

Oregon's Coastal Caucus responds to BOEM announcement on wind energy areas

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The surprise announcement on February 13th from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) releasing final wind energy areas off Oregon stunned stakeholders and legislators alike.

Oregon's Coastal Caucus is a bipartisan body made up of senators and representatives with coastal Oregon districts and the caucus has been actively attempting to communicate with BOEM over the last few years. In January 2024 the Caucus sent a letter to BOEM outlining strong concerns and questions that needed answering before moving forward with offshore wind off Oregon. More than a month later and BOEM still has not responded to the Caucus.

Fast forward to BOEM's declaration finalizing wind energy areas despite substantial pushback from stakeholders, state and federal legislators, coastal communities, and many others. The Coastal Caucus immediately responded with a follow-up letter expressing their "extreme disappointment" with the federal agency's push forward in the face of opposition and uncertainty related to potential impacts on fisheries and the environment.

The letter addresses the significant concerns raised by stakeholders and continues, "If BOEM is listening to these concerns, their actions suggest that they are not concerned with addressing them. It is worth noting that the sentiments expressed in these listening sessions and state-mandated community engagement

opportunities are not dissimilar to those that have arisen through the traditional BOEM process. Of the 1,100 public comments submitted on Oregon's draft WEAs, most were in opposition to moving forward with the offshore wind process in Oregon. Even those in support emphasize the need for additional consideration of tribal, fishing, and coastal community voices."

Additionally, stakeholders are working collaboratively with the state to develop a Roadmap (with exit ramps) for offshore wind consideration. This Roadmap would involve extensive stakeholder outreach aimed at authentic engagement with tribes, communities, the seafood community and more. HB4080 is making its way through the Oregon legislature during the 2024 short session and currently is headed to the Ways and Means committee. The legislation would create the capacity to ensure the Roadmap is completed. "The Roadmap is critical to moving forward," said Heather Mann, Executive Director of the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative.

"The top-down approach utilized by BOEM is insufficient to address our concerns and we need the Roadmap to be sure we all have a seat at the table while we shape Oregon's future energy transition."

Nick Edwards, a longtime fisherman from the Coos Bay area, applauded the newest Coastal Caucus letter. "We are and have been focused on developing a comprehensive Roadmap for Oregon's consideration of offshore wind energy – BOEM just threw an axe into that process with complete disregard for the six months of collaboration of diverse stakeholders who are working to create a viable and widely-supported path for Oregon's consideration of offshore wind."

The Roadmap is key for Oregonians to determine the best path forward to move away from fossil fuels toward clean energy. However, that clean energy mix must include a portfolio of options that don't cause further, unsustainable damage to the environment and must truly be considered clean energy. Offshore wind has not proven that yet.

"Floating offshore wind is still an unknown here," West Coast Seafood Processors Association Deputy Director Susan Chambers said. "These turbines will be built on a scale not yet seen in the pursuit of the clean energy dream and at the behest of political whim, not science. Oregonians must consider the future side effects of floating offshore wind and be informed of all the ramifications before BOEM moves forward."

Mann summed up the feelings of many stakeholders by thanking the Coastal Caucus for their diligence and dedication to this issue. "The Caucus has stepped up multiple times and unanimously supported their constituents," said Mann. "This isn't a Republican versus Democrat thing. This isn't a House versus Senate thing. This is about doing things the right way – the Oregon way – and we thank our legislators who are willing to stand up for coastal communities and be heard."