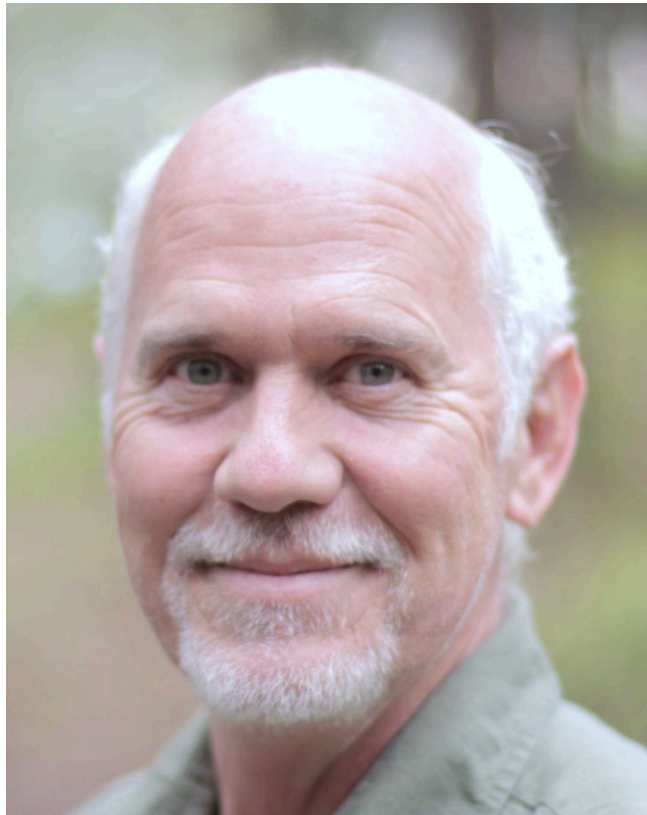


In My View: Local offshore wind workshop

March 16, 2024



On Saturday March 2, I attended a local workshop with a panel of experts on offshore wind development. Over 100 people attended including Supervisors Valerie Starkey, Chris Howard, Darren Short and Joey Borges.

A group of citizens interested in developing energy resiliency in our county spearheaded this effort. This interest was sparked by the wildfire induced blackouts last August when we all became aware of our vulnerability to power outages because we only have one power line coming into our community.

The goal of this workshop was to provide unbiased information about offshore wind. The panel included a spectrum of presenters from government agencies, a university, an environmental group, a fishermen's association, and a wind development company.

Crescent City Harbor

The lead speaker was Wes White, Harbor Commissioner and Tri-Agency board member. He was not speaking for these agencies but shared personal opinions. White is neither pro nor con but has followed

offshore wind for seven years because he sees economic development potential. He said our harbor could provide operations and maintenance support for offshore wind platforms.

White also shared specific concerns he has heard from fisherfolk. They want to continue their way of life and are concerned about increased vessel traffic, relocation of fishing boats from other harbors and snagging their gear on underwater power cables. These are all reasonable concerns.

It is not as helpful to simply say we are against offshore wind because of the impact on fishing. When we identify specific issues and concerns, then we can ask that these be addressed in the planning phase. Offshore wind is already happening in Humboldt and may be here next. We should stay informed and be ready for this.

Humboldt Harbor

Rob Holmlund, Development Director for the Humboldt Bay Harbor District spoke about the economic opportunity that the harbor district has realized as a port selected to assemble floating offshore wind turbines. There are only two harbors in California suitable for this purpose, Long Beach and Humboldt.

The components are so large that they must be built near a port and barged in to be assembled. The floating platforms are 350' to 450' across, larger than a city block. Each blade is over 300' feet long. Once assembled each platform will be dragged out for anchoring offshore Morro Bay or Humboldt and Del Norte in the future.

The assembled platforms are so tall that there are few ports that have the overhead clearance to move them out of the harbor. It is not possible to assemble these in the San Francisco Bay because there is no way that the assembled platforms will fit under the Golden Gate Bridge, yet they will barely be visible 20 miles from shore.

UC Davis Extension

Keith Taylor and Alec Dompka, economic development advisors from UC Davis Cooperative Extension zeroed in on how to harness the economic development potential of offshore wind. There will be short term jobs during the construction phase, but also long-term employment with operations and maintenance enterprises.

They emphasized the need to plan now for workforce training to help local workers qualify for these jobs. There will be work for welders, machinists, vessel and machine mechanics and marine operators. These jobs will require at least a two-year technical degree or an apprenticeship with a trade union.

They spoke about the importance of understanding how community benefit agreements work and recommended that we must fight for every dollar and benefit. Their advice was to speak with other

communities and experts that have successfully navigated these waters to learn from their experience.

Minimize Impacts

A fisheries scientist representing one of the Humboldt lease holders, Vinyard Offshore, spoke about the outreach that they will conduct to help identify what species should be studied as they prepare their operations plans. They have pledged to work with the fishing industry to minimize impacts on fishing.

It was great to have the Director of the Environmental Protection Information Center on the panel. This local group is evaluating all the potential impacts of offshore wind, including bird collisions, effects on marine life from noise, electromagnetic fields near power cables and possible reduction of upwelling from reduced wind.

There are many uncertainties about the potential impacts from floating offshore wind platforms. These are different from existing wind platforms which are nearshore, in shallow water and fixed to the ocean floor. Some information can be extrapolated but most impacts must be studied as a new development.

Resilient Fishermen

The Director of the California Fishermen's Resiliency Association (CFRA) spoke about the new non-profit group that was formed in 2022 involving 13 different fishermen's associations to be the lead negotiator on behalf of fishing interests related to the potential impacts of offshore wind (OSW).

The California Coastal Commission requires as a condition for permitting, that "fishermen, OSW developers and state and federal agencies will need to work collaboratively towards a common strategy to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to the fishing industry in a consistent and equitable manner".

The California Fishermen's Resiliency Association has three goals, 1) avoid impacts on fishing grounds and in harbor areas whenever possible, 2) minimize impacts and implement real-time impact adaptive management, and 3) mitigate impacts that can't be avoided or minimized.

The Big BOEM

The final speaker was from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) which is responsible for evaluating and permitting offshore wind projects between 3 and 200 nautical miles off the coast. This process completes hundreds of ocean surveys to identify the least impactful locations for offshore wind.

When offshore leases are approved, communities are eligible for bidding credits, equal to 30 percent of the lease sale. With an average lease sale of \$150 million, this means about \$45 million per lease will be set aside for local workforce training, mitigation, and other community benefits.

There are currently no plans for a lease sale off Del Norte County but there is a potential lease area identified in the offshore wind plan that the California Energy Commission is developing. If there is a lease sale offshore of our community, we need to be organized and prepared to engage in negotiations. Who will lead this?

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