

RECHARGE

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US to take regional approach for California floating wind environmental review

California Governor Gavin Newsom. Photo: Gage Skidmore/Flickr



Assessment aims to address cumulative impacts while streamlining permitting for five lease areas

By **Tim Ferry**

US offshore energy regulator Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) announced its intent to conduct a regional environmental review of five offshore wind leases facing the coast of California covering over 373,000 acres (1,510.5km²).

Three leases are adjacent to the state's Central Coast in the Morro Bay wind energy areas (WEA), and two are off the state's northern coastline in the Humboldt WEA. They hold a combined 7GW of floating wind capacity.

"This regional environmental analysis will help ensure that timely decisions can be made to advance offshore wind while protecting the ocean environment, marine life, and other ocean uses," said Doug Boren, BOEM Pacific regional director.

"This approach also ensures both a comprehensive review of the California areas and improved efficiencies for future offshore wind project reviews," added Boren.

This is the second major programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) announced by the bureau **following similar efforts in the New York Bight**.

The regional PEIS aims to address concerns that project-focused environmental reviews do not fully assess cumulative impacts of development across wider areas, while also streamlining project permitting.

BOEM's former offshore wind programme director Jim Bennet told an industry conference last year that a PEIS could "streamline or further reduce the NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act) work, the environmental analysis, that has to go into each individual lease."

Liz Burdock, CEO of offshore renewable energy trade group Oceantic Network, said the PEIS "will streamline offshore wind development in California and build in environmental protections on the front-end.

"This proactive action is exactly the type of leadership we need from our State and federal governments," she added.

BOEM will publish its notice of intent to conduct the PEIS in the *Federal Register*, the US government's journal of record, on 20 December, initiating a 60-day public comment period.

California is targeting 2-5GW of floating wind capacity by 2030 and 25GW by 2045 in its adjacent deep waters.

BOEM auctioned the leases last December for a total \$757m, underperforming expectations and reflecting challenges for the nascent sector.

Global commercial floating wind development totals less than 300MW and is so far confined to waters around 250 metres, far shallower than California's 1,000-metre depths.

The state also lacks port capacity despite its extensive coastline as well as supply chain capacity. Transmission is another bottleneck, particularly in the state's lightly populated northern reaches.

California governor **Gavin Newsom recently signed legislation approving centralised procurement** of large scale offshore renewable energy, including floating wind, a move that clarifies the sector's route-to-market.

Leaseholders in the California WEAs include Denmark's Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP); French-Portuguese joint venture Ocean Winds; German utility RWE; Norwegian energy group Equinor; and US renewables giant Invenergy.

Equinor has begun site assessment activities for its 2GW Atlas Wind project in its lease in the Morro Bay WEA.