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Port of Newport sends a message on offshore wind

By unanimous vote, the Port of Newport Commission passed a resolution that sends a strong message of caution and concern to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Oregon Department of Energy (ODOE) on the topic of floating offshore wind farms at Tuesday's monthly meeting.

The resolution authorizes General Manager Paula Miranda to contact the two agencies with specific recommendations that include performing more thorough and timely analysis, taking steps to avoid displacing sustainable fisheries, and slowing the process down, either by authorizing a demonstration site approach or considering a moratorium on large scale farms.

Currently, BOEM is accepting public comment on the possibility of placing as many as 200 wind turbines on two sites offshore of Coos Bay and Brookings, which include heavily fished areas by vessels homeported at the Port of Newport and elsewhere. The announcement of these "call areas" in late April spurred an outcry among seafood harvesters, processors, suppliers, and others in the industry, as well as some members of the science and environmental community.

The Port had been urged by its Commercial Fishermen Users Group (CFUG) to consider and take a position on the issue. The Port Commission conducted a work session last week to discuss the issue, gather some outside perspectives, and consider a path forward. With that feedback, Miranda put forward a resolution for commission consideration.

"I think the work session and acting on this as quickly as we could was important," said Port Commission President Jim Burke.

During the public work session, commissioners discussed the fact that significant construction inside of shipping lanes could also impact the Port's ongoing work to attract cargo business to the International Terminal. Port Commissioners also expressed frustration and puzzlement over the process, which schedules thorough evaluations of environmental impacts and other analysis after development leases have already been awarded.

Commissioner Gil Sylvia, a marine resource economist, was surprised by the process.

"If I was looking at the question of what will be the economic impacts, loss of jobs, revenues, taxes, secondary and tertiary impacts, normally an EIS (environmental impact statement) would look at all of that up front and you would ask the questions," he said. "The fact that it can be done at the end of the process seems bizarre and doesn't seem consistent with NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)."



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Heather Mann, director of Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, provided public comment at Tuesday's meeting, saying her organization appreciated the commission's action.

"I think it will pave the way for other commissions to get on board. I feel more than ever that we can get a foothold in with the State of Oregon to stand up to BOEM and say we need to do this the Oregon way and slow the process down," she said.

Bringing more business to the International Terminal was also discussed at the meeting, as Port Commissioners were updated on a grant submission to U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) for the purchase of equipment. If successful, the \$3.4 million grant would be used to purchase large log handlers, yard trucks, and perform some site preparations in anticipation of contracts with logging companies.

"We are applying for this grant because it will create opportunities," Miranda said, explaining that conversations were underway with some possible future users of the terminal.

"In every situation, we don't have enough equipment, so if people bring their own, we don't make any money on that, and it is harder to find customers," she said.

Fishing vessels that are members of Midwater Trawlers are major users of the International Terminal, prompting Mann to offer public comment on this item as well.

"Thanks to Paula and the commission for being really transparent," she said. "We are supportive. We think this is a great opportunity."

The Port Commission unanimously voted to ratify and approve the match letter for the grant, which indicates the port's willingness to contribute 20 percent to the project, which equals \$687,940, if the application is successful.

In other action, the commission also voted to approve an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation for annual inspections of the Port Dock 5 pier. Currently, ODOT performs inspections on the NOAA MOC-P pier as part of their bridge inspections services. Both piers are used at times by vehicles, qualifying them for inspection at no cost to the Port.

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