Gulf of Maine Draft Call Area Information Exchanges
January Virtual Engagement - Meetings Summary

DISCLAIMER: This meeting summary was prepared by the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), a non-profit entity contracted by BOEM to facilitate these engagement meetings. This summary is not intended to be a meeting transcript. Rather, it focuses on the main points covered during the meeting.

Meetings In Brief

In late January 2023, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) convened six virtual engagement meetings about the Federal commercial leasing process for offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine. The online meetings were targeted to specific stakeholder groups and complemented three in-person meetings in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. BOEM designed the meetings to be an interactive space for participants to provide information and receive feedback, particularly regarding the data and modeling that BOEM is using to identify potential areas for offshore wind development. The meetings included presentations from BOEM and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Center for Coastal and Ocean Science (NOAA-NCCOS). Participants were encouraged to provide feedback and ask questions based on the information presented. In each meeting, participants provided BOEM with specific, relevant feedback that will assist the agency in its next steps.

The six meetings were targeted to: shipping and commercial maritime, mobile gear fishing, fixed gear fishing in Maine, fixed gear fishing in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, recreational fishing and highly migratory species, and environmental organizations.

Presentations and other meeting materials can be found here.

Presentations

Zach Jylkka, BOEM Project Coordinator, delivered the opening presentation for BOEM. In his presentation, Mr. Jylkka reviewed key steps in the Gulf of Maine Planning Process, describing how BOEM narrows and winnows potential areas for development. The presentation described how comments on an initial Request for Interest (RFI) informed a draft Call Area, released in the weeks before the meetings. Mr. Jylkka highlighted the comments received from the sector that was the focus of the specific meeting. Mr. Jylkka reviewed BOEM's upcoming steps and how stakeholders can continue to influence BOEM's decisions. For further information, please see the slides here.

James Morris, a marine ecologist with NOAA-NCCOS, presented on the Center's partnership with BOEM to help the Federal government make informed decisions around offshore wind siting by using spatial models. Dr. Morris provided details about the spatial modeling process that will be used in the Gulf of Maine to develop draft Wind Energy Areas. For more information, please see the slides here.

Key Themes From Shipping and Commercial Maritime

Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed during the shipping and commercial maritime meeting

Transit Corridors, Shipping Data, and Other Areas of Exemption

- One stakeholder representing shipping interests emphasized that:
  - The Gulf of Maine is a diverse area transited by multiple cargo vessels.
  - The shipping industry appreciates the suggested fairways in the recently released draft Coast Guard ports access study.
  - The shipping industry would like transit corridors, ideally 12 nautical miles or wider.
  - The shipping industry supports wind energy and wants to see how it can harmoniously co-exist in the area. One incident would be an incident too many.

- Another participant urged BOEM to look carefully at the density of traffic lines when it incorporates data layers and offered to work with NCCOS and BOEM in this data analysis.
- Another participant noted that many smaller fishing vessels don't use AIS, and therefore won't show up in that data set.
- Finally, a participant urged BOEM to use the WEA development phase to identify and exclude areas and features that are least suitable, such as hard bottoms, ledges or boulder fields. This participant said a lesson from the leasing process south of Cape Cod is that excluding these areas after a lease is defined is much more difficult.

Key Themes From Mobile Gear Fisheries

Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed during the Mobile Gear Meeting

Fishery Data to Include for the Future

- Participants recommended including various other vessel traffic data sources outside of VMS and AIS. P-Sea WindPlot and TIMEZERO offer a lot of data that could be used, they said. In addition, fishermen's ecological data would be helpful.
    - In the western Gulf of Maine closures, a suggestion was made to look at logbook data to better understand where the Gloucester, MA fleet works and see more vessel traffic data. In addition, the fishing footprint raster data is useful, but would not include lobster data to consider.
    - A representative from the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA) said RODA is currently working on a fishery knowledge trust initiative that will pull from plotter systems into one standardized dataset.
    - BOEM noted that all these datasets are useful and would be open to additional conversations with those who offered their data for studying, observation, and inclusion in the NOAA NCCOS modeling.
    - One participant offered to share his plotter information with BOEM
- Recommendation to analyze plotter data from the closed LMA 1 triangle, as there is a lot of haddock data and plotter data available.
- There was concern over the heat map approach and a recommendation to analyze historical data from fishing grounds to better understand how habitat and fishing grounds have changed.
- There was a question about the assumptions around vessel speeds that determine which vessels are determined to be fishing.

Fishery and Environmental Concerns

- Concerns that fishing is dynamic. How are we going to know that today's best place for a turbine will continue to be a good place in the future?
- Concerns about overall ecosystem impacts – how wind development might affect cod stocks, etc.
- Concerns about disrupting multi-year fish survey efforts.
    - Recommendation that BOEM put survey tows on a map
- Concerns that removals in the draft Call Area have been focused mainly on habitat areas – what about the areas where people fish? One participant said that it is a hard pill to swallow seeing the habitat areas off limits to wind farms, which will likely cause wind farms to be located in fishing grounds.
    - Another participant said mud-bottomed areas in Cashes Basin should be on the table for wind farms.
- Several participants sought more information about electromagnetic field (EMF) effects from transmission cables on fish species and would like to know where the cabling could take place.
    - Participants were eager to understand better, and as soon as possible, likely cable routes.
- Scallopers provided specific feedback on areas of highest value for their industry

- Recommendation to have a 5-mile buffer along the 75-meter contour in the Great South Channel area. The northern edge of George's Bank is a vitally important area for scallopers and should be avoided.
- Offer to work with BOEM to show specific areas of high value. Concern that the current maps show there is a lack of understanding as to how this fishery operates.
- Participants from the scallop fishery noted that the North Carolina Fisheries Association fishes close to Closed Area 2 and Southern Channel as well as LMA 1. They would like to see future access to these areas.

Key Themes From Massachusetts and New Hampshire Fixed Gear

Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed during the MA and NH fixed gear meeting

Area for Consideration in Data Sharing

- Platt's Bank was sited frequently as an area to avoid in the draft wind energy area(s). A participant reiterated his comments made during the RFI stage about additional proposed exclusion areas.
- BOEM should understand there are important caveats on lobster data.
  - LMA3 boats typically have a multi-species permit, which affects how the data are collected and the vessel trip reports. State waters fisheries data is important to collect as well.
  - Significant new data from LMA1 fishing will be collected starting later this year. Participants asked BOEM to find ways to incorporate these data, even in the context of BOEM's timeline for establishing WEAs. A participant suggested NOAA Fisheries should try to "fast-track" this data collection to that it can inform the process.
  - The data coming from NOAA's Burton Shank and the Decision Support Tool may be understating hotspots, because the data "smear" fishing effort over large geographic areas.
  - It would be helpful for the data layers to include level of confidence in the data.
- Recommendation to take a sequenced approach, starting with areas in LMA3, where there is better data, then waiting for the new LMA1 data to come in to identify any areas in LMA1.
- Recommendation to exclude right whale seasonal closure areas.
- Request to see transit areas included before the lease areas are defined, and ensure they are sufficiently wide.
- Recommendation for BOEM to do more engagement meetings with fishermen or create a panel of fishermen from Massachusetts and New Hampshire, to have more focused data-driven conversations.
- Request that BOEM record these virtual meetings, so others can watch them.

Key Themes From Maine Fixed Gear

Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed during the Maine fixed gear meeting

Overall views on offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine

- Many participants from the fishing industry voiced their frustration with, and opposition to, putting wind turbines in the Gulf of Maine. Key areas of concern included:
  - Perception of insufficient data on a variety of issues to make a reasonable decision on where to put the turbines and to predict the potential environmental effects from wind energy areas.
    - Participants asked BOEM to conduct environmental and social impact analysis when determining potential WEAs.
  - Concern that impacts on any part of the Gulf of Maine would be disruptive to the entire ecosystem
  - Concern that fishing activity will sharply decline, with significant economic and social impacts on the region
  - Concern about negative impacts on whales

        - BOEM pointed participants to its whale fact sheet and NOAA's frequency asked questions page
    - Concern that wind energy areas should not be determined without understanding and studying potential impacts from the expected cable routes.
        - Concern that electromagnetic impacts from cables could harm habitat and some species.
    - Concerns that wind energy jobs won't go primarily to local residents.
    - Concerns that offshore wind energy isn't very "renewable" nor cost effective once you factor in the construction, maintenance, and other costs.
- Recommendation that BOEM calculate the 20-mile buffer from shore including islands, not just from the mainland.
- There were several questions related to how the process works and how BOEM incorporates lessons from other regions.
    - BOEM noted that lessons have been learned from spatial modeling work in the Gulf of Mexico. In collaboration with shrimp fisheries, BOEM and NOAA-NCCOS were able to avoid areas that the fisheries identified as most important for their operations.
- There was a question about how BOEM can do environmental analysis when the Biological Opinion for North Atlantic right whales has been questioned by a court.
- Participants asked if BOEM had ever rejected a project's permits once a lease had been issued.
    - BOEM said only three commercial wind energy projects have completed the environmental permitting process so far.

Key Themes From Recreational Fishing and Highly Migratory Species

Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed during the meeting

Questions Surrounding Data and Impacts

- Participants in this meeting focused mainly on gaps in data and trying to understand where to fill them. In addition, many participants had questions about the data currently being used. Examples included:
    - Participants noted major shifts in habitat and territory for a species such as bluefin – fishermen used to have go to 40 to 50 miles offshore, but now they are within a few miles. When looking at the modeling, there needs to be more data on these changes in historical patterns. There are differences to observe.
    - The Maine Department of Marine Resources signaled it was doing more tracking studies on migratory species and forming a state report. Multitude of other surveys are going on as well.
    - One participant offered to help BOEM improve its data
    - Recommendation that BOEM consider NOAA's Highly Migratory Species statistical chart to be "highly inaccurate". Participants encouraged BOEM to look at forage fish abundance and changes to migratory patterns.
- Participants wondered if studies were being done on the impact of offshore wind on forage species and affect migratory patterns.
    - BOEM responded that it has an Environmental Studies Program that provides resources for research to address a variety of energy development interactions with the environment. If there is a need for specific information, people are encouraged to reach out to BOEM to discuss what has been studied and to propose study ideas. The process can take 1 to 2 years to get going.
- Participants were eager to understand better how fishermen will likely interact with floating wind technology in the water.
- Participants were interested to know more about how floating wind structures might be a fish aggregating device.
    - One participant noted that yellowfin and big-eyed tuna will respond to fish aggregating devices (such as structure in the water), but bluefin aren't interested.

- Participants expressed concerns about feeling constrained by the leasing timeline, particularly wanting to making sure the right data gets to BOEM.

Key Themes From eNGO

Below is a summary of key themes and topics discussed during the eNGO meeting

Questions Surrounding Wind Energy Areas

- Participants asked questions about interagency coordination when it comes to the creation of the draft wind energy areas and how that coordination ties into solutions to avoid areas of high conflict.
- LMA 1 was an area in which participants would like to have more of a crossover conversation between fisheries and conservation groups as this process moves forward.

Modeling Data

- Participants asked if tourism or recreation uses are considered in the spatial modeling.
- Participants wondered if all the data in the modeling would be on the portal.
- Participants signaled the importance of weighting of the data in the model, and making that transparent.
- Regarding species specific data, participants had concerns if some of the information was outdated. Also, they asked if there were particular weights for particular species (i.e. endangered bird species vs. other bird species).
- Participants would like to see seasonality to be included in some of the maps shown for better understanding of what is being used in the modeling.

Species Impacts

- Recommended for coordinated transmission to minimize impacts from cables.
- Recommendation to site WEAs outside of the LMA1 line, given that fishing effort of all types drops off outside of that line
- Participants asked to make sure that the data for the North Atlantic right whales are appropriately updated whenever new data becomes available