

# **OPINION: Why are ENGO's Largely Silent on Risks of Offshore Wind to the Marine Environment?**

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By Heather Mann

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The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is fast-tracking offshore wind development off both U.S. coasts and in the Gulf of Mexico to meet the political promise of 30 GW of offshore wind deployed by 2030. Concerns about fisheries disruption and negative impacts to food security, while major, are only a fraction of the considerations being discussed.

On the West Coast displacement from traditional fishing grounds will be extreme, however, the potential environmental impacts to endangered whales and birds, the marine habitat and to the California Current

Ecosystem itself are literally at stake. I've always argued that fishermen are the first and best environmental stewards of the ocean – they are on the water daily, want to continue to fish and want their children to be able to fish. We have demonstrated we care deeply about the environment and the health of the ocean, and we are speaking up strongly and loudly about the risks of rushing to offshore floating wind.

What's missing? The major ENGO leadership who are thoroughly enmeshed in federal and state fisheries management processes. Why is it that we are hearing virtually nothing from them regarding offshore floating wind? Or worse, statements are made identifying the climate crisis as so horrendous that collateral damage to the marine environment is a necessary and accepted part of transitioning to a clean energy future. I reject that premise and believe it is lazy.



If you peel back the layers and examine the offshore floating wind technology for what it is, you can see it isn't exactly green. The carbon footprint for manufacturing these enormous structures is huge and copper intensive. Rare mineral mining onshore and from the seabed is required. Maintaining the structures at-sea in harsh conditions involves large amounts of lubricants, oil, and petroleum. The blades are not recyclable and while they have a limited useful life, they will last in landfills seemingly forever. Wind turbines kill birds. Whales can become entangled in the tethers that are holding floating offshore wind platforms to the bottom or the tethers tying the platforms together. Turbines produce incredible noise that could disrupt fish and marine mammal behavior. The cables that travel to shore with the power emit electromagnetic forces that have been shown to impact crab behavior among other things.

Studies about negative impacts to upwelling and the California Current are also emerging. If ENGO's want to continue to have credibility in the fisheries management arena, it seems to me that they need to engage in the offshore floating wind arena and acknowledge these environmental concerns the same way they do regarding fisheries. ENGO groups regularly advocate for precautionous management and recommend stringent regulations to protect marine species and habitat and then litigate if recommendations are not embraced by decision-makers. There is a stark contrast in the offshore wind development space – even with studies identifying risks to the environment, they remain mostly quiet.

Look, I know it is uncomfortable to push back on offshore wind – organizations do not want to appear anti-renewable energy or worse, lose funding sources because they appear unsupportive. But if you had a chance to go back in time and really consider the unintended consequences of hydropower and dams, what would you do differently to keep major salmon populations from becoming threatened or extinct?

We cannot create a potential environmental catastrophe (along with economic ruin and a food shortage too boot) trying to solve the climate crisis. The transition to renewable energy is critical, yes. The rush to offshore floating wind is dangerously risky for our environment and its time the ENGO leadership got authentically engaged on this critical issue.

*Heather Mann is the Executive Director of [Midwater Trawlers Cooperative](#) and helps lead a west coast coalition raising awareness about the risks of rushing into floating offshore wind development at [ProtectUSFishermen.org](#)*

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