

RECHARGE

December 6, 2022

'Offshore wind must be a significant pillar of US' evolving net zero energy portfolio'

Turn Forward chief Stephanie McLellanPhoto: Simply Blue



The American sector's acceleration in the last two years is consigning decades of slow-rolling progress to history, writes Stephanie McClellan, but taking this resource 'to game-changing scale, ensuring its impact is as positive and deep as its uptake is broad' is the challenge at hand

By **Stephanie McClellan**

American offshore wind power is coming to life before our eyes. Today (Tuesday), the US federal government has launched one of the most eagerly anticipated – and ambitious – sector auctions yet, **with first deepwater leases under the hammer for areas located off the coast of California**, while it is at the same time preparing for upcoming tenders off Oregon, as well as in the Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of Maine and Central Atlantic regions. The first wave of large-scale projects continues to build momentum, with two major developments now under construction and other utility-scale projects largely managing to remain on track even as this young regional industry and its state and federal regulators navigate newly applied rules and a tricky economic environment in tandem.

The action at the federal and state level is well-matched to the public's desire to see this resource emerge, judged by new polling data from Climate Nexus. Released in conjunction with the **launch of the independent offshore wind advocacy group** Turn Forward, the survey found that seven out of 10 US coastal voters support offshore wind. Defying the expectations of some critics, majorities did not express concern about its impact on viewsheds, tourism or their local economies. Indeed, majorities in this poll view offshore wind as reliable, and see it as beneficial for the climate and economy alike.

Offshore wind can – and must – be a significant pillar of America's evolving net zero emission energy portfolio

This moment – of incontrovertible public support, significant industry milestones, and a robust whole-of-government offshore wind programme – was all but unimaginable only two years ago, when real debate existed about whether offshore wind could really take off in the US. Today, the key question at stake is much different: now, with strong momentum for offshore wind, how do we bring this resource to game-changing scale, while making sure that its impact is as positive and deep as its uptake is broad?

Offshore wind can – and must – be a significant pillar of America's evolving net zero emission energy portfolio. To chart a clear course, US policy by 2025 should lay out a path to generating 100GW-plus of offshore wind. Yet while the urgency of today's climate challenges requires us to keep scaling up, the legacy of our previous energy decisions tells us to be smart about it.

This is the moment for a big vision for American offshore wind power, one that recognises the imperatives of a new energy landscape: protecting marine and coastal resources, lifting workers with good-quality, enduring renewable energy jobs, and sparking economic opportunity and clean energy alternatives in communities that have borne the brunt of our historic reliance on fossil fuels.

The energy transformation we are in the midst of today demands policies that embrace innovation, the environment and society as a whole. Offshore wind power can be the catalyst that helps us reset our understanding of what our energy sources can achieve. Realising that transformative power requires more voices to articulate an equitable and durable path forward. It's time to think bigger and turn forward together.

*Stephanie McClellan is executive director of independent offshore wind advocacy group **Turn Forward***