



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES
The Director-General

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Mr Ken Skau Fisher
Chairman
North Sea Advisory Council
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The Netherlands
Email: admin@nsrac.org

Subject: Reply to NSAC Advice Ref. 08-2021 on the Development of Offshore Windfarms and Fisheries Interactions (Ares(2021)94899)

Dear Mr Skau Fisher,

I would like to thank you for the North Sea Advisory Council's *Advice on the Development of Offshore Windfarms and Fisheries Interactions*. I really welcome your input on this very important topic for DG MARE. This detailed report gives a good overview of the challenges and also some important recommendations.

During the preparation of the [EU strategy on offshore renewable energy adopted in November 2020](#)¹, the Commission received contributions from stakeholders and had many bilateral exchanges with the wind and fisheries sectors, as well as with environmental NGOs, to make sure that all stakeholders' views are taken into account. The strategy sets ambitious targets for the offshore wind and ocean energy sectors by 2030 and 2050. It calls upon public authorities to “plan this long-term developments early on, assessing their environmental, social and economic sustainability, *ensuring coexistence with other activities, such as fisheries*”. One of the backbones of the strategy is *Maritime Spatial Planning* (MSP), a key tool to anticipate changes, prevent and mitigate conflicts, while also creating synergies between sectors and protecting natural resources. The MSP Directive and environmental marine Directives call for early involvement of stakeholders and local communities and environmental impact assessments. The *engagement of stakeholders* is central to the whole MSP process.

¹ COM/2020/741 final

Recently, representatives of European fisheries – Europêche and EAPO – responded positively to the Commission’s invitation to join our Member States expert group on MSP as observers. This is a very good step towards more dialogue and involvement of the fisheries sector in our activities on MSP.

In addition, the Commission is currently drafting a *new sustainable blue economy strategy* which aims at building a more holistic and strategic approach to the blue economy as a whole which considers different sectors at sea in their interactions with each other and the potential synergies that exist. Your input in the roadmap and along the process has been very valuable, too.

Your advice lists several recommendations and good practice examples across the EU, which are valuable and very welcome. I would like to address more specifically some of your recommendations, in light of the EU offshore renewable energy strategy and other relevant policies.

Co-existence and multi-use of the marine space should be encouraged and promoted. A specific action of the EU offshore renewable energy strategy aims at supporting more of these (pilot) multi-use projects in all sea basins. There are already very good examples of multi-use between offshore wind and aquaculture in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands where seaweed and molluscs are being grown successfully. This required advanced research and technologies. Another example in the Baltic Sea, the Baltic LINES project², helped to define corridors for cables and pipelines that minimise crossing of shipping lines and risks of collision.

A number of EU Member States allow certain fishing activities to take place within the perimeter of offshore wind farms. As experience is increasing, other MS are considering to adapt their rules in that sense. You rightly pointed out in your advice that technological innovation such as increasing wind turbine sizes and associated spacing requirements can improve the prospects for co-existence with fisheries. In the EU offshore renewable energy strategy, the Commission invites Member States to *consider including multi use criteria in the tender and permitting procedure*.

The Commission has put in place an *assistance mechanism to support Member States* in preparing and implementing their maritime spatial plans. In this framework, a specific online platform³ serves as a repository of best practices and guidance. A specific page on this platform is dedicated to the interactions between fisheries and the offshore wind sector, show-casing a series of good practice and studies.

I would also like to inform you that the Commission has commissioned a *study that will provide a review of the available knowledge and information on the effects of offshore wind farms on fisheries and aquaculture*. Among other aspects, the study explores the multi-use potential and compensation aspects. We expect the results to be available in the coming months.

Regarding *co-locating offshore wind farms with marine protected areas*, a specific guidance document on wind energy developments and EU nature legislation⁴ was

² <https://vasab.org/project/balticlimes/>

³ <https://www.msp-platform.eu/>

⁴ C(2020) 7730 final

released in November last year (on the same day as the offshore renewable energy strategy). It provides information and best practices that will help Member States' competent authorities, experts and the wind energy industry to ensure that wind energy developments, onshore and offshore, comply with the provisions of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. The guidance considers all phases of a wind farm, from planning to decommissioning and repowering.

Moreover, to facilitate the dialogue on the environmental, economic and social sustainability of offshore renewable energy, the Commission will promote a '*community of practice*' where all stakeholders, industry, social partners, NGOs and scientists can exchange views, share experience and use best practices. Fisheries representatives will be invited to join this community which should be initiated later this year. You rightly mentioned the new ICES Working Group on Offshore Wind Development and Fisheries (WGOWF). My team is in contact with ICES and will follow the work of this specific working group.

One other important aspect of the offshore renewable energy strategy is *regional cooperation*. The Commission is supporting projects on cross-border cooperation for MSP; 13 projects with ~20M€ funding from the EMFF were supported since 2015. A good example is the SEANSE project (Strategic Environmental Assessment for North Sea Energy) that has developed a tool to assess cumulative impacts of multiple uses, with a focus on renewable offshore energy in the North Sea. These projects improve our knowledge at sea-basin level. By 2025, the Commission will develop with Member States and regional organisations *a common approach and pilot projects on MSP at sea-basin level* looking at risks at sea, the compatibility with nature protection and restoration. The input of the NSAC and other Advisory Councils is also useful in this regard.

Finally, let me assure you that the Commission remains fully committed to continue working and discussing the issue further with Member States and other stakeholders. I am looking forward to continuing our cooperation on this important issue, and I thank you again for your recommendations.

Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (Pascale.COLSON@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.62.73), who will forward it to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA
Director-General