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California sets goal of 2 to 5 GW of offshore wind development by 2030

The California Energy Commission increased its planning goals for offshore wind development to 2 to 5 gigawatts, which would potentially mean a partial buildout of the Humboldt wind energy area 20 miles off the coast of Eureka. (Tobias Schwarz/AFP/Getty Images)



By [SONIA WARAICH](#) | swaraich@times-standard.com

The state has decided to set ambitious planning goals for offshore wind development and that could mean big economic and environmental gains for Humboldt County.

On Tuesday, the California Energy Commission released an updated report on its offshore wind development planning goals with higher planning goals. The commission initially set goals of 3 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030 and 10 to 15 GW by 2045, but raised them in the most recent report to 2 to 5 GW by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045.

“We look forward to seeing the Commission give its final approval to these planning goals at the CEC’s upcoming business meeting on Aug. 10,” Adam Stern, executive director of trade group Offshore Wind California, said in a statement. “To ‘go big,’ you have to ‘plan big.’ For offshore wind, the next key steps include the federal lease auction this fall and developing a comprehensive strategic plan for offshore wind transmission, port infrastructure, procurement, additional call areas, workforce development, and a sustainable supply chain.”

The planning goals are part of a larger effort to create a strategic plan for developing California’s offshore wind resources, something the energy commission is required to complete by the end of this fiscal year as a result of the passage of Assembly Bill 525.

The decision to raise the planning targets came on the heels of Gov. Gavin Newsom calling for 20 GW of offshore wind development by 2045, in addition to calling for other more bold climate actions, a little under two weeks ago.

“California communities experience the devastating impacts of climate change every day,” Newsom said in a July 22 statement. “We need to supercharge our efforts to significantly reduce harmful carbon pollution. The state’s draft carbon neutrality road map doesn’t go far enough or fast enough. That’s why I’m pushing state agencies to adopt more aggressive actions, from offshore wind to climate-friendly homes, and to make sure we never build another fossil fuel power plant in California again.”

The upper end of the planning goal, 5 GW, can be achieved through a full buildout of the Morro Bay wind energy area or a partial buildout of both the Morro Bay and Humboldt wind energy areas. Leases in both wind energy areas are expected to be auctioned later this year.

“The lower end of that range reflects an understanding that achieving a 2030 online date for any proposed offshore wind project will take a significant mobilization of effort and resources, and timely infrastructure investments, among other factors,” the report states.

Setting higher targets signals to the industry that it will be possible to drive economies of scale, Stern said. If the offshore wind industry were able to meet the goal of 5 GW of offshore wind power by the end of this decade, Stern said the state would be positioning itself “to meet and even exceed its 25 GW goal by 2045.”

“These goals set an ambitious course and show California is very serious about ‘going big’ on floating offshore wind to strengthen and diversify its clean power portfolio,” Stern said. “We’re determined as an industry to work closely with state and federal agencies and other stakeholders to ensure the high end of these goals becomes a reality.”

Those goals also complement goals set at the federal level. The Biden administration set a target of developing 30 GW of offshore wind by 2030.

“That’s a pretty exciting and pretty ambitious goal,” Erin Baker, a distinguished professor of industrial engineering and faculty director of the Energy Transition Institute, said during a Sciline interview in June. “Last year, the entire world had 30 GW of offshore wind. So, we want to match the entire world.”

While it's an ambitious target, Baker said she wouldn't be surprised if the U.S. overshot the goal given the pace of technological change.

"The target, the goal of 30 GW, though, is really important because it helps to organize what I would call the supply chain, like, all the pieces that need to get done for this to happen," Baker said. "So, we need people who know how to install offshore wind farms. We need special ships. We need planning for transmission. There's just a number of aspects that need to be done. And having these goals really helps to organize that and make sure that all these pieces are there when we need them there. And so, it's a very exciting goal."

Sonia Waraich can be reached at 707-441-0504.