

Renewable Power

**Effort afoot to spur East Coast offshore wind; meeting next week**

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Governors and senior policymakers from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic plan to pursue a united-we-stand approach to build an offshore wind industry, as they powwow next week on clean energy issues.

The meeting , October 5-6 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, comes as the regions' leaders strike out for ways to create a homegrown wind industry rather than rely on Midwestern imports.

"They plan to talk very candidly about what they can do together to advance offshore wind," said Mark Sinclair, executive director of Clean Energy States Alliance, which is organizing the event, called the Governors' Clean Energy Innovation Forum, hosted by New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine.

Several of the states' leaders have made clear they oppose plans being floated for a national grid that feeds land-based wind power into the Northeast. Instead the states

want to cultivate their vast offshore wind potential. However, despite nearly a decade of effort, offshore wind turbines have yet to spin anywhere in North America.

"They are committed to working together to overcoming some of the hurdles," Sinclair said. Among other things, they will consider pushing for state/federal partnerships to resolve regulatory and leasing issues, creating research priorities on environmental issues that forestall projects, and focusing on ocean management planning.

The meeting comes on the heels of a separate effort to create a unified front for offshore wind through a public/private group now forming. The US Offshore Wind Collaborative, initiated by Massachusetts, is being created to give voice to offshore wind, a sector where developers have largely acted on their own to defend their technology, or have found themselves submerged in organizations with broader renewable energy mandates.

The offshore wind collaborative plans to announce its board of directors in the fall, according to Fara Courtney, the collaborative's director. Although the entity is new, it's been mulled for nearly a decade in Massachusetts, concurrent with efforts by Cape Wind to secure permits.

In 2004, the quasi-public Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, the Department of Energy and General Electric came together to study the experiences of Cape Wind, a 130-turbine Nantucket Sound project that has nearly finished securing its regulatory approvals. The group also examined the progress of European wind developers.

The MTC decided to revive talks early this year in light of the renewed push in the US for offshore wind development. Several groups have since signed on to help steer the organization, among them the American Wind Energy Association, the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Union of Concerned Scientist.

"There is so much support for offshore wind, it needs to be put together," Courtney said. "We think it is really important to have a place where business interests and environmental interests that have overlapping agendas can get together and move forward – trouble shoot and tease out the issues that need focus."

In addition, several private developers have spoken out publicly in favor of the collaborative, among them Cape Wind and Blue H.

"It's a great opportunity for the offshore wind industry to unite on common goals that we all have. We need to mitigate the regulatory risk that exists now to get commercial permits, and to create proper incentives in relation the rest of the world," said Ray Dackerman, US general manager for Blue H.

Blue H, based in the Netherlands, recently moved forward with its plans to build a 420-MW deepwater project off the Massachusetts coast, 23 miles from Martha's Vineyard and 45 miles from New Bedford. The project applied for a permit September 15 from the Army Corps of Engineers to install one turbine for testing purposes.

Blue H intends to build the units on floating platforms, with the entire project constructed on land and then towed out to its destination, an approach that minimizes seabed disturbance, according to Dackerman. The platform is semi-submerged 66 feet below sea level and held under the water by chains that connect the floating body of the platform to a counterweight located on the sea floor.

Blue H launched a similar prototype off the coast of southern Italy in December 2007, and is now building a 90-MW floating wind farm to provide power to 75,000 Italian customers.

Pending Army Corps approval, Blue H plans to analyze engineering and environmental data from the Massachusetts demonstration project for one year. The company hopes to have all permit approvals in place for the project by 2013. The Army Corps is accepting comment on the demonstration project through October 15.

While transmission costs are higher for deepwater offshore wind than shallow projects, they make up for the cost in stronger and consistent wind that produces more energy, Dackerman said. In addition, as a deepwater floating platform project, its seabed preparation and decommissioning costs are lower, and it faces less public opposition than shallow water projects closer to shore.

Indeed, because of its distance from the shore, Blue H is skirting a moratorium that Martha's Vineyard Commission, an island planning group, is expected to enact on wind farms at a meeting Thursday. The moratorium would apply to wind farms up to three miles off the island's shore. The moratorium also would not impact Cape Wind, which is beyond the three-mile limit.

Nationally, offshore wind is seen as an industry with vast potential. More than 75% of the nation's electricity demand comes from coastal states, and the wind potential off the coasts of the lower 48 states exceeds the nation's entire electricity demand, according to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

While the US has no offshore wind, the European Union has about 1,500 MW installed. — Lisa Wood