

**Testimony of Anne Hawkins
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**Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

***“Examining the Benefits and Potential Challenges for New Jersey’s Growing Offshore Wind Industry,”*
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Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Annie Hawkins, and I am the Executive Director of the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA) based in Washington, D.C. RODA is a membership-based coalition of fishing industry associations and companies committed to improving the compatibility of offshore development with their businesses. It provides a “strength in numbers” approach to coordinating science and policy initiatives to minimize conflicts between traditional and historical fishing and other, newer, uses of the Outer Continental Shelf. In one short year since RODA’s formation, we have grown to roughly 160 members in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic—and now the West Coast—due to fishermen’s overwhelming concern about the impacts of ocean development on their businesses and the marine ecosystems they depend on.

One of the biggest obstacles RODA has attempted to overcome is the lack of information, and often misinformation, about offshore development plans, and the effects they may or may not have on fisheries and ocean ecosystems.

There Are Fundamental Flaws in the Process for Offshore Wind Energy Development

Unfortunately, the rapid pace of offshore wind development, the lack of early and transparent engagement with fishing communities, and the sparse scientific record upon which to make informed decisions, have led to leasing and project design decisions being made without effectively minimizing impacts on our sustainable commercial fisheries. Proper consideration of U.S. fishing practices and management takes a significant amount of time, due to the complexity of the regulatory and socio-ecological environments. Often, fishermen and regulators are being asked to provide information for purposes and on spatial scales that have never been seen before. These data collection and analytical activities can take months or years to get right.

The opportunities for public input in the federal leasing process alone do not occur often enough or early enough to ensure that conflicts are reduced. Fishermen must never be seen as merely a “stakeholder” in the offshore wind leasing process. If anything, offshore wind developers are the newest stakeholders in our nation’s centuries-old fishing industry, which provides New Jersey and all coastal states with

irreplaceable benefits: jobs, revenue, food security, tourism, recreation, meals on dinner plates, traditional ecological knowledge... and a significant contribution to America's very identity.

Moreover, the division of important steps in wind energy leasing processes between federal and state governments has created an atmosphere of chaos from the fishermen's perspective. While these are federal projects, states drive much of the decision making through the power procurement process, Coastal Zone Management Act review authority, and incentives for development. It's extremely important for states to have strong abilities to consider and prevent local impacts; however, this decentralization of power has led to the federal process being largely ineffective from a public participation standpoint.

Just as fish can't recognize state borders, so too do fishermen operate in areas defined by resource ecosystems rather than state boundaries. The combination of state, federal, wind energy industry, NGO, academic, and other initiatives that demand attention from any individual fishing business is simply overwhelming. When critical leasing and project decisions are made by so many different actors, fishermen who "do everything right" and participate in good faith are shocked to find they have done so only after key decisions have already been made—or told their input is too early—or it's in the wrong forum, or the wrong region—or long past the time where sufficient baseline data can be collected—and their knowledge therefore has little value at all. This is what we refer to as a "divide and conquer" approach and is no way to promote coexistence.

RODA formed last summer to better amplify the concerns of commercial fishermen and to better include their expansive knowledge into offshore wind development processes in light of the challenges I just mentioned. And in some ways, we have found receptive audiences. This past March, RODA signed a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Through the MOU, we have been able to work more closely alongside our government partners to educate our membership of project development and provide feedback to both NMFS and BOEM on industry concerns. We hope that this MOU opens the door to increasingly better science, communication, and processes as offshore wind development continues its lightspeed advancement.

RODA has also found it useful to work directly with wind energy developers. We have created a Joint Industry Task Force with lease-holding developers to tackle some of the most difficult conflict areas between the fishing and offshore energy industries. We hope that working with the developers will provide educational benefits, identify best practices for offshore wind projects, and provide a forum to drive innovative problem-solving. It will also allow for a regional approach to ensure coordination, streamline input, and reduce meeting fatigue for those who need to be on the water doing their jobs.

Aggressive state renewable energy procurement goals drive offshore wind markets, opening the door for variable approaches to mitigation and disruption payments. These discussions, first and foremost, need to be transparent and inclusive. It is absolutely imperative that fisheries mitigation follows a stepwise approach:

1. Avoid impacts to the extent possible
2. Minimize any impacts that cannot be avoided
3. Mitigate any impacts through appropriate spatial, seasonal, or technological controls

4. ONLY once those steps have been followed, consider disruption payments for fishery losses.

This can only be effective if it is employed before, during, and throughout project development. At the present, “fisheries mitigation” is approached as an afterthought only at the very end of the federal process and based on state-specific requirements rather than any sound planning. And relying on cash payments to “buy out” fishermen rather than minimizing impacts up front does nothing to preserve our coastal communities, history and culture, and sustainable fisheries.

The Scientific Record Needs Significant Improvement

Now let me transition to the environment itself. While mitigating climate change is an important and difficult task, it is simply impossible to procure energy without any impacts whatsoever—even “clean energy.” These are huge industrial projects with very large footprints—hundreds or thousands of turbines in clusters, each more than twice the height of the Statue of Liberty—and their impacts can only be minimized or mitigated if we have a full understanding of what those are and the tradeoffs involved.

To our knowledge few, if any, scientific studies have been performed on many of the known ways that offshore wind development will impact fishing. For example, despite repeated attempts we have found no information on or off the record to inform minimum cable burial depths necessary to prevent exposure,¹ much less to minimize impacts from heat or electromagnetic fields that may transfer from the cable to benthic sediment or the water column. We have similarly been unable to identify any credible data on the full distance and magnitude of the considerable radar interference that wind turbines are known to generate. There has been no discussion whatsoever of what project decommissioning may look like—much less environmental requirements for doing so—despite our understanding that currently the only way to decommission the large monopile turbines proposed for several existing projects is to chop them off at the base and leave the foundations in the seafloor *forever*.

So, too, are the ecological implications of wind energy development largely unknown – both on fishery-specific and ecosystem levels. Despite the proliferation of wind energy projects in European waters, there are virtually zero peer-reviewed studies exploring their impacts on fish populations and fishing businesses. This is due in part to Europe’s failure to collect pre-construction baseline information on the appropriate spatial scales to measure impacts against. We are following directly in those footsteps and have not collected that key data in any meaningful way. Despite some developers’ assertions to the contrary, the clear consensus among fisheries experts and scientists is that we do not have adequate data for this purpose. By rushing to develop without understanding environmental impacts, we risk making potentially catastrophic mistakes not only in the first few projects, but repeating those mistakes again and again because we will not learn how to make informed adjustments on future projects.

Since the first discussions of offshore wind development, there has been recognition of the need for a regional science body to address research and monitoring needs for fisheries and offshore wind

¹ In August of last year both the Deepwater Wind cable and National Grid’s Sea2shore Cable associated with the Block Island offshore wind facility were exposed, despite assurances from regulators and the developer that the risk of such an event was extraordinarily low. Anecdotal evidence suggests that cable in Europe buried to the same depths anticipated here are frequently exposed, causing expansive areas of restricted access and significant safety and environmental concerns.

interactions – not just on a project-specific level, but to understand ecosystem impacts from the large-scale installation of new industrial projects as well as the cumulative impacts of multiple lease sites. The relationships RODA has built have enabled us to form the [Responsible Offshore Science Alliance \(ROSA\)](#), a collaborative effort among fishermen, offshore wind developers, and state and federal government agencies. Its goal is to increase salient and credible data on fisheries and wind development and improve the understanding of the effects of wind energy development on fisheries and the ocean ecosystems they depend on. Increasing scientific understanding, research, and monitoring is paramount to achieving future coexistence between fisheries and offshore renewable energy. This is a critically important effort that must be fully supported by states, federal entities, and the public.

RODA was founded with the hope of minimizing the “divide and conquer” approach to interacting with commercial fishermen in a rapidly developing ocean. Our successes have come from our ability to collaborate with all fishermen and fishing-related businesses that will be affected by wind energy development. Fishermen hold a broad range of beliefs and approaches to their interactions with other ocean users. They are also the single best source of information on our offshore environment. Their knowledge must be brought to bear in a constructive and time-appropriate manner to ensure that one renewable resource is not developed at the expense of another.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to the opportunity to answer any questions that the Committee may have for me.