

Options and opportunities for marine fisheries mitigation associated with windfarms

Dr. Rob Blyth-Skyrme, Ichthys Marine Ecological Consulting Ltd.

Project outline

This brief summary presents the findings of a Collaborative Offshore Wind Research Into the Environment Ltd (COWRIE) funded project to investigate the options and opportunities for marine fisheries mitigation associated with windfarms. A 125 page final report and an 8 page summary report may be downloaded from the COWRIE website: www.offshorewindfarms.co.uk/Pages/COWRIE/.

The key issue for this project was that Government has committed to the UK generating 30% of its electricity from renewable sources by the year 2020 in order to reduce carbon emissions, combat climate change and secure the UK energy supply. A significant proportion of this renewable energy will come from windfarms sited off the UK coast. Because there is the potential for fishermen to lose access to sea areas within offshore windfarms, this project was proposed with the aim of developing a list of possible mitigation options which would be of use to fishermen, developers, regulators and marine resource managers in discussions related to fishing and windfarm developments. In brief, the aim of the project could be summarised as "*identifying ways to keep fishermen fishing*".

Mitigation options

As a result of the research undertaken, and through the support of an expert stakeholder group, 26 possible mitigation options in four different categories were identified during the course of this study:

- 1) Options to minimize impacts on commercial fishing activities (5 options); reducing or eliminating any negative impacts of windfarms on commercial fishing activities through early and constructive consultation.
- 2) Options to enhance stocks of targeted species and associated habitats (5 options); promoting existing fishing activities within and around windfarms.
- 3) Options to support existing fishing activities (12 options); increasing access to fisheries, enhancing performance, reducing costs, increasing product price or enhancing marketability.
- 4) Options to develop new fisheries or other activities (4 options); opportunities to switch to new or alternative fisheries and other activities if access is lost.

Key points

- The list of proposed mitigation options was never intended to be exhaustive. Fishermen and developers, with the support of fisheries managers, fisheries scientists and statutory bodies, are encouraged to use the list as an information source while identifying their own preferred process for managing any impacts on commercial fishing.
- Each of the proposed mitigation options will need to be considered and appraised in the context of individual offshore developments. Some of the identified options may be unsuitable because of specific local issues.
- Developers must work to consult fishermen effectively and as early as possible in the development process. If this does not occur, there will inevitably be little opportunity to incorporate mitigating features into any development.
- Fishermen must contribute effectively to discussions with developers. If data showing the value of different areas to fisheries are available only at the broad scale or in limited areas, fishermen must work to supply information which provides evidence of fishing activity.
- In order to maximise the opportunities for mitigation projects to proceed, external funding should be sought. The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will provide the best opportunities for sourcing additional funding for projects linked to sustaining viable fisheries and fishing communities. Most of the possible mitigation options presented are compatible with the remits of the EFF and the RDAs.