



U.S. Fishermen Fear Forests Of Wind Turbines At Sea

Wind turbines and fishing don't mix, but that isn't stopping turbine operators from installing hundreds of giant wind generators in the Atlantic ocean. Industry studies support deep-water turbines as symbiotic with marine life but actual fisherman know better. From regulations to harmful sounds and electromagnetic vibrations, offshore wind farms portend as much ecological damage as their terrestrial counterparts. □ TN Editor

East Coast fishermen are turning a wary eye toward an emerging upstart: the offshore wind industry.

In New Bedford, Massachusetts, the onetime whaling capital made famous in Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick," fishermen dread the possibility of navigating a forest of turbines as they make their way to the fishing grounds that have made it the nation's most lucrative fishing port for 17 years running.

The state envisions hundreds of wind turbines spinning off the city's shores in about a decade, enough to power more than 1 million homes.

"You ever see a radar picture of a wind farm? It's just one big blob,

basically,” said Eric Hansen, 56, a New Bedford scallop boat owner whose family has been in the business for generations. “Transit through it will be next to impossible, especially in heavy wind and fog.”

Off New York’s Long Island, an organization representing East Coast scallopers has sued the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to try to halt a proposal for a nearly 200-turbine wind farm. Commercial fishermen in Maryland’s Ocean City and North Carolina’s Outer Banks have also sounded the alarm about losing access to fishing grounds.

Supporters of offshore wind say they have learned from Europe’s long experience with it. They also point to the more recent opening of America’s lone offshore wind farm, off Rhode Island, as evidence the actual impact to U.S. fishermen will be less than feared.

“We want to do this the right way, and I believe we have a path to do that,” said Matthew Morrissey, a vice president at Deepwater Wind, the Rhode Island company that opened that five-turbine operation off Block Island last December and is proposing larger farms elsewhere along the East Coast.

In New Bedford, where the state has already built a \$113 million heavy-duty terminal to take on turbine construction and shipment, city officials envision commercial fishing and offshore wind working hand in hand to revive a region that has long lagged behind nearby Boston.

“There’s a lot more in common between these industries than pulling them apart,” said Edward Anthes-Washburn, executive director of New Bedford’s port, citing the potential for wind farms to provide fishermen with extra work and to contribute to port investments, like a new shipyard.

For fishermen, the broader concern is that offshore wind farms will only lead to more stifling restrictions.

“Fishermen are losing ground one a nibble at a time,” said Joseph Gilbert, a Stonington, Connecticut fisherman who owns boats that range from Virginia to Maine. “Eventually, it adds up to a very large piece of the pie.”

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which oversees wind farm developments in federal waters, has taken steps to address fishermen's concerns, among them excluding specific habitats off Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York from wind farm development, said spokesman Stephen Boutwell.

It has also invested in studies looking specifically at questions raised by fishermen, from the effects of pile-driving during wind farm construction to the effect of electromagnetic fields on fish behavior, he said.

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