

Cape May wind-energy firm launches data buoy off Atlantic City

By MICHAEL MILLER Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, April 29, 2010 |

ATLANTIC CITY - Fishermen's Energy launched a weather and whale buoy Thursday three miles off the coast in the race to build New Jersey's first offshore wind farm.

Anchored in 40 feet of water, the yellow and brown buoy will spend the next two years gathering weather data such as wind speed and barometric pressure. Its sensors also will monitor migrating whales, dolphins, birds and bats.

Fishermen's Energy and two other companies plan to build offshore windmills between Atlantic City and Avalon. But the Cape May company has a head start on its competition, Garden State Offshore Wind and Bluewater Wind, because Fishermen's Energy is building a 20-megawatt demonstration project in state waters where there is less red tape.

This smaller project 2.8 miles off Atlantic City will help determine the viability of Fishermen's Energy's larger 350-megawatt project planned for 10 miles off the coast.

The buoy will record the sounds of passing whales, dolphins, birds and bats. Studies have shown that bats are especially vulnerable to windmills, which create areas of low pressure between their spinning blades that can kill the small flying mammals.

The four to eight windmills just off the coast will be just as prominent to beach and Boardwalk visitors as the five turbines spinning at the Atlantic County Utilities Authority. ACUA Vice President Paul Gallagher said the projects should bring more jobs to Atlantic County.

"This is a race for economic development," he said. "We want to turn New Jersey into a regional hub for jobs."

Company President Dan Cohen said the city has embraced the wind farm.

"It will be the Sydney Opera House of Atlantic City," he said.

The state Board of Public Utilities has invested \$12 million to help the three companies erect meteorological towers along the Continental Shelf. BPU President Lee A. Solomon said it is too

early to tell how much more public money may be spent bringing this alternate energy to New Jersey electricity customers.

"We have to look at the cost-effectiveness and impact on ratepayers before we make the decision on public money," he said. "There is a societal interest in clean energy, both solar and wind."

Cohen said offshore wind farms need to be big to be economical, echoing comments from Eastern European energy executives who visited Atlantic City's windmills earlier this year. But the steady breezes off New Jersey should provide a reliable source of power.

The state's energy master plan calls for providing 3,000 megawatts from offshore wind by 2020. The projects proposed by the three companies represent just one-third of that goal.

Environmental groups applauded Thursday's buoy launch.

"If anything else, the oil spill off the Louisiana coast reminds us why it's important to build up this natural resource," said Dena Mottola Jaborska, spokeswoman for Environment New Jersey.

The New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club and Clean Ocean Action also endorsed the wind projects.

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