

New England Is Not Prepared For The World's Largest Offshore Windfarm

Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership
Press Release

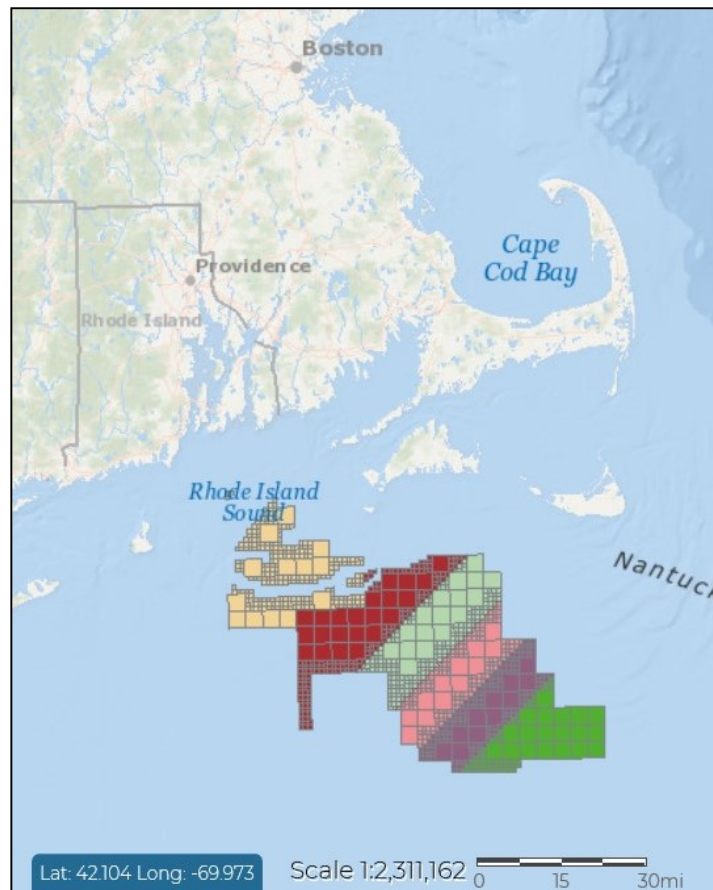
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Commercial fishing families, as stewards of the ocean, are concerned that a new industry is developing at a rapid pace without adequate science and risk management. By the end of the year, Vineyard Wind intends to begin construction on its 84-turbine offshore wind farm south of Cape Cod. It will be one of the largest wind farms in the world and it will be built on essential marine habitat.

By the end 2025, Vineyard Wind and other foreign-owned wind energy companies, plan to build over 1,000 turbines in a 1,400 square mile lease area. Combined, they will dwarf other wind farms around the world. And they will build it without adequate scientific understanding of the harm they could cause to the migratory route for millions of marine animals, the feeding grounds for right whales, and the traditional fishing grounds of thousands of fishermen and recreational boaters.

It's true that most New Englanders are in favor of increasing renewable energy sources like wind farms. But it is also true that most New Englanders are not aware of the sheer magnitude and ecological disruption of the industrial development that will soon dominate their coast. For perspective, imagine driving through a wind farm the size of Rhode Island. This will be bigger.

"Fishing families in New England are alarmed that Vineyard Wind has been able to race through its permitting process without answering simple scientific and economic questions about the harm it will have on the ecosystem and traditional fishing grounds," said Ed Barrett, the President of the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership. "There are ways that wind farms could be developed responsibly so that they coexist with the environment and fishermen. But that's not happening here."



The area of ocean that will be covered with wind farms is massive. At over 1,400 square miles, the combined leased areas are larger than the state of Rhode Island. *Created using Data Explorer on <https://www.northeastoceandata.org/>*

Scientists are among the growing group that are concerned with how little research Vineyard Wind has conducted before it begins pile driving and dredging in essential habitat. NOAA, the federal agency in charge of fisheries science and policy recently responded sharply to Vineyard Wind's Draft Environmental Impact Statement: "We determined that many of the conclusory statements relating to the scale of impacts for biological and socioeconomic resources are not well supported in the document," the 44-page report letter stated. "Related to fish and fisheries, there is limited analysis of areas of mortality, injury, and behavioral impacts, particularly spawning activity for relevant species and potential loss in catch resulting from pile driving activities." (Link to the full letter below)

Basic scientific questions have not been addressed. What are the impacts to New England's marine environment when thousands of turbines are pounded into the sediment and hundreds of miles of high-voltage cable run through fisheries habitat? What will happen to the lobster, squid, striped bass, tuna, flounder, cod, whales, sea turtles and other marine animals that migrate along the New England coast when their path to Massachusetts is interrupted by the noise and vibrations of hundreds of turbines? Who will be responsible when New Englanders lose access to local seafood and fishing grounds?

Most New Englanders assume that someone is answering those fundamental questions. They also assume that if Vineyard Wind harms the marine environment or the local economy, then Vineyard Wind will be held responsible.

But these assumptions are not correct. Vineyard Wind, in a race to ensure it receives federal tax credits, is barreling towards starting construction before it answers these questions. And it has every incentive to do so. Federal laws, with few exceptions, are not designed to hold wind energy companies responsible for the harm they cause to the environment.

As an example in fisheries, if the wind farms negatively impact the population of summer flounder (a popular recreational and commercial fish stock in Southern New England); the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act provides no means to hold Vineyard Wind accountable. The only action the government can take is to lower fishing limits. In fact, it will be required to do so. Commercial and recreational fishermen would pay the price for something that the wind farms did. And summer flounder is only one of over 50 species that are part of the multi-billion dollar, locally-owned, seafood and recreational fishing economy.

"People need energy," said Angela Sanfilippo, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership and President of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association. "But people also need food. We cannot trade one renewable resource for another."

The Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership is an umbrella organization of fishing community associations throughout the Bay State. "For the last thirty years, we've done everything the government has asked of us," Barrett said about commercial fishermen. "We've been good stewards of the environment. As a result, we have productive fisheries that feed millions of people in North America. That is at risk."

Fishermen are also concerned about the effect wind farms will have on whale populations. “We’ve closed thousands of square miles to lobstering to protect right whales,” said John Haviland, President of the South Shore Lobster Fisherman’s Association. “Why aren’t the wind farms held to the same standard? There are right whales that live in the wind farm lease areas. What will happen to them when their habitat turns into an industrial park?”

Ultimately, offshore wind energy is developing at a reckless pace and scale. What has been clear to fishermen is becoming clear to an expanding group of scientists, politicians, and government officials. There is too much risk to the environment to sit back and trust foreign energy corporations to decide what is best for New England.

The Massachusetts Fishermen’s Partnership applauds the recent actions taken by Massachusetts House leadership, including Representative Haddad, Chairman Michelwitz, and the Speaker, during the recent budget debate for their work to bring the issue of mitigation to the front burner in the off-shore wind procurement discussions. Mitigation should be a critical component of any future bid for securing off-shore wind contracts, and the House’s approved amendments provide it an appropriate place in the conversation. Fishing families will continue to work with elected leaders to protect our oceans and New England’s vibrant coastal communities.

The press is encouraged to contact the Massachusetts Fishing Partnership for more information and to be put in touch with fishermen in their area.

Link to NOAA Fisheries Comments to Vineyard Wind DEIS: www.nefmc.org/library/april-2019-offshore-wind-in-the-northeast-region-special-session