

ECOSYSTEM ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING

The Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS) received an update from Mr. Scott McMullen on recent activities of the Marine Planning Committee (MPC) that included drafting letters for the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) for transmittal to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in response to proposals concerning wind farms along the Pacific coast as well as participation in numerous public meetings. We appreciate the efforts of the MPC to fully embrace their role and “hit the ground running” on offshore development. In addition, we recognize the challenges inherent in development of alternative power sources while minimizing impacts to existing or future fishing activities and communities.

Mr. McMullen provided highlights of the letters from the Council to BOEM as part of the Environmental Assessment (EA) scoping process (available online ¹) for Wind Energy Call Areas off Morro Bay, Humboldt and the Oregon coast. For the majority of fishers, their highest priority is first to avoid impacts and not lose fishing grounds to wind farms. If that is not possible, then any impacts should be minimized to the extent possible. If avoidance of impacts is not possible, then those impacts should be mitigated. The MPC letters emphasized that BOEM should do as much as possible to avoid any potential impacts to fisheries. If there is a need for mitigation, it should be tailored to specific areas – no one size fits all. Also, in the event that mitigation is needed, the MPC wanted that to include increased environmental monitoring on impacts to habitat, fishing activities and support, as well as socioeconomic impacts. Public comment letters were submitted from the Council in response to the EA deadline of January 11, 2022.

Mr. McMullen also shared impressions of some very well attended public meetings and correspondence received from BOEM regarding the Humboldt and Oregon wind energy call areas that suggested BOEM: 1) had a limited understanding of who might be displaced from these areas; 2) may not have used the full range of data available to evaluate impacts; 3) may not have fully appreciated the level of impacts to fisheries; and 4) that some members of the MPC felt BOEM’s strategy was merely to give the appearance of public engagement without further consideration.

The EAS also discussed the broader trade-offs associated with wind energy development off the West Coast, in general, and noted a few issues that the Council may wish to consider. At a high level, the EAS recognizes that there are national and global, as well as local, benefits to increased use of renewable energy sources. However, there could also be impacts across multiple fisheries from various states resulting from offshore energy development or other competing uses of ocean space, as well as differential impacts among states, particularly for uses that overlap with state waters. We also discussed the level of shore support (e.g., necessary infrastructure for power transmission and associated support activities) that might be needed for specific call areas and noted that this could have impacts to ocean resources and fisheries as well.

The EAS discussed the new analyses on indicators of trawl activity in the vicinity of proposed wind energy call areas (presented in Figures 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 from [Agenda Item H.2.a, CCIEA](#)

¹ <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2022/01/january-2022-letter-to-boem-on-morro-bay-wind-energy-area.pdf/>

[Team Report 1](#)) and felt it showed promise as a means to document fishing activities by one sector in the areas of concern. The EAS was unclear on whether this particular analysis had been provided to BOEM prior to the January deadline. However, the EAS points out that there is a need to expand this analysis to all sectors where there may be sufficient data to more effectively demonstrate historical use. The EAS discussed whether it might be possible to conduct predictive analyses that consider potential ecosystem impacts resulting from the displacement of trawl (or other sector) effort to other locations in the event wind farms were developed in the footprint of high fishing activity. In addition, the EAS discussed whether efforts to develop forecasting of hypothetical future uses (in the absence of wind farms and under various climate scenarios) would also be of benefit.

The EAS engaged in a robust discussion on the scope of impacts and unintended consequences of future wind farm development and its placement along the coast – including the level of shore support required for transmission lines, additional tender vessels, impacts from placing large facilities on the water that could alter local ocean dynamics; potential loss of migrating species and or opportunities to access stocks migrating northward as a result of changing oceans; potential effects on productivity and profitability; and cultural ecosystem services inclusive of ocean tourism. The EAS further discussed potential changes in upwelling resulting from reduced wind speeds related to turbine placement; for example, evidence provided to the California Ocean Protection Council² suggests that wind speed in the lee of wind turbines could be reduced by 5 percent, which in turn, could reduce localized upwelling by up to 15 percent. Based on these potential outcomes, we emphasize the importance of conveying a precautionary approach and the potential concerns of multiple areas being developed without quantified impacts from one area or a small-scale installation in each of these blocks to inform larger structure placement and ecosystem impacts.

Recommendations:

- The EAS recommends the Council make a request to NMFS that their Science Centers’ scientists dig deeper into the analysis presented in H.2.a, CCIEA Team Report 1 Appendix P to determine the broader scale impacts of more trawling if it is moved to less quality habitat; and expand it to include other fishing sectors with sufficient data available.

PFMC
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² https://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/media_library/2022/02/C0210404_FinalReport_12312021.pdf