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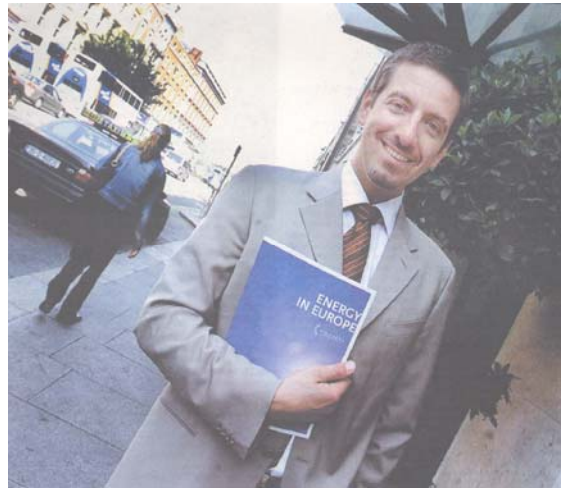
It's Bak to basics as Jason brews up an Irish green energy storm

INTERVIEW OF THE WEEK: JASON BAK, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FINAVERA

With two large wind projects planned for Galway and Clare, Jason Bak's farms will produce 180 megawatts between them - enough energy to power more than 100,000 homes. Canadian Jason Bak strongly believes the future is green.

That is why his Irish company has decided to hold off on developing a potentially huge onshore gasfield it owns along the Border and bet the house on waves, wind and biodiesel instead.

To fund its green energy plans, Mr Bak's privately-owned energy company, Finavera Renewables, plans a flotation on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) in London and the Dublin equivalent, the Irish Enterprise Exchange (IEX), later this year or early next year.



Finavera Renewables has been split off from the company that owns the large onshore gas reserve along the Border. Finavera has a gas exploration permit for over 1,630 sq km of the Lough Allen basin along the Border at Fermanagh and Sligo.

The company says there is between 1 and 5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in this area. This compares with 1.5 trillion cubic feet at the controversial Corrib field off the West Coast.

But despite the sky high and ever rising price of fossil fuels, Mr Bak says that for now alternative energy is the best bet.

The company is active in wind power, wave power and fuel-related technologies. It is developing 180 megawatts of wind power in Ireland.

It also has stakes in two wave power companies which, combined, are hoping to produce 170 megawatts of power.

Finavera has appointed Libertas Capital in Britain as its sponsoring broker and nominated adviser for the AIM flotation and is currently talking to Dublin brokers to help with its IEX listing.

The company is finalising land agreements for the development of two large wind projects in Galway and Clare. When developed, the wind farms will produce 180 megawatts between them, or enough green energy to power more than 100,000 homes, and will contribute to helping the Republic meet its renewable energy targets.

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The country will need to produce 1,000 megawatts from alternative energy sources by 2010 to meet its commitments on cutting greenhouse gases, Mr Bak stresses. "Ireland is ideally suited for wind generation as it has the highest winds speeds in Europe," he says.

Both wind projects are located within reach of ESB transmission lines.

But the most interesting project Finavera is involved in is its plans for generating electricity from the waves. The company's wave projects are located off the coasts of Wales and Portugal.

Wave technology is a high-risk venture, with previous attempts to harness the power of the sea failing, often because equipment got damaged during bad weather.

But Mr Bak believes its products, which move with ocean currents, will be able to withstand stormy conditions.

Finavera is currently working with the Portuguese government and Portugal's largest power utility, Energias de Portugal, to develop a wave power project at Figuera da Foz.

The Irish company owns 30pc of the €80m project which plans to build a 100 megawatt wave power plant. The project is being underwritten by the Portuguese government, which is offering interest-free loans for much of the development outlay.

The technology of Seattle firm AquaEnergy is being used as it generates clean electrical power from the motion of waves in the ocean.

Mr Bak insists that the technology, although still at an early stage, works. Finavera tested all the different wave technology options and now has interests in two of them.

"Generating electricity offshore is far more consistent than onshore. The devices we have, have been tested and have been under development for a while. Others out there are not at the level of development ours are at."

The Portuguese government is prepared to pay 22½c a kilowatt hour, compared with 5c for wind-generated power in Ireland.

Mr Bak's company is also aiming to make money out of biodiesels. It has a minority interest in an Australian company that converts waste material into biofuel.

The European Commission has set a target that states should aim to have biofuels as a minimum of 2pc of their fuel mix by the end of 2005. This is part of an overall European-wide strategy to establish a 20pc substitution in oil and gas fuels by 2020.

Finavera has identified sites in Britain and Ireland where it plans to cite a biofuel-producing plant.

Mr Bak, a native of Vancouver, has been in Ireland for the past six years. He is marrying a Donegal woman later this year. A physicist, he originally brought him to this island.

Finavera was set up about two years ago by four professionals with experience in energy and natural resources.

Other founders include geophysicist Tom Davitt, and Damien Reynolds, whose background is mining and natural gas, and geologist Dr Stephen McCarron. The founders own around 50pc of the company.

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Finavera Renewables is chaired by Michael Reynolds who, as chief executive of Spain's Endesa, led a team that invested €8bn expanding the Spanish company's power business.

When it floats later this year or early next year, Finavera hopes to raise between €15m and €22m to develop its projects. At some stage Mr Bak will then set his sights on expanding some of Finavera's renewable energy operations in his native Canada.