

## Oil prices, eco worries blowing in favor of wind energy

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CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE - They already know how to catch fish. Now a group of commercial fishermen want to go offshore to catch the wind.

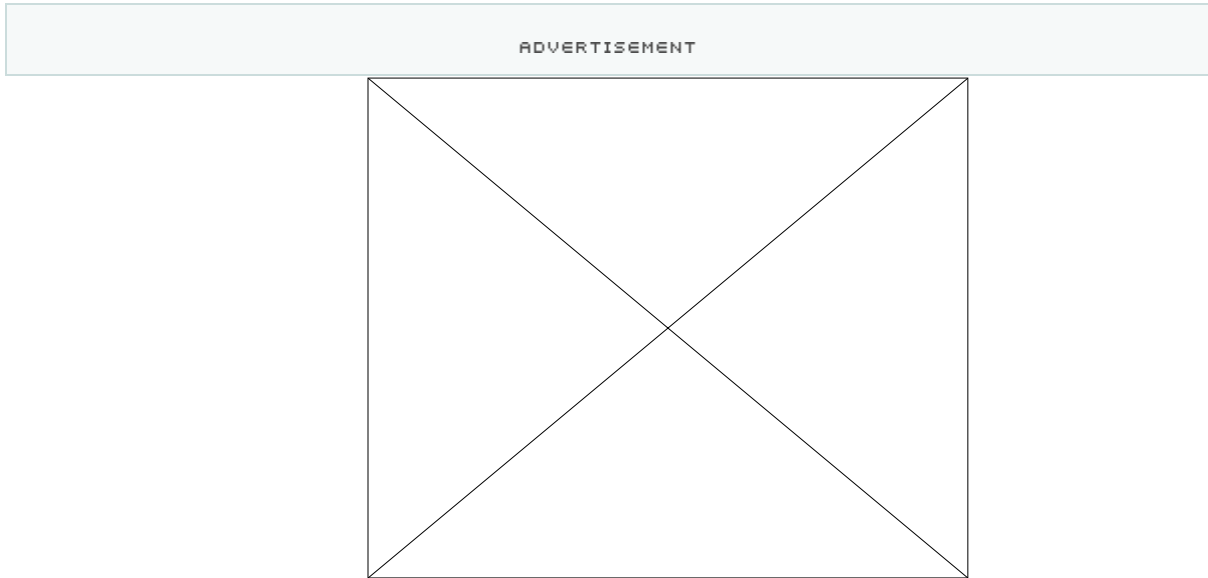
Fishermen's Energy of New Jersey, or FERN, a group of commercial fishing businesses from Cape May to Point Pleasant, used Earth Day as a backdrop Tuesday to make a pitch to the Cape May County freeholders to build wind turbines off the New Jersey shore.

One reason FERN came to the freeholders is that it is looking for buyers of the electricity it hopes to produce. It also wants the freeholders to endorse the project.

"Over the next year, we will develop a full economic model and offer a fixed price for the next 15 to 20 years. The costs should be economical, but they won't be cheap," said Dan Cohen, the president of FERN and owner of Atlantic Capes Fisheries in Lower Township.

Cohen made the case that wind energy's time has come, with oil at more than \$100 per barrel, a weak dollar and carbon dioxide levels from fossil fuels leading to global warming and rising sea levels. He said with rising prices of oil and coal, and a possible "carbon tax" for burning it, the county

should consider being part of the "Rural Electric Cooperative" FERN is setting up to sell the electricity from the first phase of the project.



The company will have public investors, but Cohen listed several businesses that read like a who's who of New Jersey's fishing industry, including his dock, Lund's Fisheries, the Lobster House, the Truex family, who run clamming boats out of Atlantic City, the Larson family of Barnegat Light and many others.

The first phase would cost \$90 million and include eight turbines placed in state waters 3 miles off Atlantic City. They would produce 20 megawatts. By comparison, the B.L England plant in Upper Town-ship produces 214 megawatts.

They would be the first offshore turbines in America if they are up and running by the 2010 target date. This electricity would be sold to customers in rural areas and is modeled after a program dating to the days of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The second phase would include 66 wind turbines in federal waters 6 to 7 miles off Atlantic City producing 330 megawatts when in operation in 2014. Energy could be sold to industrial, commercial and institutional customers.

The proposals must be between Stone Harbor and Seaside Heights to qualify for as much as \$19 million in funding from the state Board of Public Utilities,

although this is a small part of the estimated \$1.3 billion price tag for this phase.

"The \$19 million from the BPU is actually pretty minor, and you don't get it until you generate electricity," Cohen noted.

The fishermen are looking for partners and are prepared to go forward even without winning the BPU money, for which several other firms are applying. They are even considering sites on land.

New Jersey imports up to 20 percent of its electricity and has a new Energy Master Plan that calls for getting 20 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020. The state Department of Environmental Protection began a study in January of birds, marine mammals, fish and shellfish that are in the ocean areas where turbines would be placed. FERN has applied for permits to put gauges offshore to measure the winds.

Cohen wants to place one turbine on land as an early test of the system. He is talking to Cape May, where it would help power the city's desalination plant, and the Coast Guard base in Cape May, although it is making its own wind study. Another option is to put it on Middle Thorofare Island to supply electricity to the Cape May fishing docks.

Cohen noted fishermen initially opposed offshore wind mills amid worries about how they would affect fisheries. That thinking has changed, which Cohen said removes a key opponent to developing offshore turbines.

"Rather than see these as a threat, we should see these as an opportunity. All the fishermen in the state can be a part of this," Cohen said.

He notes fishermen have docks and boats to service the turbines. They are used to working in rough seas.

Cohen showed the freeholders slides of how the turbines would appear at different distances offshore. He said they would likely become a tourist attraction.

Cohen acknowledged there might be some environmental impacts and said studies will be done all along the way. The first study is whether the right amount of wind is out there. They need about 24 mph to be economically feasible, he said.

County MUA Director Charles Norkis also gave a presentation of a study the county did on wind power. The county spends about \$2 million per year on electricity, but Norkis said most sites studied did not have enough wind.

"You need 24 mph sustained, and we have about half that," Norkis said.

There were also site issues at the sewer plants that were studied. Norkis said the plant south of the Cape May Canal had migratory bird issues, the plant on Route 47 in Middle Township was surrounded by wetlands, and in Ocean City a municipal airport was a concern.

Freeholder Director Dan Beyel was curious why the five turbines built by the Atlantic County Utilities Authority have been so successful.

"They have a lot of wind. It was deemed one of the windiest places in the county," Norkis said.

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