



MIDWATER TRAWLERS COOPERATIVE

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Wildlife interests and fishing groups unite over offshore wind

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In what may seem like an unusual partnership, numerous environmental organizations joined forces with fishing industry leaders this week to raise further concerns about proposed wind energy development off the Oregon coast.

In a joint letter to the director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's pacific region, groups representing wildlife interests, like Oceana, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, and Portland Audubon co-signed the letter with seafood interests, including Pacific Seafood, American Albacore Fishermen's Association, and Midwater Trawlers Cooperative. All total, 24 organizations signed off on the appeal for further restraint, 10 of which represented environmental interests.

Many of the concerns raised in the letter relate to how offshore wind development in the areas off of Coos Bay and Bandon could push wildlife and fishing interests into the same areas. Referred to as the "domino effective of displacement," the groups expressed worry that turbine placement "will likely displace fishers from fishing grounds at the same time that wildlife will be displaced from foraging grounds, creating a situation where both fishers and wildlife will be crowded into smaller areas, potentially creating a new set of conflicts."

Heather Mann, executive director of Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, explained that one of the failures of the process was that critical impact assessments come much later in the process.

"According to the BOEM approach, the environmental analysis that is called for by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) occurs after these decisions are made about potential sites for future development. That is completely backward, as the development of an environmental impact statement would reveal some of these conflicts both wildlife advocates and fishing interests are already predicting," Mann said.

In the letter, the groups point out that initiating environmental impact studies earlier in the process would also help identify alternative sites, bring more perspectives into the process, allow time to research the siting decisions, and generally improve the viability of offshore wind projects by addressing issues earlier in the process.

BOEM has identified 2,100 square miles off the Oregon coast and is expected to publish those "call areas" in the Federal Register any day, launching the official BOEM process that could lead to offshore wind leases issued by the end of 2022.

"To date, BOEM has been unwilling to slow down the process or complete a programmatic environmental impact statement before moving forward with publishing the call areas. We are hopeful they will pause and listen to the broad concerns voiced by thousands of Oregonians," Mann said.

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