

Fishing interests urge Kotek to halt offshore auction

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A consortium of fishermen, processors, and others in the seafood industry are urging Oregon Governor Tina Kotek to halt the auction of ocean leases for offshore wind energy. While leasing is the work of the U.S. Department of Interior’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), agency representatives have publicly stated BOEM would defer to state wishes before moving forward.

Last week, the Protect US Fishermen coalition joined Oregon tribes and submitted a letter imploring the governor to “relay to BOEM that no offshore wind lease auction should occur on the South Coast until after the Oregon Roadmap is completed.” When finished, the roadmap will outline considerations and recommendations relating to offshore wind energy in Oregon.

The considerations for the roadmap have been crafted over several months by a diverse group of stakeholders and will include exit ramps, or a means by which Oregon can change course if offshore wind development strays from the outlined recommendations. The diverse group has been facilitated by Oregon Consensus. According to BOEM, offshore lease auctioning could happen as soon as October 2024. In their letter, the consortium of fishing interests made the case for a delay. “It is our understanding that if an auction is not completed in 2024, the next opportunity would be in 2026.

This timing works well with the completion of a roadmap and is responsive to the concerns from existing ocean users and coastal communities alike. Offshore floating wind energy does not currently exist anywhere in the world in waters deeper than 300 meters or at the scale being contemplated for the West Coast. In addition to the roadmap, Oregon would benefit significantly by learning from projects that are already moving forward, such as those on the East Coast and in California,” the letter states. BOEM has ignored recent requests for an extended period of public comment, despite the request coming from tribal leaders, Oregon’s Coastal Caucus, Oregon senators Wyden and Merkley and Congresswoman Hoyle, fishing interests, and more.

Fishermen are hoping that a more forceful response from Gov. Kotek will change the tide. In the most recent legislative session, lawmakers passed HB4080 which, among other things, directs the Oregon Department of Energy to develop an Offshore Wind Roadmap that “defines standards to be considered in the processes related to offshore wind energy development and approval.” That legislation is on Kotek’s desk, awaiting signature.