinforcement of the onshore power grid also played a role. The regulator CREG has not been able to fully play its legal advisory role for transmission network investments due to limited access to information and too little time to offer its advice.

Financial support evolved from fixed support for the first wind farms to variable support of net production for the most recent ones. Various adjustments resulted in insufficient surveillance of the level playing field between the wind farms. Most of the wind farm profits were already largely distributed to shareholders whereas the annual returns fluctuated widely depending on offshore wind levels. Some of the wind farms made surplus profits but these should be interpreted with caution, given the role of the wind climate.

The Court of Audit made recommendations for the further follow-up of the wind farms in the eastern zone, the development of the Princess Elisabeth Zone and the related crucial preconditions such as the implementation of the onshore and offshore power grid, and the CREG's advisory and supervisory role.