

## GULF OF MAINE DRAFT WIND ENERGY AREA VIRTUAL MEETINGS NOV 1-3, 2023 - MEETING SUMMARY

*DISCLAIMER: This meeting summary was prepared by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), a non-profit entity contracted by BOEM to facilitate discussions. This summary is not intended to be a meeting transcript. Rather, it focuses on the main points covered during the meetings.*

### MEETINGS IN BRIEF

BOEM convened six virtual meetings during the first week of November 2023 to provide information and receive input on the recently announced draft Wind Energy Area (WEA) in the Gulf of Maine, as well as the BOEM Secondary Areas for Further Analysis (“Secondary Areas”). BOEM offered an initial meeting oriented to all audiences. Five subsequent meetings focused on specific stakeholder groups, though all meetings were open to the public and [recorded](#)<sup>1</sup>. The meetings provided useful input that will inform the agency’s approach to identifying final WEAs in early 2024.

### ATTENDANCE

Approximately 487 people participated in the 6 meetings. Three of five meetings targeted the fishing community (mobile-gear, fixed-gear, recreational & highly migratory species), while other meetings convened environmental advocates and shipping & commercial maritime stakeholders.

### SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

Zach Jylkka, BOEM Project Coordinator, reviewed key steps in the Gulf of Maine Planning Process leading up to the recently announced Draft Wind Energy Area and Secondary Areas for Further Analysis. Mr. Jylkka described how previous stakeholder input influenced BOEM’s decisions. He also reviewed BOEM’s upcoming steps and how stakeholders can continue to provide meaningful input.

Dr. James Morris and Alyssa Randall with NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) described how the Center used spatial models to identify areas that may be most and least suitable for offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine. They provided an overview of the data used in the model, as well as details of the spatial model outputs.

### DISCUSSION

Questions and feedback from participants made up a majority of each meeting. Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed. The full detail of the meetings can be seen in the meeting [recordings](#).

BOEM encouraged all participants to submit detailed comment and feedback on points discussed in these meetings. Comments can be submitted by visiting [regulations.gov](#) and searching for docket number BOEM-2023-0054. BOEM said the formal comment period ends 11:59 pm ET on Nov. 20, 2023.

### Fisheries Meetings

#### **Recreational Fishing & Highly Migratory Species**

##### Impact on Bluefin Tuna

- Participants highlighted the lack of quality data on bluefin tuna movement, spawning grounds, and forage. Low VMS data availability creates gaps in the spatial model.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boem.gov/renewable-energy/state-activities/maine/gulf-maine>

- Stakeholders recommended:
  - Reconsidering the overlap of the draft WEA with the Fundian channel. It is one of only two deepwater inlets available to bluefin tuna.
  - Conducting comprehensive impact assessments before the leasing process begins.
- Stakeholders appreciated the exclusion of the Great South Channel from the draft WEA

#### Types of Wind Technology

- Fishermen requested guidance on the specific types of floating winds technology that might be used, to better inform their comments and response.

#### Overall Questions and Concerns

- Fishermen:
  - raised concerns about the possibility of losing access to wind farm areas over the long term.
  - suggested that bathymetric data be analyzed in the spatial model to provide additional information about fishing vessel movement patterns
- Participants asked questions about:
  - How learning from the research lease will be used to inform commercial leasing.
  - The difference between secondary areas for consideration and the draft WEA.

#### **Mobile Gear**

##### Questions Surrounding Data

- A fisherman wanted to confirm that his trawl speed was being captured in the data
- A participant said he felt the model and overall process was giving greater importance in wind industry interests than fishing interests.

##### Areas Included in the Draft WEA

- A stakeholder noted that an examination of mean wind speeds will provide context for the movement of trawling fleets in different seasons, particularly fleet movement toward the west in the winter. The WEA overlaps in the west will impact the industry and may force fleets to reroute around the wind farms.
- Depending on the time of year when surveys were conducted, different spawning seasons may not be reflected in available data. Concerns were raised about fish spawning areas. Specifically, were historical and current spawning grounds accounted for in the Draft WEA?
- According to one participant, some areas of the Draft WEA encompass prime spawning areas:
  - Quadrants 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b, 8c and 8d are haddock spawning areas.
  - Quadrants 7b, 8b and 9b are redfish spawning areas.
- A concern was raised about the inclusion of quadrants 4a, 4b, 5a, and 5b, as these areas are economically significant for hook gear as well as being environmentally significant.
- VMS data may not accurately reflect important scallop fishing grounds.
  - Quadrants 7a and 8a have high scallop biomass, which will be harvestable within 2-4 years.

### Leasing and Construction

- Concerns were raised about the unknown ecological and economic impacts of construction and converter stations on marine ecosystems. How can we choose potential areas for leasing without clarity on possible effects?
- Participants asks BOEM for additional information on lease stipulations and bidding credits

### Other Questions and Concerns

- A participant said BOEM should provide more information at these meetings about marine mammal issues.
- A participant asked for in-person meetings in the future instead of virtual meetings.

### ***Fixed Gear and Scallops***

#### Overall views on offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine

- Fishermen expressed serious concerns about the impact of offshore wind development on their industry
  - Population of young lobsters in the Gulf of Maine is down 39%. The industry cannot afford to lose any of its prime fishing areas to offshore wind.
  - Concern that fisheries are not receiving as much weight as wind and industry. Stakeholders stated that fisheries have been active here much longer, and deserve more consideration
- Participants expressed concern about low availability of data on lobster fishing
- A participant noted that the existing model does not include data tracking changes in the currents in the Gulf of Maine, especially those moving south from Labrador, which are important to fisheries.
- Concern that environmental impact surveys are planned after leases are issued, making it less likely that serious conflicts will be addressed and development halted if needed. The fishing industry would like a clear assessment of impact prior to leasing
- Some participants expressed a low level of trust in the federal government, and noted that the public meeting schedule clashed with fishing schedules during prime season.

#### Concerns Surrounding Secondary Areas

- All participants who commented on the Secondary Areas said they should be removed from consideration in the Final WEA
- Feedback on Secondary Area A
  - Secondary Area A, combined with the research array, represent a significant percentage of lobster Zone D, and would force dislocation and conflict.
- Feedback on Secondary Areas B and C
  - Secondary Area B is a highly lucrative lobster fishing zone. If fishermen are pushed out of this zone, they will be forced east into direct conflict with others
  - Regarding Secondary Area C, a potential shift in the proposed shipping fairway to make this area viable would put shipping traffic further in shore and closer to fishing areas.

#### Lease Stipulations and Bidding Credits

- There were several questions related to bidding credits, and BOEM's role in setting lease stipulations.
  - What authority does BOEM have to hold developers to stipulations and credits?
  - When a lease is sold/transferred, do the obligations go with it?

- How is the amount of funding required for decommissioning calculated?

#### Wind Technology and Construction

- Participants asked:
  - Is there a specific cable distance at which a DC system is needed to transport power to shore.
  - Might conversion equipment (substations, for instance) be permitted outside of wind energy areas?
- Questions were raised about the impact of laying cables in fishing areas.
  - A question was raised about whether environmental assessment of existing cables in the Gulf of Maine has been carried out, and how that might inform the offshore wind process.
  - Participants raised concerns about laboratory studies showing impacts from electromagnetic frequencies on lobster larvae, and asked what studies BOEM has conducted regarding electromagnetic impact on lobsters.

#### eNGO

##### Questions Surrounding Data and the Spatial Model

- Stakeholders asked several questions about the types of data included or excluded from the spatial model:
  - Did any particular species drive suitability most, and how were birds accounted for within the model?
  - A participant requested a source for the included ESA and MMPA species data, noting that aerial surveys would not cover an adequate sample of animals
  - Have BOEM and NOAA-NCCOS assessed how gaps in existing data may affect the reliability of the spatial model?
  - Are there differences in suitability scoring between floating and fixed bottom foundation areas?
  - Was any recent acoustic data used in the ESA/MMPA layer?
  - What kinds of cultural resources were included in the Natural and Cultural Resources model
- A participant noted differences between scoring used in the Oregon NCCOS analysis and in the Gulf of Maine, and wanted to understand what prompted the change in approach.
- How does this analysis compare to those done for deep water lease areas in California and the Gulf Coast?

##### Areas Included in the Draft WEA

- A participant asked if BOEM considered which areas would appear if the Draft WEA accounted for only the top 2% suitability scores.
- Were resource conflicts outside of the Call Area boundaries accounted for?

##### Questions About Bidding Credits and the Commercial Leasing Process

- Will the research array be established in time to collect data that can inform commercial development?

- How do bidding credits work, and have environmental mitigation funds ever been used in bidding credits?

### **Shipping & Commercial Maritime**

- Concerns about overlap with fairways
  - Secondary Area C seems too close for comfort from a shipping perspective.
  - Discussion about possibly moving fairways - concern raised about making ships zig zag - increased safety risk without a clear straight path.
  - Moving the shipping lane north of secondary area C would push the lane towards secondary area B may result in more interactions with commercial fishing vessels and gear
- Inclusion of Secondary Area A would allow for the most cost-effective transmission to Maine interconnection
- Participants asked a range of questions, including:
  - What is the timeline from finalizing lease maps to completed construction?
  - How much wind interest was there in Secondary Area C?
  - What feedback did fishermen provide in their meetings?
  - What size wind farm would be economically viable? What size footprint would that be?
  - Given recent news about developers backing out of wind projects - does BOEM expect interest to remain high in the Gulf of Maine?
  - Can leases be transferred?

### **Public Meeting**

#### Impact of Cables and Transmission Mechanisms

- A concern was raised about impact to fisheries from laying cables close to shore. A participant asked how the cost of that impact to fisheries compares to the cost incurred by companies to construct further offshore.
- Who will determine the transmission mechanism?

#### Areas Included in the Draft WEA

- Concern raised about the overlap of the Draft WEA with Right Whale Critical Habitat areas, and how that will impact right whale prey
- Are the Draft WEA and secondary areas more than 25 nautical miles from Clean Air Act Class 1 areas?
- How much additional data is required before Secondary Area A can be considered for the Final WEA?

#### Overall Questions and Concerns

- A participant appreciated that feedback shared in July meetings was incorporated into the process for the Draft WEAs.
- Question about whether there has been an assessment of which interest groups stand to gain or lose more given the boundaries of the Draft WEA
- Request for clarification about whether the state's request for 13 GW of offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine obliges BOEM to lease that amount of space.
- Discussion on how bidding credits work, and a leaseholder's obligations to fulfill them.
- Questions about phased leasing
  - How many leases are planned for initial solicitation?
  - Is there any provision for shared infrastructure between multiple lease holders?