

On December 18, 2008 CFCRI members traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with Congressional Policy staff in order to discuss how to forge a way to work with energy developers and project decision makers on such things as management, construction and operational impacts, maintenance and deconstruction practices, research and the long-term monitoring of impacts to fishery resources. The following briefing document was submitted:

Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island

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Member Commercial Fishing Associations:

Ocean State Fishermen's Association
Rhode Island Commercial Fishermen's Association
Rhode Island Lobstermen's Association
Rhode Island Shellfishermen's Association
RI Monkfishermen's Association
Point Judith Fishermen Memorial Foundation
Atlantic Offshore Lobsterman's Association

Briefing Information Prepared by CFCRI Steering Committee for RI Congressional Delegation Regarding Offshore Energy Projects and Ocean Zoning – Submitted December 18, 2008

About Us:

The Commercial Fisheries Center was founded in 2004 for the purpose of bringing fishermen, scientists, managers, and elected officials together to work to improve fisheries and understanding of the marine environment through education, collaborative research, and cooperation.

Our Objectives regarding Offshore Energy Projects and Ocean Zoning:

We are looking to our RI Congressional Delegation for advice and assistance.

We are not opposed to efforts to develop alternative energy sources including offshore wind farms. We know it is the future. We do feel strongly that such projects need to be implemented responsibly, and the concerns and input of the commercial fishing industry needs to be carefully considered throughout all phases of the process.

Recognizing the precedent setting nature of these initiatives, we hope that we are given the opportunity to participate in making this a successful national model, sharing in the benefits of the wind farm with our fellow RI citizens without bearing a disproportionate burden. The quality and content of our engagement will shape the outcome for the fishing industry nationwide, as this technology advances up and down the coastlines of our nation. Since RI currently stands at the forefront of this, we all have a special responsibility to get this right.

As representatives of the commercial fishing industry in RI, we are searching for a way to meaningfully engage in the research, planning, implementation and monitoring phases of both the proposed RI offshore wind farm project and the Ocean SAMP development process currently underway in RI. As industry leaders, we feel it is critical to find a way to work with energy developers to lessen the potential negative impacts on fishery resources, and protect the health and long-term sustainability of this important local food source. Our members need to know that their access to commercially valuable species and their ability to earn a living will be recognized as critical to the success of these projects.

As industry leaders in Rhode Island, we have begun working through our organizations as well as collaborating with those in neighboring states to keep industry members accurately informed. We will continue to gather input on their concerns. If given meaningful opportunities and the necessary support, we will commit to relaying this information in an organized and positive way, to address critical issues with the developer and appropriate state and federal officials.

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Our Concerns:

Management

- recognizing and not jeopardizing ongoing work to rebuild stocks along our coasts

Location of offshore wind farm

- need to protect critical spawning, breeding, and nursery areas
- access to important fishing grounds needs to be protected
- need to work directly with developer on what specific sites are being considered
- need to do baseline research to evaluate which site(s) would cause the minimum amount of damage and disruption
- need site specific fisheries data spanning yearly cycles of commercially valuable species for any siting decision

Construction impacts

- need to consider construction methods and timing of construction to minimize impacts to fishery resources and fishing activities
- need to minimize damage from blasting, dredge material disposal, sedimentation
- need to safely manage increased boat traffic in the offshore area
- input from fishing community needed on construction planning

Operational impacts

- need to minimize impacts of electromagnetic fields from underwater cables on fishery resources
- need to evaluate acoustic impacts on various species
- need to address extent of exclusion zones in and around wind farm, allowable distances for various types of fishing gears, setbacks for recreational vs. commercial boats, etc.

Maintenance/Deconstruction Practices – long-term servicing and/or dismantling of turbines

- plans for this need to be developed
- what types of debris might be left behind?
- what safety measures will be in place to prevent oil spills?
- how will increased boat traffic be managed?

Research

- field research is needed, current process does not include adequate fisheries field research and this needs to be corrected before any decisions are made
- project leaders need to use fishing industry's special expertise
- industry needs to have input regarding what type of research is needed
- industry should be part of the field research teams

Monitoring

- how will positive and negative impacts be evaluated over time?
- how might the fishing industry be involved in monitoring the impacts of fishery resources?