

Carcieri picks panel to size up 7 proposals for wind farm

The governor's office said the state would "use its best efforts" to expedite the permitting process and assure a long-term contract for energy produced by the facility. The companies that submitted bids were: Allco Renewable Energy Group Limited LLC, New York, N.Y.; Bluewater Wind LLC, Providence; Deep Water Wind Rhode Island LLC, Hoboken, N.J.; DKRW Wind LLC, Houston; Fishermen's Energy of Rhode Island, Bristol; Great Eastern Wind LLC, Providence; and WindPowerpro.us, Woodbridge, N.J. Four of the five members of the wind farm selection team -- Dzykewicz, Ahern, Kaplan and Long -- were either appointed to their state positions by the governor, or they work for someone who was appointed by him. None of the five appears to have specific expertise in wind energy.

June 11, 2008 by Timothy C. Barmann in Providence Journal

Governor Carcieri has selected five people, including four state officials, to evaluate the proposals for building an offshore wind farm that were submitted last month by seven private companies.

The team is expected to pore through the proposals, some nearly 2 feet high, and select the "best" one, the governor's office said.

The team is composed of:

- 1) David Farmer, dean of the Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island
- 2) Andrew Dzykewicz, commissioner of the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources
- 3) Thomas F. Ahern, administrator of the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers
- 4) Saul Kaplan, executive director of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation
- 5) Christopher Long, policy analyst in the governor's office

"The members of this team will represent and evaluate a broad array of concerns," Carcieri said in a statement. "Tom Ahern will represent the interests of Rhode Island ratepayers, while Saul Kaplan will work to ensure that this project fits with the state's economic development plans. And with the inclusion of Dr. Farmer from the URI Graduate School of Oceanography, we can be sure that we are taking into consideration all the elements that will be important for selecting the best project."

In April, the governor sought bids from private companies to design, construct, finance and operate an offshore wind farm designed to generate 1.3 million megawatt-hours per year of electricity. That represents about 15 percent of all the electricity used in the state.

Such a project, which would be about the same size and scope of the proposed Cape Wind project in Massachusetts, could cost up to \$1.9 billion.

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Farmer, a scientist, has done extensive research on ocean waves, according to a biography on the Web site of the Acoustical Oceanography Research Group.

His interests include surface waves and wave breaking, near surface circulation, and the movement of heat, mass and momentum, the Web site said. He has a particular interest in using acoustical techniques to research topics ranging from the measurement of ocean surface bubbles to the fracturing of sea ice.

Jeff Neal, a spokesman for Carcieri, said that because the offshore wind energy industry is so new to the United States, local expertise is hard to find.

"It is important to remember this would be the first offshore wind project in the country," Neal said. "I am not aware that there are any resident wind energy experts in Rhode Island. I expect we will be consulting, as needed, individuals and other sources of information who can provide the necessary guidance to the panel."

The governor chose not to appoint any members of the General Assembly to the selection team. Neal said it would not be appropriate for the governor to have done so, given the public's support of the separation of powers principle.

"I am not aware of any instance in the past where the legislature participated in the decision-making process in awarding a public bid," Neal said.

Dzykewicz, who has been stewarding the project since it was announced by the governor last year, has said that for the project to be successful, it will likely require new legislation. As it stands now, there is no state entity that could purchase the electricity from a wind farm developer.

The governor's office said the criteria used to choose the winning proposal will be the total cost to Rhode Island ratepayers, the qualification and experience of the bidder in constructing wind projects, and the number of jobs and the amount of tax dollars to be created.

The state plans to award a contract to the bidder chosen by the team. The bidder will then seek regulatory permits and conduct environmental and siting studies. The team is expected to complete its work by the end of this summer.

Web link: http://www.projo.com/news/content/bz_wind_farm_cho...

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