CONSULTATION RESPONSE

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Renewable energy – Guidance on designating renewables acceleration areas – Have your Say
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RENEWABLE ENERGY – GUIDANCE ON DESIGNATING RENEWABLES ACCELERATION AREAS – HAVE YOUR SAY

Bellona welcomes the Commission’s initiative to provide guidance on designating renewable acceleration areas. The proposal holds significant promise in accelerating the deployment of renewable energy to meet the EU targets. The renewable acceleration areas outlined in Article 15c of RED hold significant promise as instrumental mechanisms for expediting the deployment of renewable energy sources within the EU.

Renewables are the cornerstone of the energy transition and, as they are produced locally, can vastly contribute to increased energy security by freeing Europe from dependence on imported fossil fuels. However, this cannot be done at the expense of the environment, thus, acceleration areas should be identified as areas with low environmental risks. This will reduce investment risk and public opposition, together with early involvement of affected communities.

We emphasise the critical need to adopt a holistic approach when it comes to this planning, taking into account environmental, societal and infrastructural/technical considerations, particularly regarding the necessary grid infrastructure.

We appreciate that areas for grid infrastructure are tackled in RED’s Article 15e, in particular, point (c) stresses that we should “ensure synergies with the designation of renewables acceleration areas”. Therefore, renewables acceleration areas should be identified with careful consideration of the existing and anticipated grid infrastructure, incentivising its buildout if this is not available.

It’s imperative to recognise that the success of these areas hinges not only on the suitability for renewable energy projects but also on the availability of appropriate grid infrastructure to support their integration into the energy system and the delivery of the electricity to the final consumers. The potential benefits of acceleration areas for wind and solar projects may be severely constrained if adequate grid infrastructure is not deployed. Therefore, while Member States can designate renewable acceleration areas for various renewable energy technologies, the focus must also encompass the associated grid infrastructure and storage buildout. This ensures that the acceleration areas are not merely isolated pockets for renewable energy deployment but integral components of a cohesive and efficient energy system.
We stress that the designation of renewables acceleration areas should culminate in a coordinated effort that develops the entire energy system. This includes building the necessary grid and storage infrastructure once the viability of wind and solar projects within these areas is assessed. Failure to do so may undermine the effectiveness of the acceleration areas in achieving their objectives. Projects face operational challenges and economic viability issues without sufficient transmission and distribution capacity, managing intermittency, and integrating renewable energy. Addressing grid infrastructure needs is essential to maximise the potential of acceleration areas and achieve the EU 2030 renewable energy targets.

Furthermore, finding a delicate balance between harmonisation at higher levels and flexibility at the local level is key in ensuring the effectiveness of the methodology and criteria used for designating favourable areas and renewable acceleration zones. Recognising the importance of national or higher-level guidance to promote consistency and coherence in decision-making processes is essential. However, embracing is equally crucial for fostering adaptability and responsiveness to diverse regional contexts.

In conclusion, we urge thorough consideration of grid infrastructure and storage requirements when designating renewable acceleration areas. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses renewable energy deployment, grid integration needs and environmental protection, Member States can maximise the impact of these areas in accelerating the transition to a sustainable energy future.

Bellona Europa is an independent, non-profit organisation that meets environmental and climate challenges head-on. We are result-oriented and have a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to assess the economics, climate impacts and technical feasibility of necessary climate solutions. To do this, we work with civil society, academia, governments and polluting industries.