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NJ fishing companies propose a wind farm

CAPE MAY, NJ – A number of New Jersey-based commercial fishing companies have joined together to form a consortium to put forward a plan to build a wind farm off of Atlantic City.

In early March, Fishermen's Energy of New Jersey LLC (FERN) announced that it had submitted a proposal to the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) in response to a request for proposals to develop offshore wind energy facilities.

According to Dan Cohen, president of Atlantic Capes Fisheries in Cape May and president of FERN, forming the consortium made sense because the energy needs of the country mean such facilities inevitably will be built, and fishermen are in the best position to take a lead role in siting them.

"The US fishing industry has historically opposed offshore wind development due to negative impacts on the fishing industry," he said. "While we remain very concerned about siting, construction, and the cumulative effects of offshore wind farms, we believe that, in our hands and with the focus that we as fishermen will place on these issues, we can solve them."

The idea of harnessing offshore wind energy has been gathering momentum in New Jersey over the last few years. In April of 2006, the Governor's Blue Ribbon Offshore Wind Energy Panel released its final report, concluding that the state should launch a limited and carefully monitored offshore pilot wind turbine test project to gather more data about the costs and benefits of the technology.

That was followed last October by the NJ BPU's competitive grant announcement for development of a wind farm in response to the blue ribbon panel's recommendations.

"If we are successful with our proposals, we intend to work with our fellow fishermen in other East Coast states to build and operate similar facilities," Cohen said. "We are building a world-class team for managing the natural resources off our coast and will share our unique plans cooperatively with other fishermen."

Two phases

The full FERN proposal calls for the construction of 74 wind turbines that will generate a total of 350 megawatts (mw) of electricity. Construction would be done in two phases.



Phase one would consist of an array of eight turbines three miles off Atlantic City that would have a total electricity production capacity of about 20 mw.

“These turbines will provide a genuine pilot facility, which is what the New Jersey Blue Ribbon Commission called for,” Cohen said. “FERN’s phase one will let us test the environmental impacts of offshore wind in a small, manageable facility that we plan to have up and running by the end of 2010 or early 2011.”

The results of the environmental testing done during phase one will be used to refine the design of phase two, which will be built about six or seven miles offshore and will generate approximately 330 mw of power.

FERN team

According to the FERN web site, principals of FERN are also principals of leading commercial fishing companies operating in New Jersey and off New Jersey’s coast. They include Atlantic Capes Fisheries, Lund’s Fisheries, Sea Watch International, Viking Village, and Eastern Shore Seafood, along with La Monica Fine Foods, which is a division of Cape May Foods LLC, and Cold Spring Fish & Supply Co./The Lobster House.

The consortium has put together what it describes as a “world class team” to design, finance, and build the phase one pilot project.

Among team members are AMEC, a United Kingdom-based engineering and project management company that describes itself as a “leading energy developer with expertise in both onshore and offshore wind farms.”

In addition to Cohen, the consortium’s management team includes: Andrew Gould, who specializes in business development and corporate finance; Paul Gallagher, vice president and general counsel of the Atlantic County Utilities Authority, a public agency that provides environmental and waste management services to Atlantic County and southern New Jersey; Rhonda Jackson, who has extensive experience in public relations; and Peter Hughes, who is serving as the group’s rural electric cooperative coordinator.

Opportunity

As a community-based offshore wind developer organized to enable the New Jersey commercial fishing industry to take the lead in development of offshore wind energy, Cohen said that FERN is in the best position to get the job done.

“With fishermen as principal developers, a key opposition to offshore wind is removed,” he said.

The consortium and its wind energy proposal also have changed the position fishermen usually find themselves in when it comes to development.

“FERN and its fishing industry supporters and investors have chosen to view offshore energy as an opportunity rather than as a threat,” Cohen said. “FERN intends to be the agent for change instead of a victim of changes going on around it.”

Fishermen expertise

Cohen emphasized that fishermen know more about what needs to go into a wind farm than any other group.

“Aside from our access to capital, commercial fishermen are husbanders of sustainable marine resources,” he said.

“We know how to handle heavy machinery in high winds and rough seas. We control key upland docks, boats, and water access. We have hundreds of employees who work year-round in the extreme seasonal conditions in waters off New Jersey’s coast,” Cohen continued. “We know the waters and the ocean bottom so we start with a real leg-up on how siting of wind farms can be optimized.”

FERN said it also plans to work closely and cooperatively with the state’s tourism and hospitality industries.

The consortium anticipates that its project, if approved by the NJ BPU, will foster substantial economic growth and expansion of job opportunities along the New Jersey coast.

“We are excited about the prospect of harnessing this clean, renewable energy source,” said Cohen. “We’re convinced it will benefit the energy future of New Jersey and its citizens.”

More information on FERN is available online at www.fishermensenergy.com.

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