
In My View: Tri-Agency is stalled

April 5, 2024

Three County Supervisor meetings have passed since the Crescent City Council and Crescent City Harbor Commissioners adopted the revised joint powers agreement (JPA) for the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority.

To refresh your memory, The City, Harbor and County must all agree on the same agreement for Tri-Agency to move ahead. In January the Board of supervisors approved a version of the JPA with an exclusion which states that Tri-Agency “shall not support or pursue activities involved with the offshore generation of wind energy.”

The Harbor Commission and the City Council both voted in February to approve the JPA without this offshore wind exclusion. Now it is up to the County Board of Supervisors to decide what to do next. Will they concur with the other two partner agencies or refuse to reassess their position?

County Inaction

While the County takes their own sweet time acting on this decision, the Tri-Agency Economic Development Authority is left in limbo. Tri-Agency cancelled the February meeting and recently cancelled their March meeting “due to lack of agenda items.” Progress is stalled by the County’s failure to act on this matter.

It is not clear whether there are enough votes on the Board of Supervisors to approve the change approved by the City and the Harbor. It may even be a higher bar than normal to re-evaluate their position. The County Counsel has reportedly advised County Supervisors that it will require four votes to bring this up again.

The fundamental question for the Supervisors is if they want Tri-Agency to continue to lead our regional economic development effort. Whether they decline to schedule a vote, or fail to muster four votes to reconsider and approve the revisions made by their partners, the result is the same. Tri-Agency will wither and die due to County inaction.

Missed Opportunity

While the County dithers, we just missed an opportunity to have input on the State of California’s plans for offshore wind energy. The California Energy Commission recently circulated a draft strategic plan for developing offshore wind energy. The deadline to comment on this plan was March 22.

This plan is required by Assembly Bill 525 to draw up a blueprint for wind projects offshore California. This document is over 500 pages including technical appendices and is daunting for an average citizen to digest. Yet it contains volumes of information about how offshore wind might affect our county.

Ideally there would be a centralized agency with professional staff that can analyze and comment on this plan. But we have only a few individuals like Harbor Commissioners Wes White and Brian Stone, who have taken it upon themselves to become informed about the positive benefits and negative impacts from offshore wind.

Asleep at the Wheel

While the County ponders their move on Tri-Agency, there is no coordinated effort to watch out for our interests. Many of our local leaders are asleep at the wheel. Now is the time to ask questions and demand answers. If our community speaks with one voice, we are more likely to be heard.

This offshore wind plan has a chapter on potential impacts which states, “Defining potential impacts for a new floating offshore wind industry is challenging, as no commercially deployed floating offshore wind projects exist in the U.S and the technology is rapidly evolving.” There is still much they don’t know.

“Floating offshore wind technology is in its infancy and has never been deployed off the coast of California. Therefore, the specific effects of these installations on the marine environment are not fully understood and uncertain.” We should insist that impacts from the first projects be studied before expanding to our coast.

Cautious Engagement

Even if Del Norte County chooses to ignore what is happening with offshore wind development, it will happen without us. I think a strategy of cautious engagement is the right course of action. We can gain knowledge and experience by observing what happens in other areas first.

The two wind projects off the coast of Humboldt are moving forward. They will both need to develop detailed operations plans and complete environmental studies before they begin to operate. If we track these projects, we can insert our questions and concerns into this process. This will better inform any future local projects.

It is reasonable to be skeptical about possible negative impacts of floating offshore wind platforms. We should demand that our questions and concerns be addressed. When we have more information, we will be able to weigh the benefits and risks of offshore wind. Better information leads to better policy.

Lost Momentum

Wind is not the only project that Tri-Agency could work on. One reason for the formation of this agency was to rebuild the harbor. This is still a work in progress. The Harbor by itself has started efforts to repair and rebuild the harbor including the fishing infrastructure. If we support fishing, we must support the harbor.

The Harbor needs help now, and it is in the interest of the community that we have a healthy harbor. Tri-Agency should find a way to help the Harbor District diversify and grow their economic base. Otherwise, the Harbor District is challenged to find a reason to continue with Tri-Agency. What do they get from it?

Until the County Supervisors decide if they want to continue with Tri-Agency, the other members and Tri-Agency are on hold. The City, County and Harbor District all have economic development plans. The City and Harbor have made great progress separately. Imagine what can be accomplished if we all work together.

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