

US House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Offshore Wind Field Hearing – Wildwood, NJ – September 16, 2019
“Examining the Benefits and Potential Challenges for New Jersey's Growing
Offshore Wind Industry”

Testimony of Peter Hughes
Chairman of the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance

Chairman Lowenthal, ranking member Gosar and distinguished members of the subcommittee: thank you for taking a serious interest in our issues, and a special thanks to Congressman Van Drew for making it possible to hear the concerns of our coastal fishing community.

My name is Peter Hughes, I am employed with Atlantic Capes Fisheries, where I have worked for the last 30 years. I consider myself part of a small industry with a big impact.

I cannot give you the position of the entire commercial fishing community because there are diverse opinions on offshore wind. But I can articulate the specific concerns of the members of the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance, or RODA, of which I am the chairman.

There are four main topics I'd like to bring to your attention:

- 1) The economic importance of New Jersey's fishing industry and our contributions to the coastal economy;
- 2) The unique ecosystem of the Mid-Atlantic Bight;
- 3) The risk of losing our traditional fishing grounds and the short term and long term impacts on our ecosystem, and;
- 4) The potential disruption of scientific sampling conducted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

Allow me to expand on these 4 topics:

First, the economic importance of New Jersey's fishing industry.

New Jersey is routinely ranked among the top 10 states for the value of commercial seafood landings. Our industry is multi-generational, having existed and thrived in the state for over 100 years. Take Cold Spring Fish and Supply, which was incorporated in 1922 and in 3 years will celebrate its centennial birthday – that's a significant milestone! More recently, over the last 50 years the industry has made collective and individual investments and innovations that have resulted in annual landings of fish and shellfish valued at over \$190 million.

Our most valuable ports include Cape May (\$81 million), Point Pleasant (\$35 million) and Barnegat Light (\$25 million).

New Jersey continues to be a leading supplier of Atlantic Surfclams and Ocean Quahogs in the U.S. and around the world. For anyone who has ever eaten a bowl of clam chowder, they owe a thank you to the development of New Jersey's clam fishery.

We have not only excelled at catching fish and shellfish but our contributions to sustainable fisheries through science and management are well-documented.

This has come at a significant cost of time and resources, but we have met and surpassed the high standards of US fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

We consider the job of providing high quality seafood to be a virtue and a privilege. Seafood products landed in New Jersey are shipped and consumed worldwide. The commercial fishing industry and support industries provide thousands of jobs for residents and contribute greatly to the value of tourism in our coastal communities.

Offshore wind development poses a serious threat to our achievements and the continued success of sustainable fisheries in New Jersey.

Next, the unique ecosystem of the Mid-Atlantic Bight.

The productivity of our Mid-Atlantic fisheries is dependent upon a unique confluence of environmental factors.

The New Jersey fishing industry participates in fisheries under the jurisdiction of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and the New England Fishery Management Council. We use many different gear types and methods to harvest Ocean Quahogs, Surfclams, Summer Flounder, Black Sea Bass, Scup, Illex Squid, Loligo Squid, Atlantic Sea Scallops and other species.

These stocks could be negatively impacted by the size, scale and function of the wind energy areas . Unless and until these concerns are allayed, we ask for caution and consideration of wind development through proper scientific examination.

The physical oceanography of this region is influenced by the seafloor, freshwater input from multiple rivers and estuaries, large scale weather patterns, and tropical or winter coastal storm events. Consequently, this area experiences one of the largest summer to winter temperature changes of any part of the ocean around the world. The result is a unique ocean feature called the Mid-Atlantic Cold Pool, a nutrient-rich band of cold bottom water that extends the length of the Middle Atlantic Bight from spring through early fall.

The ecological and environmental influences on the fisheries we rely upon are fragile and not yet well understood but a disruption of this balance could alter this ecosystem and degrade it.

Third, the risk of losing our traditional fishing grounds.

Our regional fishing practices are not compatible with wind development and we will be forced to operate outside of these areas.

The New Jersey fishing industry has been closely following offshore wind development for 10 years and has actively participated in those discussions. We never expected what has occurred over the last two years, which is the vast majority of the leases are on top of productive fishing areas. In addition, we have come to learn that a major reason for site selection was aesthetics and not wind viability, suitable substrate or depth. In other words, sites were simply chosen so as not to be visible from shore.

It is alarming that many of the leases are on top of sensitive and productive habitats and occupy the same areas as migrating marine mammals. One wind area of particular concern is sighted on the Carl M Schuster Horseshoe Crab Sanctuary, located in the mouth of the Delaware Bay.

It is possible we will not only see lower catches of sustainable protein but will be forced to fish in areas of less abundance, requiring more effort, more exposure to risk and higher costs.

Finally, the potential disruption of scientific sampling.

Fishermen will not be the only ones excluded from operating inside the wind areas.

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center has conducted trawl surveys to sample and estimate resource abundance for over 40 years. The stock assessments rely on time series and information collected from these surveys and fishery quotas are established based on this information.

One possible result of the disruption of surveys is a lack of data for assessing the stock status of fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic and New England. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center has stated that their current methodology of survey will no longer be possible within windfarms. This could force scientists to increase the scientific uncertainty buffer as it is applied to the assessment process and potentially reduce quotas.

Additionally, marine mammal and protected resource surveys will be impacted by the loss of access to these areas, greatly inhibiting our knowledge of critical stocks, notably Right Whales.

In closing, New Jersey's sustainable fisheries contribute significantly to the state's economy and employment. Unknowns about offshore wind farms pose a threat to the continued success of the commercial fishing industry and therefore must only be implemented when their impacts don't harm a successful, existing industry.

We are concerned that fishing efforts will be pushed to the margins into less productive areas of the ocean. This will significantly impact our catch per unit effort resulting in increased cost, decreased catch and potentially our safety at sea.

The unique ecosystem dynamics found in the Mid-Atlantic Bight provide us with some of the most prolific and consistent fisheries in the world. Suitable science needs to be conducted prior to construction of wind farms to minimize negative impacts on the environment.

Additionally, the proposed offshore wind development areas will inhibit the ability of current scientific survey methods to continue their longstanding monitoring efforts. This could have dire consequences for not only our understanding of the health of the ecosystem, but also fishing quotas set by the Secretary of Commerce.

We would like to respectfully request this subcommittee provide the commercial fishing industry a level of protection through a deliberative scientific examination of the overall impact of wind farms. In addition, we request you apply a rigorous set of standards to wind energy developers similar to what the commercial fishing industry has already met.

My final message would be that we are not looking for a new industry to supplant a historically viable commercial fishing industry but rather coexistence for both industries.

I would again like to thank Chairman Lowenthal, the subcommittee and Congressman Van Drew, I hope this is the first of many congressional hearings on this important subject.