

# Fishers want say on future of wind energy

## Offshore plans discussed at packed hearing in Wildwood

By **BILL BARLOW**  
Special to the Star and Wave

WILDWOOD — For the most part, the fishing industry representatives who addressed a House of Representatives subcommittee hearing on wind energy Monday support the concept of offshore wind energy. They just want to be consulted.

The crowd overflowed the meeting room at the Wildwoods Convention Center for the hearing on the benefits and potential challenges for New Jersey's nascent offshore wind industry. Many in the crowd were commercial fishermen, and representatives of the fishing and tourism industry gave testimony at the Sept. 16 meeting of the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, which falls under the Committee on Natural Resources.

U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew brought subcommittee chairman Alan Lowenthal, a Democrat from California's 47th district, to southern New Jersey for the hearing. In repeated comments, Van Drew said the commercial and recreational fishing industry should be part of the planning process as New Jersey looks to build wind turbines off the coast.

In June, New Jersey's Board of Public Utilities gave Danish company Ørsted a contract to build a \$1.6 billion wind farm about 15 miles off Atlantic City, known as the Ocean Wind project. The plan is to generate 1,100 megawatts of electricity without carbon emissions, generating enough power for about a half-million homes.

Supporters believe wind power could be a key part of reducing carbon emissions. The unprecedented buildup of carbon in the atmosphere has been linked to rising global temperatures, expected to cause rising seas, increasing severe weather and numerous other changes.

"There is no doubt that a transition from fossil fuels to zero-emission energy sources is essential if we are to leave a recognizable world for our great-grandchildren and their children," Lowenthal said at the opening of the hearing. "No doubt. The evidence is clear."

Wind power is essential to that transition, Lowenthal said, while adding that the concerns of other stakeholders should be taken into account, including those of fishing and tourism, both major elements of Cape May County's economy.

"I want to be clear from the very start — I hope I don't read anything or see anything to the otherwise — I support offshore wind," Van Drew said. "It's a clean source of energy that will help in the fight against climate change."

He said he's looking forward to learning more about offshore wind plans. "However, as with most



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Charter boat captain Edward Yates cites studies indicating reduced catches and changes in migration patterns around wind farms in Denmark.

public policy, the first rule should be to do no harm," he continued. "That means no harm to our environment. That means no harm to our ratepayers and the livelihoods of fishermen."

The project is expected to increase costs to ratepayers by \$1.46 a month on average. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$1.6 billion.

### Part of local culture

Van Drew described fishing as a vital part of southern New Jersey culture, adding that commercial and recreational fishing combined are a \$1 billion industry. When it came time to question the speakers, Van Drew asked each one if they believed the commercial fishing industry "deserved a seat at the table" when wind projects were being planned. Each said yes.

The fishing industry was not kept informed of plans for wind turbines off the coast, Van Drew said, and was not consulted on those plans. There remain unanswered questions about fishing access near the turbines and other key issues, he said.

"Lip service and perfunctory meetings that check the box will not suffice. This is our lives down here. Our fishermen deserve a seat at the table," he said.

The hearing included talks with three panels over the course of the morning, with testimony from local officials, industry and organization representatives and offshore wind proponents. Many spoke of the history of commercial fishing in Cape May County and its

importance both economically and culturally to the region.

Van Drew said it was fishermen who convinced him of the reality and danger of climate change, as men with decades of experience in the water began telling him things were changing offshore.

Cape May Mayor Chuck Lear was the first to speak, saying the community wants assurances that the planned turbines would not disrupt fishing, tourism and other local industries. Local officials want to know that the benefits of offshore wind would far exceed the cost and the potential harm, he said.

Lear was one of several speakers to reference the late Danny Cohen, the founder of Atlantic Cape Fisheries and founder of Fishermen's Energy of New Jersey, one of the first serious efforts to create an offshore wind farm in the state. It was counterintuitive for a commercial fishing businessman to support building structures in the ocean, Lear said, but Cohen saw wind energy as a path to change.

"Danny urged us all to rise to the challenge of climate change wisely, openly, sadly, because he knew, as do we, that our children and their children and all the children of tomorrow depend on how we respond to the economic environmental changes that we face today," Lear said.



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U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew says the fishing industry deserves a seat at the table during discussions of wind energy off the coast of New Jersey.

Captain Edward Yates, a charter boat captain and president of United Boatmen of New Jersey, was one of the speakers most critical of the wind turbine proposal, raising concerns on the impact on fisheries. He cited studies indicating reduced catches and changes in migration around wind farms in Denmark.

"What is the rush to get into this when there's not enough data to support any benefit and nondisruption to the commercial and recreational fishermen?" Yates said.

If the fishing industry had been consulted, other speakers suggested, members could have suggested areas where the wind turbines would have had less of an effect on the catch.

### Potential job creation

Vicki Clark, president of the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, told the subcommittee that she sees an opportunity for new jobs in wind power. What's more, she said, they would not be seasonal or connected to the cyclical tourism industry.

"For nearly 50 years, we have fought the development of offshore oil and gas in the Atlantic Ocean. As we look for alternatives to fossil fuel energy, offshore wind will provide sustainable, clean energy that will protect our ocean, bays, beaches and marine life for future generations

address their concerns as well," she said. "We believe that it is entirely possible and absolutely necessary for offshore wind and fishing industries to coexist in our fishing waters."

At one point in the meeting, Lowenthal asked critics of the proposal if wind power were preferable to offshore drilling or seismic testing off the New Jersey coast. The Trump administration has sought to open much of the coastline to oil and gas leasing. The answer was unequivocal that wind power is preferable but that there remain questions to be answered.

Frederick Zaleman, Ørsted's head of government affairs for North America, described Ørsted as the world's largest wind power company, saying it pioneered the industry globally and operates the first offshore wind project in the U.S. off Block Island.

Zaleman said the project would mean thousands of new jobs, describing offshore wind as an enormous untapped potential, especially on the East Coast where there are strong, steady winds. Plans are to have the wind farm operational by 2024.

to come," Clark said.

But she added that it must be developed in cooperation with the fishing industry, not in competition.

Plans were already changed to protect tourism, Clark said, moving the huge wind turbines farther off the coast. Similar compromises could be made for fishing.

"We must hear from the fishing industry and



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