A Climate to Thrive
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Testimony in Support
LD 336, "An Act To Encourage Research To Support the Maine Offshore Wind Industry"
May 11, 2021

Chairman Lawrence, Chairman Berry and Members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee:

A Climate to Thrive (ACTT), a 501(c)(3) non-profit working successfully towards a goal of energy independence for Mount Desert Island by 2030, supports LD 336 and research into responsible development of offshore wind energy that minimizes impacts on the state's commercial fishery and on migrating birds and mammals while recognizing the energy and economic potential of "the great winds which sweep across the Gulf of Maine."[1]

Climate change, caused primarily by emissions from fossil fuel combustion, has caused the Gulf of Maine to warm faster than nearly any other water body on earth.[2] Without a rapid move away from fossil fuels, water temperature increases that have shifted favorable conditions for lobster ever northward will almost certainly continue, likely taking Maine's most valuable fishery with them.

"Climate change really helped us for the last 20 years," Dave Cousens, former president of the Maine Lobstermen's Association, told the New York Times in 2018. "Climate change is going to kill us, in probably the next 30."[3] Researchers have confirmed this: a study published in 2018 found that warming waters, coupled with a lack of conservation measures, were likely the cause of an 80 percent decline in lobster stock in southern New England, while simultaneously contributing to a boom in Maine waters.[4]

Protecting that fishery, and meeting Maine's ambitious and necessary renewable energy goals, will require an array of innovative policy solutions and technologies, including offshore wind, to provide power at night and in the winter when there is less sunlight available for energy generation from solar power.

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[1] "Final Report of the Ocean Energy Task Force to Governor John E. Baldacci," The Ocean Energy Task Force. Page IV. December 2009. https://www.maine.gov/dmr/mcp/downloads/finalreport_123109.pdf
[2] "Marine Heatwave," Gulf of Maine Research Institute. August, 2019. https://gmri.org/stories/marine-heatwave/
[3] "Climate Change Brought A Lobster Boom. Now It Could Cause A Bust," New York Times. July 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/climate/maine-lobsters.html
[4] "Climate vulnerability and resilience in the most valuable North American fishery," National Academy of Sciences. February 2018. https://www.pnas.org/content/115/8/1831

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"The best source of renewable power to meet Maine's heating loads is wind," wrote Richard Silkman, an energy policy expert in Portland, in recent testimony opposing "LD 101: An Act to Prohibit Offshore Wind Energy Development."

"Without off-shore wind generation from large wind farms in the Gulf of Maine," Silkman wrote, "Maine cannot meet its emission targets."[5]

The process of investigating offshore wind energy began in earnest more than a decade ago: In 2009, after the passage of Maine's Ocean Energy Act, state agencies held more than 25 meetings with local officials, commercial fishermen, the public and other interested parties, to identify possible sites for offshore wind. They looked for areas that would provide favorable wind and water depths for turbines while minimizing impacts on the state's commercial fishery, on seabirds, bats, and marine mammals.

In its final report, the task force pointed out that "Choosing a business-as-usual course – which would maintain and probably even deepen this dependency [on fossil fuels] – exposes us to the enormous risk of oil and gas price volatility and shocks, potential supply disruptions, and mounting levels of greenhouse gases. And, we will continue to export billions in energy dollars out of state and overseas every year."[6]

The winds that sweep across the Gulf of Maine, the task force wrote, "are one of the great untapped energy resources on earth and hold the potential to supply a significant portion of Maine's energy needs – not only for lights and computers but heat for houses and fuel for our cars – when balanced with complementary energy sources during periods of calm. Moreover, Maine has the potential to emerge as a net energy exporter through the aggressive development of its offshore wind and other renewable ocean energy resources."[7]

The task force also noted, however, that the state's waters are in use, year-round, not only by commercial fishermen but by marine mammals and migrating birds, and that these uses "are closely associated with communities' character, economic vitality, sense of place, and identity

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[5] "Testimony of Dr. Richard Silkman in Opposition" to LD 101: An Act to Prohibit Offshore Wind Energy Development. 130th Maine Legislature, 2021. http://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=159152

[6] "Final Report of the Ocean Energy Task Force to Governor John E. Baldacci," The Ocean Energy Task Force. Page IV. December 2009. https://www.maine.gov/dmr/mcp/downloads/finalreport_123109.pdf

[7] "Final Report of the Ocean Energy Task Force to Governor John E. Baldacci," The Ocean Energy Task Force. Page IV. December 2009. https://www.maine.gov/dmr/mcp/downloads/finalreport_123109.pdf

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and values."[8] These parties are all important stakeholders in the offshore wind development process.

All solutions to the climate crisis will require compromise, and none will be entirely without impact compared to the business-as-usual approaches that have created this crisis. Thoughtful exploration into the development of offshore wind projects will help mitigate impacts on fishermen and marine wildlife while helping Maine grow its economy, retain its character, and fight climate change — the greatest threat to all our livelihoods and the state we love.

Respectfully,

Gary Friedmann,
Energy Committee Chair, A Climate to Thrive

[8] "Final Report of the Ocean Energy Task Force to Governor John E. Baldacci," The Ocean Energy Task Force. Page 49. December 2009. https://www.maine.gov/dmr/mcp/downloads/finalreport_123109.pdf