

# Gulf of Maine Offshore Wind Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) Stakeholder FAQs

## What is an IEA?

An Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) is a way to include all aspects of an ecosystem, including human activities, into the management making processes. Steps include: (1) setting ecosystem goals and objectives, (2) identify what data to monitor, (3) assess changes in the system and tradeoffs between management goals. An example of an assessment similar to an IEA is the Annual State of the Ecosystem reports for the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Fisheries Management Councils.

## Who is leading this project?

This project is led by the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA) and the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC).

## How will this project affect offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine?

This project is intended to contribute to environmental analyses and reviews that are required prior to any construction and operations within lease areas. The IEA process will provide a means of identifying, communicating, and monitoring important factors that might not be emphasized in the BOEM/NOAA-NOS spatial modeling analysis. Because BOEM's process of identifying Wind Energy Areas (WEAs) in the Gulf of Maine is already in progress and scheduled to finish in fall 2023, this project may not be able to inform the final WEAs, but project development and construction require additional environmental review.

## Why should members of the public engage with this project?

The participation and knowledge of fishers, industry, and members of the public is extremely important in helping improve the offshore wind planning process. **Local ecological, experiential, and technical knowledge will help inform offshore wind planning.** This is especially important for detailed spatial scales, since many of the current scientific data streams cover large areas like the entire Gulf of Maine. The results of the IEA will help fisheries and ocean managers monitor effects and avoid, minimize, and mitigate negative impacts of offshore wind on fisheries and the fishing industry.

## What will the final product look like?

The first product will be a conceptual map of the system, which is a diagram showing all of the important processes and interactions that occur in the Gulf of Maine. We will use this map to help identify indicators that will inform understanding of various aspects of the system. The next product will be an indicator assessment report similar to the State of the Ecosystem reports that the Science Center puts out for the Fishery Management Councils each year. This report will then help inform environmental impact statements for each offshore wind project.

## What is the project timeline?

The development of offshore wind is moving fast. We plan to finish the conceptual map by the fall of 2023, followed by indicator development and reporting. The report should be available by summer 2024. We anticipate that this timeline will allow the IEA report to be shared prior to the development of wind project plans and environmental assessments. IEAs are iterative, so we will be revisiting and updating this project as needed throughout the development timeline of offshore wind in the region.

## How does this project differ from BOEM/NOAA-NOS spatial modeling?

The IEA process is not necessarily tied to spatially-resolved data. Instead, we assemble a suite of indicators that can inform us about various aspects of the system. We then synthesize across the indicators to assess risk to the system. The BOEM/NOAA-NOS spatial modeling framework is a

quantitative mapping approach that directly models the data layers and identifies areas with the fewest overlapping uses based on available spatial data and according to predetermined weighting factors.