



Responsible Offshore Development Alliance

November 11, 2021

Marc Gorelnik, Council Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, OR 97220

Re: Pacific Fishery Management Council Engagement on Offshore Wind Development

Dear Chair Gorelnik and Members of the Pacific Fishery Management Council,

The Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA) submits the following comments to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) on behalf of several fishing industry members concerned about the potential impacts that offshore wind energy development will have on PFMC managed fisheries, protected species, and coastal communities.

RODA is a membership-based coalition of fishery-dependent vessels, companies, and associations dedicated to improving the compatibility of new development with their businesses. Our approximately 180 members are comprised of fishing industry and community groups, vessels, and shoreside dealers in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Pacific. Since its inception, RODA has worked to promote fishing industry concerns to offshore wind developers, and relevant federal and state agencies, with the intention of protecting the long-standing fishing and processing operations of our members, and the coastal communities that depend upon those operations.

RODA urges the PFMC to work with BOEM, wind energy developers, and other involved parties to develop science and compatibility-based approaches to siting and designing offshore wind energy facilities. Any leasing and development of Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lands for new activities is best approached with early engagement with and direct involvement from those who already depend on the same areas for their livelihoods. Many of our fisheries have been ongoing for centuries and should not be a secondary consideration in the siting and development of wind energy. The PFMC, through its recently formed Marine Planning Committee, is ideally situated to promote direct engagement with fishing communities, and coordinate with BOEM, NMFS, and other federal and state agencies regarding OCS development.

I. Opportunity for the PFMC

Due to the rapid timelines for offshore wind energy (OSW) development set by the Administration it may be prudent for Council members to consider the position of the PFMC on the topic immediately. Based on experiences in other regions, fishing industry participation in the process is primarily relegated to a reactionary role, often with substandard outcomes for the industry. Offshore wind development is in the relatively early stages on the Pacific Coast, which if done properly, could allow for a more transparent, fair, and proactive process for impacted fisheries and other ocean users.

Over the past three years, primarily focused on east coast wind projects, RODA has submitted dozens of comment letters, attended countless meetings, and has consistently offered specific requests to improve communication, safety, transmission planning, research and fisheries data, cumulative effects analyses, seafood business longevity and environmental impacts. From that (continued) experience, we have found that it is absolutely necessary for the fishing industry to be engaged, informed, and consulted at the earliest stages of OCS development.

Several of RODA's west coast-based members are concerned that delayed action by the fishing industry and associated agencies and organizations, such as the PFMC, could catch the fishing industry on its heels as federal and state Administrative pressure seems to be fast-tracking OSW development. The PFMC has mechanisms in place to engage with fishing vessels, businesses, and associations, and has fisheries expertise, thus we encourage the Council to consider outlining your internal policies on offshore development as soon as possible.

RODA will continue to support our west coast members, several of whom are already engaged in the Pacific Council process, and will readily work with Council members and staff to give insight from past experience and recommendations on how the process could be improved for the commercial fishing sector.

II. Data Needs

Fisheries data and monitoring is collected using the best available science for fisheries management. This means it is typically not collected at a spatial resolution relevant to OSW planning. The PFMC should encourage BOEM to improve baseline datasets and data collection methods to scales relevant to offshore wind energy plans rather than relying on data with limited effectiveness for siting decisions. For example, knowing where fleets operate can be difficult as most fishing vessels do not use Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), and Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) block-areas used by state agencies are too large for fine-scale resolution. Many fisheries have very limited reporting requirements from which to derive spatial information at all. The best source of information regarding fishing effort is the fishing industry itself and must be included in planning discussions or this information will not be effectively contributed and interpreted for OSW development.

In addition to understanding the limitations of existing data to describe the spatial needs of potentially impacted fisheries, new research and monitoring efforts to characterize the specific environmental effects of OSW to fisheries resources must begin immediately. Such research must commence on a concurrent timeline to OSW planning studies in order to be informative to site selection; currently it lags by many years or more.

Fishery management agencies have greatly improved the scientific record through cooperative research with the fishing industry, and both entities understand that the best knowledge and evidence comes from these collaborative partnerships. At the same time, other recent ocean zoning activities have excluded fishermen's participation in practice or by design. Simply put, fisheries-related scientific products and processes that do not directly include industry experts will not produce credible nor correct results. There needs to be a bottom-up effort to work with fishermen to create a trustworthy process for science and research; this will be far more extensive than simply backfilling existing processes and data sets.

RODA has consistently urged BOEM to coordinate closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service, the PFMC, state fisheries management agencies, and other established experts in order to develop the best possible fisheries data to inform any leasing decisions. Fisheries data and information must be supplemented by ecological and business knowledge from the fishing industry and coastal communities. OSW planners should use the longest time series available that also includes the most recent and complete fishing year when analyzing fisheries data.

III. Offshore Wind Poses Major Conflicts with Fisheries

Due to the planned use of floating offshore structures for wind energy development off of the Pacific coast, lease areas will become de facto closures to fishing. Technology is evolving to reduce the footprint of the base of an offshore wind platform, but current proposed technologies still have mooring lines and flexible cabling that will make any type of fishing – fixed or mobile gear – unsafe and likely impossible within a wind energy area (WEA). The PFMC should seek to develop engagement plans to address or provide insight to permitting agencies and developers to first avoid, then minimize, mitigate and finally compensate for impacts to fishing communities. Some, but far from all, potential impacts include:

- Environmental and ecosystem impacts, such as changes in species composition and risk of invasive species colonization;
- Access constraints with limited ability to simply “fish in other areas” due to complex regulatory restrictions under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Endangered Species Act, and state laws;
- Accommodation of transit needs, marine radar functionality, and principles for safety at sea;
- Disruptions to critical scientific surveys and assessments, and associated time-series of data, that serve as the foundation for sustainable fisheries management;
- Lack of comprehensive understanding of the cumulative impacts of multiple project sites as well as multiple ocean management measures including Marine Protected Areas/marine sanctuaries and emerging offshore aquaculture;
- Impacts associated with effort displacement, such as changes in bycatch composition that will further constrain catch limits or increased fuel cost and emissions resulting from increased travel time to fishing grounds;
- Interactions between offshore energy activities and protected resources such as endangered whales and seabirds that drive severe restrictions to fishing operations;
- Increased competition for limited space in local ports and harbors, creating severe competition for shore side support facilities which are already scarce;
- Overwhelming demands on time and meeting fatigue for engaging in offshore wind-related efforts led by each project, state, and others, especially if no result is achieved;
- Coordination failures leading to state-specific mitigation requirements that fail to account for the regional nature of many fisheries and the movement of fish stocks; and
- An opaque permitting process wherein the key project design decisions are made by multiple state and federal agencies outside of the NEPA-mandated public process.

One recent example that underscores the lack of robust engagement with the fishing industry is the proposed Gray's Harbor wind project off Washington state. The project developers only recently conducted cursory meetings with a number of fishing associations to inform them of the proposed project, after privately contracting for initial biological and economic analyses, with the intent of submitting an expedited, non-competitive lease request to BOEM. The fact that the proposed area overlaps several existing fishing grounds does not appear to be a significant consideration on the part of the project developers. We urge the PFMC, and its Marine Planning Committee, to engage BOEM in its consideration of this non-competitive lease request, and ensure that impacts to existing fisheries are fully considered and minimized.

More generally, we are not suggesting that the PFMC adopt a blanket opposition to wind energy development; however, we are urging that the PFMC closely track these rapidly developing projects and help ensure that all fishing interests are meaningfully considered early in the process, and prior to any lease auctions by BOEM. RODA was formed for this very reason and we stand ready to assist our members and the Council at this critical time in a rapidly advancing wind development climate. Only by working together to minimize conflicts at the outset of—and at all stages throughout—these processes can we ensure adequate protection of our living marine resources, habitats, and fishing fleets.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can provide additional information or clarification.

Respectfully,



Lane Johnston, Programs Manager



Annie Hawkins, Executive Director



Fiona Hogan, Research Director

Responsible Offshore Development Alliance

Supporting members

Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries
Alan Alward, Co, Chair
California Central Coast

F/V Linda Lu
Craig Barbre
Morro Bay, CA

Port San Luis Commercial Fishermen's Association
Jesse Barrios, Vice President
Avila Beach, CA

California Wetfish Producers Association
Diane Pleschner-Steele,
Executive Director
Buelton, CA

F/V Miss Kelley
Kelley and Kelly Inc.
Richard and Robert Kelley
Fort Bragg, CA

San Francisco Community Fishing Association
San Francisco, CA

Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA

F/V Noyo Dawn
Tara Dawn Inc.
Tom Estes
Fort Bragg, CA

San Francisco Crab Boat Owners Association
San Francisco, CA

F/V Autumn Gale
Larry Collins
San Francisco, CA

F/V Verna Jean
Vincent Doyle
Fort Bragg, CA

United Catcher Boats
Brent Paine, Executive Director
Seattle, WA

F/V Captain Banjo
Banjo Fishing, Inc.
Eureka, CA

Midwater Trawlers Cooperative
Heather Munro Mann,
Executive Director
Newport, OR

West Coast Pelagic Conservation Group
Westport, WA

F/V Good News
Ian Roberts
Eureka, CA

Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization
Tom Hafer, President
Morro Bay, CA

West Coast Seafood Processors Association
Lori Steele, Executive Director
Portland, OR

F/V Jeanette Marrie
Jon Silva
Charleston, OR

Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission
Hugh Link, Executive Director
Coos Bay, OR

F/V Kathryn H
Tom Hafer
Morro Bay, CA

Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative
(American Seafoods, Glacier Fish Co., Trident Seafoods)
Seattle, WA

F/V Langosta II
Jeff and Lori French
Morro Bay, CA

Peter H. Flournoy
International Law Offices of San Diego
San Diego, CA