

CAPE COD COMMERCIAL
**FISHERMEN'S
ALLIANCE**

Small Boats. Big Ideas.

Zachary Jylkka
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Office of Renewable Energy Programs
Federal eRulemaking Portal
BOEM-2023-0054

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To Mr. Zachary Jylkka:

Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance submits the following comments in response to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) call and request for public comment on the draft Wind Energy Area in the Gulf of Maine.

Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance is a member-based nonprofit organization that works to build lasting solutions to protect our ecosystem and the future of our fisheries. Fishermen's Alliance represents 150 fishing businesses and more than 300 fishing families, making our organization the leading voice for commercial fishermen of Cape Cod. We represent a diverse group of commercial fishermen, seafood processors, and shoreside support businesses who depend on access to healthy fish stocks and the marine environment. While the species we target, the gear we use, and vessel sizes may differ, we all firmly believe in healthy vibrant fisheries, and resilient coastal communities.

At the heart of our community, we have seen climate change impact fisheries resources and the people who depend on them. The waters surrounding Southern New England and the Gulf of Maine are some of the most productive in the world, but as these waters warm, we need more research to be conducted to better understand the environmental changes taking place, and how these changes are affecting our ecosystem. Horizontal layers of water caused by differences in salinity and temperature, and seasonal upwelling events provide concentrations of plankton that support and attract many marine species. Waters flow into the Gulf of Maine on either side of Georges Bank, via the Great South Channel and the Northeast Channel. These highly productive waters in the North Atlantic, combined with strong tidal flows, complex circulation, and varied seafloor topography, result in a diversity of marine species. The Gulf of Maine's deep basins, shallow banks, and major channels are consistently important for fish productivity and support a variety of water temperatures that correspond to high levels of biodiversity. As a result, we support more scientific data and collaborative research with the fishing industry to get access to near real-time data to better understand changing conditions and how marine species are responding. We encourage BOEM to look at ocean currents and conduct oceanographic and ecological modelling during all phases of wind energy development (before, during, and after construction) to understand changes in ocean currents and better understand region-specific processes such as warm core rings, midwater intrusions, larval transport, and other factors.

At the Fishermen's Alliance we are concerned that the fisheries footprint (revenue) for small day-boats are missing or obscured in the model. Small ports are not going to show up in the model and consequently it misses the economic effects on small fisheries and small ports. The marine fisheries throughout New England are deeply important to the social and economic well-being of many coastal communities in the Northeast United States and provide numerous benefits to our nation and the blue economy. But the pace and number of offshore wind projects in development throughout our region pose significant challenges for

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thorough analysis of potential and cumulative impacts, informed public input, and adopting lessons learned from each project. NOAA Fisheries and Offshore Wind Interactions: Synthesis of Science Report, highlights that the fishing industry in the United States is “highly concerned with the quality of cumulative impact assessments currently being conducted for OSW development. BOEM’s current approach is to analyze projects on an individual basis. The environmental and economic effects will not be isolated and fishing communities have suggested the scale of analysis should match that of fisheries and ecosystem management practices.” We believe BOEM should coordinate early and often with NOAA Fisheries on the best approach for data analysis of potential impacts to fisheries, including fishing and transiting locations, as well as the socioeconomic impacts. Commercial and recreational fisheries provide a wide range of benefits to small coastal communities, and often they are not fully captured by looking only at financial metrics.

While Vessel Trip Reports (VTR) and Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data is a starting point to describing current fishing activity, fishermen we work with recognize that what are significant fishing grounds now, may be very different in 5-10 years as stocks move and shift. In the face of a changing ocean, we know marine species respond to warming in very different ways. Some may travel northward into deeper cooler water offshore, and therefore, future fishing areas will expand beyond the current fishing footprints. In the last year, scallopers, trawlers, and lobster fishermen are finding themselves further offshore, in deeper waters. This recent change is not reflected in the older VTR and VMS data. It is imperative that BOEM uses the most recent data available (within the last 6-12 months). While we know BOEM recognizes that a majority of the Draft WEA is more than 50 miles from shore, and likely be serviced by high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission, we want to express our concern about offshore wind development in the westerly portions of the Draft Wind Energy Area closest to shore and off our Massachusetts coast. For example, we know at its nearest point the Draft WEA is approximately 23 miles east of Wellfleet, MA. We support the removal of areas 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 8A, 8B, 9A, 9B from consideration (referring to the Draft Wind Energy Area maps). These areas should be removed from the Final WEA to provide flexibility for fishermen to follow the fish into deeper and/or cooler waters and to protect historic fishing grounds for groundfish (4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B) that have shown higher NE multispecies landings from 2008-2020, as well as areas productive and important to the scallop fishery. The NCCOS Report Figure 3.6.6 depicting Fishing Footprint Landings (2008-2021) for the Draft WEA show total landings are highest in areas 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 7A, 8A, 9A, 9B, and we encourage BOEM to remove these locations from consideration in the final wind energy area, and instead consider areas farther to the east. While we recognize offshore wind developers want to be closer to shore for profit reasons, they have a choice on where they can operate. They can operate farther offshore and can lay a longer cable to do so. The fishing industry, does not have that option, and it provides serious safety concerns to our small day-boat fleet if they have to steam farther offshore (16+ hours), and in whatever conditions Mother Nature chooses to dish out on a given day.

We also believe BOEM should exclude areas where current long-term scientific surveys reside, because they supply critical information and data for species stock assessments. For example, the highest number of NMFS independent fisheries surveys (10) are found in areas 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B, 8A, 8B that overlap with the Draft Wind Energy Area. Offshore wind development will disrupt current existing federal fisheries surveys which will result in a reduction in information, increased uncertainty in stock assessments, and result in poorly informed management decisions. The commercial leasing process should proceed on a timeline that sufficiently addresses the challenges associated with incomplete and inaccessible fisheries data.

Fishing effort can also change based on different management actions such as change to access areas, or changes in allocations. Certain marine species are currently, or have historically, been under strict management regulations for stock rebuilding. We have serious reservations that progress made towards rebuilding, through careful science-based approaches with significant socioeconomic effects to the fishing community, will be compromised by the building and development of offshore wind and the presence of large-scale infrastructure. It is imperative that BOEM accounts for the dynamic nature of fishing effort over time when evaluating the potential impacts of offshore wind development to fishermen and fishing communities. Future fishing effort may not be sufficiently reflected in historical data effort, as regulations and management plans, ecosystem variability and climate change will dictate where and how the industry continues to harvest.

The commercial leasing process should only proceed on a timeline sufficient to address the challenges associated with incomplete and inaccessible fisheries data. We need BOEM to slow down and focus on improving science and data gaps before irreversible decisions are made. Floating technology is already in development in other regions and countries. The complex nature of the technology, cabling, materials, and consequential introduction of new conflicts to existing biological resources and ocean users highlights the need for a deliberative and data-driven approach. We need BOEM to develop best practices for floating technology should a project be approved. We also encourage discussion now on the navigational and safety concerns associated and unique to floating technology such as turbine layout patterns, radar interference, transit lanes or buffer areas, search and rescue policies, cable burial depth requirements, fishing spatial needs, and anchorage in sensitive habitats. It is imperative that we understand and can quantify displacement effort as the subsea cable networks and anchoring systems of floating structures will essentially make these offshore wind areas, closure areas to most commercial fishing gears.

Finally, an enormous amount of research is still needed to understand the impact of offshore wind development on our environment, and fisheries. We need to better understand ecosystem effects including interactions with benthic habitat, physical habitat, and oceanographic processes, as well as impacts to fisheries socioeconomics, fisheries management, data collection, and regional science planning. We encourage BOEM, NOAA and others to utilize oceanographic and ecological modeling, as well as collect real-time information and observations through a robust monitoring program during all phases of wind energy development (before, during, and after). BOEM needs to conduct a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) prior to identification of Call Areas, with full inclusion of the fishing industry, scientists, and management agencies. Understanding the potential impacts from offshore wind development in the region should help inform the best and worst places for Call Areas. BOEM should collaborate with NMFS, the councils, states, fishing industry and other key stakeholders to conduct an offshore wind scenario planning workshop to assess potential scales of OSW development, range of impacts (locally, regionally, and east-coast wide), and range of mitigation strategies. We urge BOEM to have these engagements occur in-person, and at multiple venues and multiple ports in each state. Fisheries Ecological Knowledge (FEK) is an important component of fisheries data, and in-person meetings allow for an exchange of information and productive dialogue amongst all stakeholders.

In summary, climate change is increasingly impacting fisheries and there is a need to mitigate climate impacts. However, impacts of offshore wind energy development are uncertain, and we need more research to be done to understand changes in circulation and productivity, impacts to birds, marine mammals, fish and invertebrates, and address lost fishing opportunities and revenue, gear loss, displaced effort, and safety concerns. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments. We believe BOEM must engage with the fishing industry and coastal communities as it proceeds with offshore wind development. Fishermen's experiences, knowledge, and network make them an incredibly valuable resource for the successful stewardship of our oceans, and their perspective can help inform siting, conflict minimization and mitigation. We will continue to provide feedback and comments to BOEM throughout the process, to ensure that any wind development in our region minimizes impacts to the marine environment and can be developed in a way that ensures coexistence with our fisheries and the men and women who make their living from the sea. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments.

Sincerely,
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