MEMORANDUM

Date: August 2, 2019

To: Chris Moore, Executive Director

From: Julia Beaty, Staff

Subject: Mid-Atlantic Council Role in Offshore Wind Development

The objective of the offshore wind agenda item at the August Council meeting is to discuss how the Council can most effectively participate in the offshore wind development process to ensure that impacts to Council-managed fisheries are minimized, including impacts to target species, habitats, fishermen, fishing communities, fishing businesses, and fisheries science.

To date, the Block Island wind farm is the only offshore wind farm in the U.S. However, many additional projects of various scales are in different stages of permitting, site assessment, and environmental review. Multiple projects could begin construction over the next few years. The map on the next page shows the current wind energy lease and call areas\(^1\) off the coasts of Massachusetts through South Carolina.

The Council’s involvement in offshore wind consists of strategic comment letters to the Bureau of Ocean Energy and Management (BOEM), which has the primary federal authority over offshore wind development; maintenance of a web page jointly managed with the New England Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries (http://www.mafmc.org/northeast-offshore-wind); and participation in various organizations and teams working on offshore wind issues (e.g., the NOAA Fisheries Wind Team, the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance, the New York State Fisheries Technical Working Group, and the Mid-Atlantic Council on the Ocean).

The Council may have the greatest impact in the offshore wind development process by working with other groups to influence: 1) the siting of lease areas and the siting of turbines within lease areas, 2) the science undertaken to assess the impacts of offshore wind developments on fisheries and the environment, and 3) the environmental reviews required of offshore wind developments (e.g., though the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, process). Collaborations with other groups could include participating as members where appropriate, coordinating on comment letters, working together to communicate with stakeholders, and other ways of providing support.

For example, the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance, a coalition of commercial fishing industry associations and companies, may be best positioned to advocate for the needs of

\(^{1}\) Call areas are areas that have not yet been leased but are under consideration for leasing by BOEM. These areas may be refined before they are leased.
commercial fishermen regarding siting of wind turbines, including the layout of turbines within lease areas and transit lanes. The Council has agreed to participate in the newly formed Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA). ROSA is a collaboration between commercial fishing interests and offshore wind developers and is well positioned to help ensure that the environmental assessments and studies required of offshore wind developers can answer important questions about impacts to fisheries at a regional scale. In addition, NOAA Fisheries provides detailed advice and comments to BOEM through review of NEPA documents, essential fish habitat assessments and consultations, and incidental take authorizations. Close coordination between the Council and NOAA Fisheries is invaluable for tracking, understanding, and responding to the various environmental reviews of the many offshore wind projects in the region. By participating in or otherwise supporting these organizations and groups, the input of the Council and these groups can be amplified.

In short, the staff recommendation for discussion at the August Council meeting is for the Council to continue to provide strategic comment letters to BOEM, continue to maintain the website managed with the New England Council and NOAA Fisheries, and continue to participate in and further support select groups and organizations, especially those highlighted above.

Atlantic outer continental shelf renewable energy lease and call areas. Source: BOEM.