

## Opinion: Murphy gets state, fishing industry more time for wind energy plan

New Jersey under Gov. Phil Murphy is fully committed to offshore wind, working toward generating 3.5 gigawatts of its clean energy by 2030. The Board of Public Utilities has been ordered to prepare to seek bids on more than 1,000 megawatts of wind power, and a Danish company with a lease for an ocean wind farm has opened an office in Atlantic City.

So when the governor asked early last month for another 180 days to comment on the next round of vast ocean wind leases — this time in the much used and fought over New York Bight between the city’s harbor, Long Island and South Jersey — his request was very credible.

If even an ardent supporter of green energy wants more time to consider the impacts of massive wind farms on other users, he must be speaking for all New Jersey businesses and people with a stake in these very valuable waters.

The federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has agreed, to a suitable compromise anyway. It quietly responded by extending for 60 days the comment period on the potential leases in the 2,047 square nautical miles area. Instead of ending last Tuesday, the comment period will remain open through July 30.

In his May 4 letter to U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, Murphy noted the unique attributes of the N.Y. Bight — close to the largest East Coast port, the first potential wind energy area near two power grid operators, and including one of the more ecologically rich and important marine resources on Earth.

New Jersey’s \$2.5 billion fishing industry operates extensively in the area, yet the Garden State Seafood Association says nothing from the BOEM suggests its concerns have been received and understood, let alone addressed.

“Information from the New Jersey fishing industry is particularly critical because its main fishing grounds are in areas that New York submitted for potential wind development,” Murphy wrote. “While New Jersey believes that wind energy and the fishing industry can coexist productively, it is critical that potential conflicts from these multiple uses be identified and planned for early in the process.”

That wasn’t the case in the earlier round of leases, according to the Fisheries Survival Fund. It is part of a lawsuit challenging the process that argues the federal leases gave away some of the most productive scallop beds in the world without properly evaluating alternatives.

Offshore wind farms are very long-term projects and mistakes made in their planning and development could needlessly cost other ocean users many millions of dollars over their lifetime. We hope Murphy succeeds in his effort to ensure the benefits are realized with the fewest disadvantages.

Clean energy supporters long disappointed at the slow pace of offshore wind development can’t be blamed for being skeptical about the additional comment period and effort to accommodate all users. But it’s only 60 days and massive leases have already been granted and mega-projects are already being advanced.

What everyone should hope is for the state to complete its preparatory work and begin soliciting bids for offshore wind projects on those leases sometime this year. That would enable developers to qualify for federal tax incentives and deliver on the Murphy administration's goal of quick and substantial clean wind energy.