

## MA Habitat Working Group on Offshore Wind

Virtual Meeting - February 9, 2023

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### MEETING SUMMARY

#### Updates from Massachusetts, Lisa Engler, MA CZM

Massachusetts CZM continues to review the proposed projects going through the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) for the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Wind Energy Areas (WEAs).

- Many projects are going through NEPA review and state review.
- Massachusetts will submit comments for the Orsted Sunrise and New England Wind projects in the coming weeks.
- Massachusetts continues to support and help BOEM's planning and siting of Offshore Wind (OSW) in the Gulf of Maine.
- Regarding the next OSW procurement in Massachusetts, the legislation indicates that the next RFP needs to be released within 24 months of the previous RFP release, which was May 2021. The group can expect another RFP by May 2023.

Lisa noted that in last summer's climate legislation, there was language added that required mitigation of impacts to the marine environment by providing financial and technical assistance to support the monitoring of wildlife and habitats. This essentially allows for the requirements of financial contributions to support offshore wind research relating to wildlife and habitat impacts.

Finally, regarding the next RFP, Lisa anticipated there would be another opportunity for public comment on a draft RFP. More information on the legislation can be found here:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2022/Chapter179>

*Q: How much power is that for the next procurement, and is there a set amount?*

*A: Massachusetts is authorized up to an additional 2,400 megawatts. The determination for what this RFP will request in terms of offshore wind is not yet determined.*

*Q: Could you remind us of where that money will go? Recall that other developers have pledged in bids to have similar dollar amounts but don't recall if there is a specified amount.*

*A: There is not a specified amount of dollars at the moment. This still needs to be determined, and a public comment period could support that effort. New York requires \$10,000 per megawatt, and that's \$5,000 for fishers and \$5,000 for habitat. For this language in Massachusetts, it seems to speak specifically to habitat and wildlife, but at this point, there is no clear direction in the statute.*

*Q: Regarding the public comment period, it would be great to get a group of us together to think about what we could submit as a group.*

*A: This is a great idea, and we'll coordinate a group to schedule that.*

NEXT STEP: Organize a group for the public comment period for the next RFP procurement.

### **Habitat Working Group Survey Results, *Nate Lash, CBI***

Nate Lash, CBI, presented the survey results for this working group. The presentation focused on: what the group finds more and less valuable, the representation within the group, improvements that could be made, and what subjects the group wants to tackle. Please refer to the [slides](#) for more details.

Some participants expressed surprise that some people viewed the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC) and the current group as duplicative. Members suggested that the group should focus on Massachusetts-specific issues not covered by the RWSC and avoid creating duplication. Others echoed those sentiments, emphasizing the importance of addressing state-specific concerns and the distinct role of the group in providing input on responsible offshore wind development. Another participant also pointed out that the RWSC primarily focuses on the scientific aspect, while the current group has broader interests.

### **BOEM Gulf of Maine Planning Process, *Zach Jylkka, BOEM***

Zach Jylkka, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Project Coordinator, delivered the opening presentation for BOEM. In his presentation, Mr. Jylkka reviewed key steps in the Gulf of Maine planning process, describing how BOEM narrows and deconflicts potential areas for development. The presentation explained how comments on an initial Request for Interest (RFI) informed a draft Call Area released weeks before the meetings. Mr. Jylkka reviewed BOEM's upcoming steps and how stakeholders can continue to influence BOEM's decisions. For further information, please see the slides and videos [here](#).

Lisa Engler led a focused discussion on key themes and points heard from the BOEM engagement meetings, the next steps in the BOEM leasing process, and a framework that this group and the state should consider regarding trade-offs and prioritization.

One participant said that the big picture, in terms of wildlife, is the identification of hot spots (i.e., population effects on certain species if the wind will go in a certain spot). Hopefully, National Audubon will send information regarding the islands off the coast of Maine and highlight specific breeding sites. There are many species to juggle.

For birds, a participant discussed the challenges in studying bird behavior and the need for more telemetry technology to improve data collection. They explained that a lot of the work from a bird perspective is uncertain due to tagging limitations on smaller birds. Most of the data on bird use comes from shipboard surveys, and some are quite old. One member encouraged investment in more telemetry as attachment technologies are improving, and nanotags are now small enough for endangered birds. However, without receivers, the data collected doesn't help much in

understanding spatial use. Several attendees urged states and organizations to continue to get as many tags out there as possible over the next five years before the steel is in the water and to obtain better spatial data about bird behavior.

A couple of participants focused on the amount of change in data due to the changes in the marine ecosystem. One participant said there is much conversation between current and historical data. As this process goes forward, more recent data seems to be of bigger prioritization, and while historical data is important, it probably shouldn't hold as much weight. Fisheries management councils are looking at data these days. What would be helpful would be to start incorporating projection data, but that probably won't be involved in this round of siting. Another participant stressed the importance of ongoing surveys and research to incorporate into this process as it continues and cautioned against overconfidence in the current understanding of the marine ecosystem.

### **Offshore Wind Developer Updates, *Atma Khalsa, Avangrid***

Atma presented on Lease Area OCS-A 0534, which includes the Park City and Commonwealth Wind projects (see slides for reference). The primary focus has been on permitting. The draft environmental impact statement was received in December, and the public comment period is open until February 21st. State permitting for the export cable lines is ongoing. Khalsa also addressed the Commonwealth Wind project's challenges, such as rising interest rates, the Russia-Ukraine war affecting commodity prices, and workforce disruptions. Despite these challenges, Avangrid remains committed to their plans, such as transforming Salem into an offshore wind port.

Environmentally, ongoing studies include a highly migratory species study and a channel whelk study. A preliminary analysis has been completed, and there may be opportunities to discuss the fishery in relation to the study findings. Geotechnical work is also being conducted in the Commonwealth Wind area and should be completed within a month. The focus will shift to construction as pre-construction surveys and studies wind down.

### ***Erin Healy, SouthCoast Wind (formerly Mayflower Wind)***

Erin Healy from SouthCoast Wind (formerly known as Mayflower Wind) provided a quick update on their offshore wind projects. The company has a generation potential of 2,400 megawatts (MW) from their lease area and currently holds power purchase agreements (PPAs) for 1,200 MW. They are exploring opportunities to expand their PPAs.

In 2023, SouthCoast Wind plans to conduct ongoing geophysical and geotechnical surveys in all areas, including export cable corridors and lease areas. They will focus on near-shore areas that were previously inaccessible and collect data at ship landings. Additionally, they will address comments or questions from states as they go through the state permitting process. Their draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is expected to be released within the next few weeks.

SouthCoast Wind is working on developing pre-construction and construction programs to collect additional data for evaluating potential impacts. These programs include fisheries

monitoring plans, construction monitoring plans, and post-construction monitoring for avian and fisheries impacts.

*Q: A participant asked about the coordination between developers to reduce the overall impact of these cable runs.*

*A: Erin mentioned that they coordinate with Vineyard Wind and share data as much as possible. Elizabeth Marsjanik from Vineyard Wind confirmed that.*

*Q: A participant mentioned that there is a proposal for an ocean grid to address this issue of coordination and asked for opinions on the merits or challenges of such a plan.*

*A: Erin responded by explaining that these are the first projects to be developed in the area and are being developed in parallel, with different schedules. Mayflower Wind and other developers look for options to optimize their engineering and cables, trying to be as efficient as possible and minimize impacts. Stakeholder questions and regulators are very much in tune with the idea of an offshore grid and optimization going forward. Mayflower Wind plans to deliver 1,200 MW of clean energy to the grid, working through the challenges and optimizing as they go.*

*Elizabeth Marsjanik, Vineyard Wind*

Elizabeth Marsjanik provided updates on the Vineyard Wind 1 project, highlighting the progress in offshore export cable construction and the installation of nearshore cables. She also mentioned the upcoming construction in the wind development area, which will include scour protection (rock) installation.

Elizabeth shared information about various environmental initiatives and studies, including deploying an archival Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) system. This system will monitor anthropogenic noises, such as construction and vessel operations, for up to three years post-construction. Additional studies include eelgrass monitoring, water quality checks during cable installation, and avian surveys.

Vineyard Wind has provided funding to Charles River Analytics for the development of an artificially intelligent software system called AWARION. This system uses infrared camera technology to augment human monitoring of waters for wildlife of concern during construction and surveying activities, improving visibility in low-visibility conditions.

Lastly, Elizabeth mentioned Vineyard Wind's partnership with Greentown Labs and Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) for the GO Energize 2023 program, which aims to advance ecological monitoring technology and promote local startups in the industry.

*Michelle Fogarty, Equinor*

Michelle Fogarty from Equinor discussed the progress of their offshore wind projects. She mentioned that two links are now available to track the FAST-41 and Beacon Wind 1 Article VII processing, which can be found on the Beacon Wind [webpage](#). Michelle encouraged feedback on the website to improve its utility. Currently, no active surveys are being conducted, but data from

completed aerial wildlife surveys can be accessed on Seamap. A third year of the highly migratory species study is planned and monitoring stations have been set up.

The submitted monitoring plan for Beacon Wind Power is awaiting approval from New York State Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA). The metocean facilities deployed since November 2021 will undergo a service visit in May and will be decommissioned in November. Fogarty emphasized the importance of coordination and information sharing among different organizations.

Equinor's metocean data is live on the Mid-Atlantic Regional Association Coastal and Ocean Observing System (MARACOOS) Oceans [Map](#). Users can interact with the map and download data for their own use. The MARACOOS dashboard has also incorporated the LiDAR buoy.

*Q: Will the geophysical data be made available?*

*A: Michelle responded that this is not happening yet. NYSERDA PPA requires Equinor to release as much environmental data as possible so long as it's not business sensitive, so just not quite yet.*

*Participants were happy to see the data being shared publicly.*

*Q: One participant had a clarification about whether the \$10,000 per megawatt requirement for funding environmental studies is in addition to the federally required amount.*

*A: Michelle responded by clarifying that it is money that's purposefully allocated as a part of the PPA to support the regional development of responsible offshore wind. It's not meant only to do research in the Beacon 1 lease area.*

*Q: Do you know if Massachusetts procurements have a similar data availability structure to the New York ones?*

*A: Lisa Engler answered that she is unaware of similar requirements in the upcoming solicitation. However, Massachusetts state agencies require offshore wind developers to share survey data. It is an ongoing process to figure out where to house the data.*

*Kyle Cassidy, Orsted*

Kyle Cassidy, Orsted, presented an update on their offshore wind projects. Orsted currently has four leases in the Northeast, including Block Island, Revolution Wind, South Fork Wind, and Sunrise Wind. South Fork Wind is under construction, while the other projects are in various stages of development.

Some recent project updates include the start of onshore construction for South Fork Wind and seabed preparations beginning last fall. Revolution Wind recently received approvals on the CRMC/RIDEM permit applications from the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council. Sunrise Wind has concluded its New York Article 7 meetings and is awaiting further feedback.

Fisheries monitoring updates for the projects include ongoing surveys for South Fork Wind. There are several delayed surveys for Revolution and Sunrise Wind due to permitting. Additionally, a couple of acoustic telemetry surveys are ongoing, and a couple of benthic surveys are planned.

For marine mammal programs, Orsted is deploying long-term passive acoustic monitoring devices in South Fork Wind and planning similar arrays for Revolution and Sunrise Wind. Orsted has also funded several research projects, such as Mystic Aquarium's study on eDNA and seal health, the PINNI-POD project on satellite tagging of seals, and Syracuse University's study on improving density estimations from acoustic detections.

Other ongoing research includes the ECO-Pod project, which focuses on zooplankton studies, and a project evaluating the efficacy of thermal imaging cameras for marine mammal monitoring. Finally, a few post-construction monitoring plans for South Fork include funding a Roseate Tern movement study. Revolution and Sunrise will have similar avian tagging studies and acoustic bat monitoring.

*Q: A participant asked for clarification about the lander to sample zooplankton within the Sunrise lease area and how it's sitting in the water.*

*A: Kyle responded that the lander is at the bottom, looking upward and anchored to the bottom for sampling.*

*Q: A participant asked who was doing the post-construction notice.*

*A: Kim Peters, Orsted, responded that they are working closely with Pam Loring from US Fish and Wildlife for those notices.*

### **Seabed Preparation/Boulder Removal, Lisa Engler, MA CZM**

Lisa Engler mentioned that the conversation first arose in the Fisheries Working Group and as the Orsted construction project moves forward, more details about the construction activities are being defined, including seabed preparation for cable activities. Due to time constraints, the presentation on this topic was postponed to the next meeting, but Lisa encouraged participants to reach out with questions or concerns.

*Q: When is that work scheduled to be done?*

*A: Kristen Trudell, Orsted, answered that the South Fork seabed preparation is scheduled from the beginning of February through the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of March for the export cable, and the pre-lay grapnel run is starting next week to the end of February. The installation for the cables will be starting in the next 2 to 3 weeks.*

### **Other Announcements/Updates/Next Meeting, Nils Bolgen, Mass CEC**

Nils Bolgen from MassCEC discussed updates on ongoing projects, including the aerial wildlife surveys conducted by the New England Aquarium. The final report for Campaign 7, covering

January-August 2022, is in progress and expected to be released within a month. Campaign 8, funded by BOEM, began in January 2023, with data from Fall 2022 to be included in the final report.

Additionally, Nils discussed two projects jointly implemented by MassCEC and Vineyard Wind as part of Vineyard Wind's Accelerator Fund. The first project involves a bubble curtain, where a local firm will provide bubble curtain services locally instead of importing them from Europe. The second project focuses on monitoring whale presence in vessel transit routes between New Bedford and the deployment area using a mobile system to capture acoustic data. Contracts for both projects are being finalized, with the expectation that the selected firms will present their work at the next habitat working group meeting. Nils acknowledged the strong collaboration between MassCEC and Vineyard Wind.

One participant made a comment that emphasized the importance of continuing aerial surveys and monitoring programs to understand the impact of projects on distribution patterns and behavior of wildlife. They argued that baseline data, which has already been collected, must be compared with ongoing monitoring to make meaningful assessments. They urged for a discussion to finalize the decision on supporting and locking in the funding for the monitoring program. Another participant also supported these statements, stressing the need for long-term funding to ensure the success and effectiveness of these efforts.

*Participants can sign up for the RWSC updates through their monthly email newsletter here:*  
<http://eepurl.com/hYVrgv>

*If Participants are interested and for those operating in SNE, please note ropeless/on-demand gear testing is starting in the South Islands Restricted Area, [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/science-data/2023-northeast-experimental-demand-gear-system-testing?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery#project-activity-updates](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/science-data/2023-northeast-experimental-demand-gear-system-testing?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery#project-activity-updates)*

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM