THE SKIMMER ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND MANAGEMENT

**Published on *Marine Ecosystems and Management (MEAM)* (https://meam.openchannels.org)**

# US offshore wind under the Trump administration and new developments with offshore wind

*Editor's note: In this interview, Val Stori, the project director for the Clean Energy Group and Clean Energy States Alliance, discusses US offshore wind energy under the Trump administration and new developments in the offshore wind industry. She can be contacted at val@cleanegroup.org.*

## The Skimmer: How have offshore wind energy policies in the US changed (or not changed) under the Trump presidential administration?

**Stori:** Under the Trump administration, the Department of Interior and its Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) have taken steps that will enable the further development of offshore wind energy in the US.

One of the first changes to offshore wind under the Trump administration has been making permitting for offshore wind projects easier. BOEM may now use a 'design envelope approach' in Construction and Operations Plans (COPs). This streamlines the review and permitting of infrastructure projects and allows developers more flexibility to make last-minute project design decisions without triggering another environmental review.

In addition, BOEM is continuing to identify areas for wind energy and in December 2018 held an auction for three lease areas off the coast of Massachusetts. Winning bids were nearly $135 million each – the highest bid prices to date for wind lease areas.

The Department of Energy (DOE) has also made significant investments in offshore wind R&D initiatives. DOE contributed $20.5 million to the Offshore Wind R&D Consortium, which is led by the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) and includes project developers, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, state agencies, and technical consulting groups. DOE also contributed $28 million for floating wind R&D through its ATLANTIS program, and recently announced $17 million in funding for offshore wind test facilities and innovative technologies to reduce costs.

## The Skimmer: How well do you feel US regulators and the US offshore wind energy industry have been doing coordinating with other industries such as fishing and shipping?

**Stori:** Communications and outreach are improving as regulators, the industry, and other stakeholders learn from each state's and each project's experience. I think the Rhode Island Special Area Management Plan process and the Block Island Wind project did a great job and are a good model for how to involve a broad range of stakeholders, including the fishing industry.

NYSERDA's Environmental and Commercial Fisheries Working Groups are two other examples of good collaboration between policy makers and the fishing industry. The NYSERDA working groups are working on best management practices (BMPs) to minimize impacts on fish and fisheries and include stakeholder engagement in the working group. For example, the groups are considering BMPs such as appointing a Fishing Liaison and collaborating on monitoring to develop baseline data.

The US Coast Guard is involved in BOEM leasing from very early in the process. More could be done to inform and include the states on the Coast Guard and the Navy's role in identifying lease areas and permitting of offshore wind projects.

## The Skimmer: What big developments, if any, have you seen in the offshore wind sector in the past few years in the US (and/or the rest of the world)?

**Stori:** In the US specifically, we have seen the first turbines in the water and historic wind lease auctions. New York and New Jersey have the largest offshore wind procurement targets – 2400 MW and 3600 MW by 2030 respectively. And now, New York has a 9000 MW target by 2035!

We've also seen contract pricing come in much lower than expected – the 800 MW Vineyard Wind project in Massachusetts came in at a levelized $84/MWh, and in Rhode Island, Orsted signed a 20-year contract with National Grid at $98/MWh from its 400 MW Revolution Wind project.

In Europe we've seen zero-subsidy and near zero-subsidy bids for offshore wind in Germany and the Netherlands.

And this summer, General Electric will be installing the world's largest turbine – the Haliade-X 12-MW prototype turbine – in the Netherlands! Larger turbines continue to reduce the cost of offshore wind.

## The Skimmer: And have you seen any developments in the past few years that have increased or

## decreased the potential environmental impact of offshore wind farms?

**Stori:** Bigger turbines and larger capacity factors could result in fewer turbines in the water, which would reduce drilling and other impacts on ocean wildlife such as whales.

It remains to be seen what impact floating offshore wind turbines will have on wildlife. Floating foundations are generally considered to have less environmental impact than fixed-bottom foundations because there is less seabed drilling and activity during installation. There are three main floating wind foundation types and three common mooring systems, all which minimally disrupt the seabed. The impacts of a network of mooring lines on wildlife remain to be seen.

Likewise, I'm not sure that there has been a full environmental comparison of shared offshore transmission networks versus project-by-project transmission routes, and this would be helpful for assessing impacts.

*Image: Offshore wind turbines at Barrow Offshore Wind off Walney Island in the Irish Sea (2012). Image obtained via Wikimedia Commons.*

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