



Fishermen have concerns about offshore wind energy projects

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negotiate with each company individually. That makes it easy for the companies to ignore the fishermen, he said, and it's also time-consuming for fishermen who need to work.

"It's just a process of checking all the boxes," he said about the companies talking with fishermen. "We become collateral damage."

Coalition speaks up

Last month members of Responsible Offshore Development Alliance, or RODA, a national coalition of fishing industry members, boycotted a meeting with a federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management task force, which is considering auctioning of 800,000 acres of New York Bight — shallow waters south of Long Island and east of New Jersey — to potential wind farm operators. RODA said its members feel they are not being listened to.

On April 6, RODA said 1,665 members of fishing communities in every U.S. coastal state submitted a letter to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, or BOEM, and National Marine Fisheries Service requesting a transparent and balanced national planning process for offshore wind development.

RODA said "offshore wind development poses direct conflicts with fishing and the current permitting process provides no meaningful opportunity to include the needs of sustainable seafood harvesting and production in strategies to mitigate climate change."

Just before the federal government last week approved the Vineyard Wind I project — the first large-scale offshore wind farm in the country

— RODA members requested that BOEM adopt reasonable and consistently requested fisheries mitigation measures for the project. That project calls for erecting 62 turbines off Martha's Vineyard, which will generate power for 400,000 homes.

After the approval, RODA said "BOEM did not even consider any mitigation measures recommended by RODA or any fisheries professionals, scientists, or natural resource managers, despite having clearly defined requests available to them."

"For the past decade, fishermen have participated in offshore wind meetings whenever they were asked and produced reasonable requests only to be met with silence," RODA Executive Director Anne Hawkins said. "From this silence now emerges unilateral action and a clear indication that those in authority care more about multinational businesses and energy politics than our environment, domestic food sources, or U.S. citizens."

The Vineyard Wind I turbines were spaced 1 nautical mile apart after commercial fishermen and environmentalists expressed concerns. Vineyard Wind developers also agreed to pay \$377 million to commercial fishermen as compensation for future losses.

Guzzo, though, said some fishermen feel it is more important that they are able to continue landing fish and feeding people, than collecting money from developers or the government.

In addition to the leases under consideration for the New York Bight, seven leases also have been granted for waters south of Martha's Vineyard and southeast of Block Island, which has its own small off-

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ANNE HAWKINS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE OFFSHORE DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE (RODA)

shore wind farm to help power the island. Four of the leases are for the Ørsted/Eversource cooperative, which is developing State Pier in New London into a staging area for their projects.

BOEM says it listens to fishermen

In an email to The Day, BOEM spokesman Stephen Boutwell said the agency "works with all ocean users and stakeholders, including state and local governments, coastal communities, the U.S. military, fishing and maritime communities, and Tribal governments throughout the offshore wind development process to avoid or reduce potential impacts from offshore wind energy development."

As for the complaints from fishermen that they have to discuss their concerns with the individual wind companies, Boutwell said that while fishermen are encouraged to discuss their concerns directly with the lessees prior to the lessee's submission of a plan to BOEM, it is not a requirement to do so. He said that, throughout BOEM's environmental review process, the fishing community has the opportunity to comment directly on the im-

pacts the project may have to their business. He added BOEM requires lessees to develop fisheries communication plans and hire liaisons to have discussions with fishermen.

"The goal of BOEM's Area Identification process is to identify the offshore locations that appear most suitable for wind energy development taking into consideration co-existence with ocean users. As part of this process, BOEM removed areas of highest conflict from consideration," the agency said last month.

The agency also plans to begin an environmental review, with public input, on these areas in federal waters for potential offshore wind leasing.

What are the concerns?

Fishermen have a long list of safety and environmental concerns in addition to the turbines being located in some of their prime fishing grounds.

Chief among them is that some of the projects call for the turbines to be spaced 0.67 mile to 1 mile apart, far less than the 2-mile spacing and 4-mile-wide transit lanes the fishermen say are needed. Gilbert explained that it is extremely difficult for boats to stay apart from one

another within the 0.67-mile spacing while towing their gear, especially in rough weather.

"We're willing to share the ocean," he said, "We just want them to intelligently place (the turbines) within the needs of a historic and proud industry."

Gilbert said in bad weather, when fishermen are trying to get home, the corridors are not wide enough to safely transit. Additionally, he said the spinning blades create "radar scatter" that can hide the presence of nearby vessels.

Guzzo agreed with the potential radar problems and said the transit lanes through the bight are busy with ships going in and out of New York City.

Boutwell said the turbine spacing and layout is considered on a project-by-project basis and each project must submit a navigational safety risk assessment, which is developed based on the Coast Guard's guidance. The Coast Guard additionally is involved in the review of the project plans.

Asked if efforts are being made to move turbines out of fishing and transit areas, Boutwell said BOEM works with the Coast Guard and other maritime stakeholders to consider impacts to navigation and fishing in all stages of the leasing and development of projects. Prior to leasing, he said BOEM removes areas overlapping charted shipping and vessel transit lanes and avoids areas with higher volumes of vessel traffic. After the leases are issued, he said BOEM encourages developers to work with the Coast Guard and other stakeholders to develop their navigational safety risk assessment as early as possible. For example, he said BOEM removed more than 900,000 acres of

ocean bottom from consideration for leasing in the New York Bight.

Gilbert said National Marine Fisheries Service scientists also have expressed concern that the turbines will disrupt the stratification of the water column, which is essential to the ecosystem of fishing grounds. He said the turbines also generate fog as they mix cold and warm air, creating another safety issue.

The hundreds of turbines planned by Ørsted/Eversource for their four projects south of Martha's Vineyard are 873 feet tall, just 190 feet shorter than the Eiffel Tower, with blades that have a diameter of 722 feet.

Guzzo said he is worried the turbines will make fish such as flounder disappear from traditional fishing grounds.

Gilbert said the rockpiles around the turbines also create an attractive habitat for black sea bass, a voracious predator that feasts on juvenile lobsters, crabs, clams and shrimp. Lobster catches already have plummeted across southern New England over the past few decades due to warming waters, decreasing oxygen levels and polluted runoff. So while recreational anglers and charter boat captains are big fans of the tasty seas bass, commercial lobstermen and shellfishermen are not.

Guzzo said he is also worried about oil leaking out of the turbines, something he said he has seen with the turbines off Block Island.

Gilbert also criticized state and federal legislators for not "coming out strong for us" on the issue. He said the fishermen face a tough road because environmentalists and lawmakers want to see more renewable energy projects. jwojtas@theday.com

Number of new COVID-19 cases hits lowest since last June

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nated, according to the CDC. But demand for vaccines has dropped across much of the country. President Joe Biden's administration is trying to convince other Americans to sign up for shots, using an upbeat message that vaccines offer a return to normal life.

White House health officials on Friday even waded into offering dating advice. They are teaming up with dating apps to offer a new reason to "swipe right" by featuring vaccination badges on profiles and in-app bonuses for people who have gotten their shots.

Ohio, New York, Oregon and other states are enticing people to get vaccinated through lottery prizes of up to \$5 million.

Across the country, venues and events reopened after shuttering for much of the last year.

On Saturday, Karen Stetz readied to welcome what she hoped would be a good crowd to the Grosse Pointe Art Fair on Michigan's Lake St. Clair.

With natural ventilation from the lake and mask and capacity restrictions easing, Stetz was optimistic that artists who make their living traveling a show circuit that ground to a halt last year would begin to bounce back. The event usually draws from 5,000 to 10,000 people.

"I feel like most people are ready to get out," Stetz said by phone shortly before opening the fair. "It seems like people are eager, but it's hard to know

still. I'm sure there's a percentage of people that are going to wait until they're comfortable."

In Mobile, thousands of joyful revelers, many without masks, competed for plastic beads and trinkets tossed from floats Friday night as Alabama's port city threw a Mardi Gras-style parade. But only about a quarter of the county's population is fully vaccinated. Many went without masks, though health officials had urged personal responsibility.

Alabama's vaccination rate — 34% of people have received at least one dose — is one of the lowest in the country. It's part of a swath of Southern states where vaccine uptake has been slow. Health experts worry that areas with low vaccination rates could give rise

to new virus variants that are more resistant to vaccinations.

"My biggest concern is new strains of the virus and the need to remain vigilant in the months ahead," said Boston College public health expert Dr. Philip J. Landrigan.

A medical center in Louisiana reported Friday it has identified the state's first two cases of a COVID-19 variant that has spread widely since being identified in India. The COVID-19 variant has been classified as a "variant of concern" by Britain and the World Health Organization, meaning there is some evidence that it spreads more easily between people, causes more severe disease, or might be less responsive to treatments and vaccines. The variant has also

been reported in several other states, including Tennessee, Nebraska and Nevada.

Though Landrigan said the big drop in cases nationwide was "the best news we've had on the pandemic" and showed that vaccines are working, he warned that people should remain vigilant for local flare-ups of new cases.

Many states have largely dropped orders to wear masks and stay distanced from other people. Meanwhile, even places such as California — the first state to issue a statewide shutdown as the virus emerged in March 2020 — prepared to remove restrictions on social distancing and business capacity next month.

State health director Dr. Mark Ghaly said Friday the

decision was based on dramatically lower virus cases and increased vaccinations.

But in Vermont — the state with the highest percentage of people who have received one shot — Gov. Phil Scott has tied the lifting of restrictions to the vaccination rate. He offered to lift all remaining restrictions before a July 4 deadline if 80% of those eligible get vaccinated.

Landrigan figured it will take a nationwide vaccination rate of at least 85% to snuff out the virus. But for now, the steep drop in cases gave him hope that pandemic-level infection rates will soon be a thing of the past.

"It is getting to the point to where by the Fourth of July we might be able to declare this thing over," he said.