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California's ambitious offshore wind energy targets spell good news for local industry

The state of California's ambitious offshore wind energy development targets are good news to developers, labor representatives and local port officials (Tobias Schwarz/AFP/Getty Images)



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The state of California has set ambitious targets for developing offshore wind in the coming decades and that's good news for everyone who wants to see a rapid transition to renewable energy.

"They show that California is serious about 'going big' on floating offshore wind to drive economies of scale and realize the substantial jobs, climate, and clean power benefits from responsibly developing this remarkable renewable energy resource," Adam Stern, executive director of trade group Offshore Wind California, said in a statement.

On Friday, the [California Energy Commission released preliminary targets for offshore wind development for 2030 and 2045](#) that are expected to guide its larger planning efforts. The commission set goals of developing 3 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030, 10 to 15 GW by 2045 and 20 GW by 2050.

That's big news for the fate of the offshore wind industry in Humboldt County and the rest of the California coast.

Larry Oetker, executive director of the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District, told The Times-Standard he was confident the Humboldt wind energy area 21 miles off the coast will be fully developed by the end of the decade, contributing 1.6 GW of energy to power more than half a million homes. "The reality is, we're in a climate crisis," Oetker said. "... The state and the federal governments and the other entities that are in charge of this are going to make sure this happens. I'm convinced of that because the public will demand it."

The Biden-Harris Administration and California are actively working on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and ramping up the deployment of renewable energy, specifically offshore wind. Assembly Bill 525, which went into effect this year, is among those efforts and requires the California Energy Commission to come up with a strategic plan for developing the state's offshore wind resources. That plan has to be submitted to the state Natural Resources Agency and the Legislature by the end of the next fiscal year, June 30, 2023.

Setting the targets for how much of the state's energy should be generated by offshore wind is part of that planning effort and had to be complete by June 1. The commission is expected to release a report on the economic benefits of offshore wind for seaports and the workforce as well as a permitting roadmap with time frames and milestones before the end of the year.

Oetker said the target goals line up with the harbor district's own timeline to upgrade the port and make it ready for offshore wind development, which should be around 2025 or 2026.

Even though the North Coast has some of the best wind resources in the world, the commission found the electrical system is "relatively isolated" from the rest of the state's grid and primarily serves the local community. "Additional transmission infrastructure will be needed to deliver offshore wind energy from this region to the grid," the report states. The California Independent System Operator, which maintains the reliability of the state's energy grid, issued a 20-year outlook earlier this year that includes plans to modernize the grid to accommodate the development of offshore wind in the area.

Norway-based Aker Offshore Wind is among the companies interested in bidding for one of the three offshore wind leases in the Humboldt wind energy area that will be up for sale by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management this fall. The company has been working with the community since 2018 to bring an offshore wind energy project to fruition. Jonah Margulis, senior vice president of Aker Offshore Wind, told The Times-Standard all of this work on the part of state, federal and local governments signals to developers and businesses along the supply chain that there is certainly a market exists for offshore wind.

It's good for labor, too, said Jeff Hunerlach, district representative for Operating Engineers Local No. 3. From construction related to port improvements to the deployment of wind turbines, Hunerlach said developing offshore wind in the area will keep well-paying jobs in the area for years to come. The energy commission is set to have a public workshop on the preliminary offshore wind energy targets starting at 9:30 a.m. next Wednesday, May 18. For more information, visit bit.ly/3N6ND0X.