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## California's floating wind future finds focus as governor signs bill for 4GW plan

California Governor Gavin Newsom Photo: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images



*Gavin Newsom signs offshore energy bill AB525 into law as part of \$15bn climate change mitigation and preparation legislation package in Golden State*

By **Tim Ferry**

California governor Gavin Newsom has signed bill AB525 into law, moving ahead long-anticipated plans to develop offshore wind power in the US Pacific by mandating state agencies to prepare a concrete plan to develop some 4GW of floating projects.

The bill, passed with unanimous bipartisan support as part of a \$15bn climate change mitigation and preparation legislation package, requires the California Energy Commission (CEC) to set hard targets for offshore wind for 2030 and 2045 in a roadmap to be submitted to the legislature and the state Natural Resources Agency by June 2023.

"It's official, offshore wind is coming to California! Thank you, @GavinNewsom for signing our bill to jump start the offshore wind industry on the West Coast," said the bill's sponsor, assemblyman David Chiu, in a tweet. "This is a step forward in combatting climate change & will create thousands of good jobs."

California has some of the country's best offshore wind resources, with as much as 112GW of potential, but its narrow continental shelf means development zones are in waters too deep for conventional bottom-fixed technology, necessitating floating units.

With the passage of AB 525, "the California Legislature showed its strong support for floating offshore wind off the Pacific Coast as a reliable, renewable energy resource that can be monumental for our state," Nancy Kirshner-Rodriguez, the Business Network for Offshore Wind's western director, said in a statement.

The bill gained wide support from a diverse coalition of business, environment, and labour organisations, particularly as California has grappled with a series of heatwaves, droughts and wildfires that were attributed to the impact of climate change.

"To stave off the worst impacts of climate change, California needs to transition to a clean energy economy as soon as possible," Dan Jacobson, senior adviser for Environment California, told *Recharge*. "Offshore wind will reduce our carbon footprint and lead us forward to our zero-emissions goals."

The bill directs the state to develop a strategic plan for deploying floating wind power, from identifying necessary sea space and developing a local offshore wind workforce to improving port facilities and transmission infrastructure needed to bring this new source of energy online.

It would also require the CEC, in coordination with relevant state and local agencies, to develop a plan to improve waterfront facilities that could support a range of floating wind energy development activities.

The bill states: "The strategic plan shall emphasise and prioritise near-term actions, particularly related to port retrofits and investments and the workforce, to accommodate the probably immediate need for jobs and economic development."

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has spotlighted three Wind Energy Areas (WEAs) for development off the state, Morro Bay and Diablo Canyon off the central California, and Humboldt, in the north.

“We are confident that the strategic plan will prioritise the Humboldt Bay Port improvements outlined in our master plan and establish targeted power purchase agreement to provide surety for the private sector to make the required investments in offshore wind,” Larry Oetker, executive director for the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation, and Conservation District, told *Recharge*.

Industry and labour groups also hailed the bill’s passage as a watershed in the regional sector’s development.

“Governor Newsom’s **signing of AB 525** marks an historic milestone and major turning point for California’s offshore wind industry and workers,” said Adam Stern, executive director of Offshore Wind California, in a statement. “The bill will help address California’s pressing climate challenges and sends a strong signal to the offshore wind market.”

AB525 specifically requires CEC to develop and produce a permitting guideline that describes the timeframes and milestones for both offshore wind energy facilities and associated electricity and transmission infrastructure.

The resulting timeframes will need approval from the US Department of Interior which regulates industry commercial activity on the federal outer continental shelf where all offshore wind projects will be located.

Deployment of 10GW of offshore wind by 2045 – only a small portion of the region's huge potential – could bring \$1bn of annual cost savings to the California electricity system, increase the state’s energy security and independence and deliver high levels of reliable power directly to major load centres on the coast, **a recent study from the USC Schwarzenegger Institute claimed.**