

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 13th, 2022

Director Amanda Lefton
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
Office of Public Affairs
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Lefton,

Climate chaos is the most difficult existential crisis that our planet faces today. Offshore wind has the potential to play a significant role in achieving President Biden's goal of 100 percent carbon free electricity by 2035. It is imperative, however, that offshore wind be done right, with the support of the coastal Oregon communities who will be impacted.

The Oregon coast is a unique and special region. The California Current off the Oregon coast comprises some of the most biologically productive waters in the world and the upwelling that occurs there is essential to the environmental health of the open ocean ecosystem. The Oregon coast has not been industrialized in the way that the rest of the country's coasts have.

When I go to coastal communities I hear many concerns about the potential impacts that offshore wind could have on our communities and our ecosystems. Many Oregonians have expressed their openness to offshore wind but they want to understand the impacts that it will have on their coastal communities and fisheries-based economies. Marine scientists, engineers, environmentalists, coastal municipalities, seafood processors, marine suppliers, commercial and recreational fisheries have all reached out to me. We cannot move forward with wind off the coast of Oregon until these important stakeholders feel confident that their needs are being considered.

Coastal communities are right to be concerned because floating offshore wind off the Oregon coast presents many unknowns. Areas that need additional study include the impacts that offshore wind turbines will have on the California Current ecosystem, what types of fishing gear may or may not be compatible with floating platforms, the impacts that offshore transmission will have on nearshore environments, and how future expansion of offshore renewable energy will be sited. After all, if these call areas move forward they are likely just the beginning.

Offshore wind in Oregon is never going to be successful unless all stakeholders, including Oregon's federally recognized Tribes, are comfortable with the decision. Oregon has a strong history of collaborative stakeholder dialogue and decision making on natural resource issues. This has led to better decisions about how to prioritize our shared natural resources. I believe that Oregon and the Oregon way can serve as a model to the rest of the country for navigating the myriad challenges associated with deploying emerging energy technologies in shared, open ocean spaces.

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Identifying Call Areas and Wind Energy Areas are preliminary steps in BOEM's process. That cannot, and should not, mean offshore wind is going to be definitively built in that area since there is much stakeholder outreach and environmental review needed. As BOEM continues with its process I urge you to strengthen your stakeholder process. Before moving forward with leasing BOEM should revisit the potential to site turbines where conflict with fishing interests will be minimalized, including at a depth beyond 1,300 meters. BOEM's call areas on the Oregon coast range in depth from 500 – 1,300 meters. BOEM is exploring the potential for OSW beyond 1,300 meters, seen in the recent Central Atlantic Call Areas, and it should do so off Oregon.

Replacing fossil energy with a diverse portfolio of marine renewable energy could be a significant contribution to addressing climate chaos. Like with all energy sources, offshore wind will come with real tradeoffs. It's important that we transition to clean energy in an equitable and responsible fashion. The BOEM process has many phases and I urge that you move forward with a robust stakeholder process and a strong commitment to minimizing impacts to fisheries and the marine environment so that Oregon can model the path forward for carbon-smart blue economies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeffrey" being the most prominent.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator