

Testimony

Dr. Peter F. Straub, Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Stockton University

U.S. Congress

Natural Resources Committee

Energy and Mineral Resources

Members of Congress, Distinguished state and local officials, my fellow citizens. I serve as the Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and Professor of Biology at Stockton University, a public comprehensive anchor institution which is up the road in Galloway Township and Atlantic City. I am honored to welcome you to our home and to testify before this committee on a topic that is very important to our local south-Jersey shore region, the State of New Jersey and this great nation. New Jersey has set upon a path of significant carbon emissions reduction in the energy sector by 2050 as part of a multi-pronged effort to reduce our state's contribution to climate change and to develop resilient New Jersey communities. Towards this end, Governor Murphy has committed our state to a leadership role in wind energy generation with a target of 3,500 Megawatts by 2030. This goal will take cooperative action by all, across the board, including the government, the business community, our academic institutions and our citizenry and workforce. There is little scientific doubt that human activities, tracing back to the dawn of the industrial revolution, are interfering in long-term global environmental cycles in a negative manner. As a consequence, we see a warming planet, a record of rising sea level and an increase in the severity of catastrophic storms, fire and flooding damage. These effects are seen locally in the increases in higher flood tides which in most times are taken by the shore communities as nuisance flooding but when coupled with king tides or storm surge from a strong Nor'Easter, a hurricane Irma, or a Superstorm Sandy, it can be devastating. Besides building and protecting resilient shoreside communities, we need to think of our oceans which are under stress from climate change due to rising temperatures and to ocean acidification from increased dissolved carbon dioxide. Rising temperatures can disrupt fisheries, push fish stocks off of traditional fishing grounds and increase time and effort to go farther afield to more northerly or deeper water. Ocean acidification, again a consequence of climate change, interferes with fish reproduction and weakens shellfish abilities to build their shells, grow and thrive.

In the arsenal of building a resilient New Jersey as well as a resilient oceanic environment, it is crucial that New Jersey add offshore wind generation capacity to current investments in low carbon emission energy such as solar and nuclear generation. However, it is incumbent on any new player, including the offshore wind energy sector to get it right. Historical use of the New Jersey coast includes tourism, shipping, boating, commercial and recreational fishing, diving and minerals extraction for beach protection. As with any resource, defining the needs of the many stakeholders will involve some give and take to minimize dislocation of traditional activities. I must say that I have been impressed so far with the way that the NJ Board of Public Utilities under Commissioner Joseph Fiordaliso handled the offshore wind solicitation and the way that Ørsted, the winning bidder of the first 1,100 Megawatt Ocean Wind project, has approached stakeholder engagement and has expressed their willingness to alter their design plans based on community input.

Stockton, along with the higher education sector, can assist the stakeholder community of ocean users and serve as neutral third parties to collect and evaluate essential scientific and social data necessary to make decisions and to ensure protection of our shared environment. In addition, the education community will be called upon to develop the workforce necessary for this new industry with an estimated 15,000 jobs to be created for the current project alone plus the potential for developing New Jersey as a manufacturing hub for the wind turbine supply chain. Stockton University has strong programs in environmental, marine and sustainability sciences and is developing new graduate degree programs including Coastal Zone Management which seeks to train a new generation to study and promote wise use of this critical environment and economic sector of our state. Toward this end, Stockton is also committed to the development of a multi-disciplinary, multiusers Resiliency Institute and Blue Economy Incubator in conjunction with our planned Marine Science Center in Atlantic City. It is our hope that this academic, government and industry collaboration will provide a nexus for the study of Resilient communities, alternate energy production and its environmental and economic effects on New Jersey. Stockton has a Memorandum of Understanding in place with Ocean Wind/ Ørsted to participate in Atlantic City and we are developing partnerships with other universities, environmental, trade and industry groups and have just completed a New Jersey Economic Development Authority: Governors Innovation Challenge grant, with Atlantic City to define the project and the economic impacts.

In closing, let me reiterate my strong support for development of this new offshore wind energy generation industry in New Jersey as well as my strong support for the ocean environment and the people who make their living on or around it. It is important that each group keep in mind that only by working together can we define a path toward limiting the spiraling effects of climate change on the world our children will inherit.

Thank you.