

## Proposals for projects to investigate the potential for fisheries mitigation with windfarms.

### **1) Windfarm site selection and cable route planning to minimise potential conflicts**

#### Issue:

Maintaining access to fishing grounds is clearly very important for the viability of commercial fishing businesses. The development of offshore windfarms, though, may result in access to some grounds being lost. The principle issues are that towed gears are considered to present a risk to inter-turbine cables and so may be excluded from many windfarms through legislation, while the physical presence of the turbines can make using even static fishing gears difficult or potentially dangerous, particularly in strong tidal runs or in adverse weather conditions.

Fishermen have also noted that cables and cable trenches can form significant obstructions across fishing grounds, and potentially represent some of the most impacting factors for fishing activities resulting from windfarm developments. Fishing gear including trawls, bottom-set nets and pots can become snagged on cables, while cable trenches form obstacles to trawls and drift nets. Even trenches that are refilled can be problematic, as the trenching process can unearth new snags in previously open ground. Such snags can greatly restrict or prevent the use of trawls and bottom-fished drift nets where local seabed topography already limits fishing to particular areas.

In order to minimise the potential for windfarms or cables and trenches to impact fishing activities, fishermen are keen to ensure that discussions are held with developers very early in the windfarm planning process. For any particular site, even minor changes of site boundaries or deviations of cable routes may provide significant benefits for fisheries, while it seems likely that the earlier any such suggestions can be provided to developers, the less costs would be incurred in changing plans.

A key issue, then, appears to be the earliest possible engagement between fishermen and developers. In fact, in order for consent to be gained for developments, the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) will require developers to demonstrate that fishermen were consulted early and that the site selection process for any future development was undertaken to reasonably minimise adverse effects on fish stocks and fishing activity. The Crown Estate is also now designing a Zone Appraisal and Planning (ZAP) Process to ensure consistency in assessments between developments.

The main concern with the ZAP Process is that the actual mechanism for developers to engage fishermen has yet to be described. It is intended that this work would address that concern.

#### Proposal and Aim:

The aim of this work would be to design a process, compatible with and intrinsic to the overall ZAP Process, that promotes early, effective and meaningful engagement between fishermen and windfarm developers. The objective would be to minimise conflict between fishermen and developers as developments proceeded, leading to mutually beneficial outcomes in minimising impacts on fisheries from windfarm developments.

It is intended that this outcome would be achieved through analysis of the existing IPC and ZAP Process documentation, and through consultation with the Crown Estate, fishermen and developers. Recommendation would be provided first as a draft document for review, for example by the Fisheries Liaison with Offshore Wind and Wet Renewables (FLOWW) group. A final document would then be produced. The FLOWW framework for dialogue on the value of displacement should provide a useful starting point for this work: [http://www.bwea.com/pdf/offshore/fisheries\\_framework.pdf](http://www.bwea.com/pdf/offshore/fisheries_framework.pdf).

#### Timescale:

It is anticipated that this project, including production of draft and final reports, would take 15 days (background: 3 days, stakeholder consultation: 6 days, report writing: 4 days, final review: 2 days).

#### Deliverables:

- 1) Consultation with the Crown Estate, fishermen and windfarm developers in designing a process for early consultation.
- 2) Description of a process, consistent with the ZAP Process, which allowed fishermen and developers to engage early in offshore windfarm development planning.

## **2) Combining windfarms with MCZs**

### Issue:

Commercial fishing activities may be spatially restricted by port developments, shipping lanes, aggregate dredging activities, cable routes, oil and gas developments, Ministry of Defence sites and because of marine protected areas (MPAs) such as marine nature reserves, special areas of conservation and sites of special scientific interest.

As part of the Marine and Coastal Access Act, a new form of MPA will soon be introduced in UK waters, called Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). Four projects, focussed on different areas around the English Coast, are now working with fishermen and other stakeholders to identify possible sites for MCZs. The regional projects are Net Gain (North Sea), Balanced Seas (Southeast), Finding Sanctuary (Southwest) and Irish Sea Conservation Zones (Irish Sea and UK waters off the Welsh coast). The four projects are scheduled to provide Defra with proposals for a network of MCZs around the English coast by the end of 2011.

While the introduction of MCZs may result in additional spatial restrictions being placed on fishing activities, the establishment of windfarms offshore may also result in restrictions being imposed. In particular, towed and drifting fishing gears appear likely to be prohibited within windfarms, while the use of static gears may be restricted for practical or safety concerns.

On top of existing spatial restrictions at sea, the potential combined loss of fishing grounds within windfarms and MCZs may become a considerable issue for fishermen. There may, though, be opportunities and advantages in combining MCZs and windfarms. Essentially, this could limit the potential impact of both windfarms and MCZs on some fishermen, would help to clearly define the MCZ areas, and could support MCZ monitoring and management efforts.

There are also potential disadvantages from such an approach, in that windfarms simply may not be constructed in places that are valuable as MCZs, the windfarm turbines and associated infrastructure may compromise MCZ objectives, the windfarms may not be built in appropriate areas or in habitats that are desirable as MCZs, and, importantly, some fishermen who are able to fish inside windfarms may prefer to maintain access to these sites where they are located in favoured fishing grounds. The level of restriction on fishing activities within specific windfarms and MCZs is likely to be key.

At the present time there appears to have been no formal effort to understand the potential for combining MCZs with windfarms. A potentially important opportunity therefore now exists to clearly identify the potential and, if appropriate, the principles of combining MCZs with windfarms while the MCZ designation and windfarm planning processes are ongoing. This proposal is focussed on that opportunity.

### Proposal and Aim:

The aim of this project would be to determine the potential and interest for windfarms and MCZs to be combined. This would be achieved through reviewing the latest MCZ guidance, and through consultation with fishermen, nature conservation organisations, windfarm developers and the four MCZ projects. Regionally specific recommendations will be made where possible.

An analysis of the circumstances under which MCZs may be favourably combined with offshore windfarms will be conducted, and a draft report provided for stakeholder comments before a final report is produced.

### Timescale:

It is anticipated that this project, including production of draft and final reports, would take 15 days (background: 2 days, stakeholder consultation: 7 days, report writing: 4 days, final review: 2 days).

### Deliverables:

- 1) Consultation with fishermen, nature conservation organisations, windfarm developers and the MCZ projects to determine the potential for MCZs to be combined with offshore windfarms.
- 2) A detailed analysis and recommendations concerning the conditions under which MCZs and windfarms may be favourably combined.