



## **Submission to Inquiry into the Offshore wind industry consultation process**

This submission is made on behalf of Climate Action Newcastle Incorporated (CAN), a community volunteer-based organisation in Newcastle NSW working to combat the climate crisis, protect the environment and achieve better renewable energy outcomes. Our organisation was formed in 2006.

We would like to comment specifically on terms of reference (a), (b), (d) and (e).

### **Term of Reference (a): The efficacy of community engagement and benefit in planning, developing and operating the offshore wind industry**

The Federal Department for Climate Change and Energy held extensive consultation in the Hunter area, as one of six priority regions with offshore wind potential. The consultations in our region were held at a number of centres between 6 and 9 March 2023. Community concerns were listened to and notably, the approved area was modified to address consultation feedback and the lease awarded was for a smaller area, also to address consultation feedback. The distance out to sea was also modified from at least 10km to at least 20km.

Several CAN members attended the session in Newcastle and found the consultation process satisfactory in general.

In the longer term, CAN recommends an approach to community engagement that provides for ongoing two-way dialogue between civil society groups like ours, industry and all levels of government. This could involve establishing Hunter Offshore Wind reference and advisory groups with independent expert facilitation, and resourcing community groups to participate.

### **Term of Reference (b): Community engagement within the existing Australian Government offshore wind industry regulatory and legislative frameworks**

The Department received 1,916 submissions from the Hunter alone and 14,211 from the Illawarra. We are satisfied that there have been ample opportunities for community engagement at this initial stage of consideration.

It is our understanding that the successful bidders will engage in further community engagement, consultation and information sessions as the projects proceed.

**Term of reference (d): The impact of the offshore wind industry on marine life and marine environments in Australian waters, including strategies for impact minimisation and management.**

The conversation about the impact of offshore wind farms on marine life has been marred by misinformation and scare tactics by those opposed to these farms and large-scale renewable energy. There are a growing number of studies on the impact on marine life. To date, most of the studies conclude that the main impact is during the construction phase, when marine life may be adversely affected. These studies do not support the statements made by opponents of offshore wind farms.

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water has produced useful resources on offshore wind for community groups and other stakeholders, available on the Department's website.<sup>1</sup> According to the Department:

Offshore wind projects in Australia will be required to gain relevant environmental approvals, including under the EPBC Act. This process will include the identification of all potential impacts of the construction and maintenance of the wind farm, and mitigation measures.

Consultation between a licence holder and existing marine businesses is required during all stages of the project: in the development of a project management plan for feasibility works, during the environmental approval process including public consultation, and for the overall project management plan leading to a commercial licence that allows construction.

Available research demonstrates there is no reason to believe that offshore wind harms tourism, with some seeing it as a good reason to visit the area.

The Department has also produced visualisations of wind farms 10km, 30 km and 60km offshore in the Illawarra region. The visual impact at 10km is minor, at 30km barely visible to the naked eye and at 60km not visible at all. The current proposals are for wind farms located at least 20km out to sea.<sup>2</sup>

A range of additional studies and sources assess potential impacts on marine life, in general concluding that there is minimal evidence to expect significant adverse impacts.

A recent U.S. Congress Research Review concludes that there are only minor risks to marine habitat and that there are significant benefits including the long-term benefits of climate change mitigation.<sup>3</sup>

According to Dr Olaf Meynecke, a research fellow at the Coastal and Marine Research Centre at Griffith University:

The claims that are made by some members of the public or some politicians that it is going to kill whales are absolutely incorrect. The biggest risks to whales are not wind turbines, but entanglement in fishing nets and ropes, collisions with ships, whaling, plastic pollution, overfishing, especially of Antarctic krill, and climate change...The idea was dreamt up by conservative think tanks along with phrases like "wind factories" and "industrialisation of the sea", put out by front groups disguised as grassroots campaigners, and then trickled down to NIMBYs and people genuinely concerned about whales. That's not to say there are no impacts on wildlife. There are, both good and bad. Offshore wind farms are brilliant news for fish, but dangerous for many seabirds unless the risk is mitigated.<sup>4</sup>

To date there is insufficient data to draw unequivocal conclusions but it would seem that the risks are minimal after construction. It would also seem that the risks known today can be managed and mitigated and are far less than the impact of warming oceans on marine life. There is a compelling case for rigorous and independent assessment of potential impacts, both adverse and beneficial, and for careful monitoring of impacts during development and operation.

### **Term of reference (e) Any Other Related Matters**

Any inquiry into offshore wind farms should not omit consideration of the benefits such as their superior efficiency compared to onshore wind farms. Offshore wind generation has access to more clear and constant wind.

While they are currently more expensive, their costs are expected to drop at a greater rate than onshore wind farms according to CSIRO's most recent GenCost report.<sup>5</sup> This will make the cost of electricity generated by offshore wind comparable to onshore wind farms. This is expected to be achieved by 2050, if not earlier.

Nor should any inquiry ignore the need to transition urgently from fossil fuels to renewable sources, and the benefits of a rapid and carefully managed transition.

### **Request to address the Committee:**

We conclude with a request to address the committee to discuss these matters further. Please consider holding a public hearing in the Hunter and inviting groups including ours that have made submissions.

Sincerely

Dr James Whelan  
Secretary, Climate Action Newcastle  
8 August, 2024

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water,

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/energy/renewable/offshore-wind/offshore-wind-facts>

<sup>2</sup> DCCEEW, [https://www.dcceew.gov.au/energy/renewable/offshore-wind/areas/illawarra#toc\\_5](https://www.dcceew.gov.au/energy/renewable/offshore-wind/areas/illawarra#toc_5)

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Research Service, January 2024, Potential Impacts of Offshore Wind on the Marine Ecosystem and Associated Species: Background and Issues for Congress, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R47894.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [The Age](#), 11/7/24, 'Absolutely incorrect. The evidence is in on whales and offshore wind farms'

<sup>5</sup> Graham, P., Hayward, J. and Foster J. 2024, [GenCost 2023-24: Final report](#), CSIRO, Australia. p.57