

Entrepreneurial Women in Renewable Energy



My story...

Sue Barr

External affairs manager, OpenHydro

An inspirational woman who has been championing marine energy for the last 16 years and has made ground breaking achievements in national policy decisions.

After starting her career as a marine scientist in the oil and gas sector, Sue moved out of the offshore survey industry and in to a scientific advisory role with the UK government Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). With an educational background in marine science and environmental management, Sue was then asked to join the team within central government responsible for the permitting and licensing of marine renewable energy. Sue has contributed to a number of key policy decisions enabling the development of offshore renewables, which she describes as one of her greatest achievements. "I believe that longevity in the industry has been really important for my career, having been involved in marine energy for over sixteen years. I hope I have helped shape the future for marine energy in the UK and Ireland but, there is still a long way to go for this emerging industry."

Sue believes that the current need for low carbon technologies and increasing energy security creates huge opportunities for career development within the renewable energy sector. The latter part of Sue's career involved her landing numerous senior positions at OpenHydro, a tidal technology company. Sue initially led on site development and now sits on the senior management team, as well as holding a position at board level for Brims Tidal Array Ltd, the largest tidal development in the UK.

Sue's success is marked by her involvement in huge technical projects, which have landed millions of euros in investment. However, she openly admitted that the working environment can be hugely demanding, especially when just starting a family.

"There are still significant challenges to women progressing in any industry, proving yourself can be very difficult".

“In small, dynamic start-up companies the working environment can be hugely stimulating but increasingly demanding, both in terms of working hours and travel. I have found that I have had to be hugely flexible and committed, travelling for long periods away from home. I think I spend more time on planes and travelling than most other women. After starting a family, the demand of such a time-consuming role can be incredibly tough.”

Despite this, Sue goes on to describe the industry as an extremely exciting place and is on the case to encourage more women into the sector, “It’s important that women recognise and celebrate their own skills and understand that there are huge opportunities within the renewable energy sector to those whose skills apply.” Sue discusses with us that there are various different roles available within the renewables sector including finance, operations, project management, technical, environmental and managerial roles - as it is often assumed renewable energy is only for engineering specialists.

Sue discloses the potential barriers she has faced during her career, “There are still significant challenges to women progressing in any industry but these are somewhat magnified in my industry which combines the offshore environment with engineering. Proving yourself can be very difficult.”

“The most important lesson for me has been to really understand where your core skills lie and to use these to the best of your advantage. You also have to believe in what you are doing, which is where a career in green energy can be hugely fulfilling. You have to be strong enough to recognise what you are not good at and preferably, steer your career path towards your strengths, not your weaknesses. Never give up!”

When asking Sue what successes and failures she has learnt from her career she explains “I believe I have been successful in raising the profile of marine energy and delivering a 100 per cent success rate in gaining the permissions and licences for our tidal energy projects. I have also tried to steer the policy and science supporting marine energy development in a direction which both serves to allow sustainable development without unnecessary delay or cost to projects. But, we all have failures and we should see them as stepping stones to improvement. The majority of my failures have come from not truly believing and not being motivated by what I am doing.”

“I began my career in assessing the environmental impacts of developing oil fields and now spend most of my time stepping out on the international stage to help develop markets for marine energy.”