

Meeting: WWF webinar on Reconciling Biodiversity and Climate Ambitions: Offshore Renewable Energy, organised by WWF European Policy Office, and the S&D group of the European Parliament. Tuesday 24th April 2022 9.30 -11.00 CET

This event brought different voices together, but all resonating along the same lines.

Chris Davies moderated

Ester Asin Director of WWF European Policy Office: The need to cut fossil fuels, the war in UKR and need for energy security have brought this into even sharper focus. WWF think that 50% of renewable energy is the minimum target to reduce impacts on environment. Energy from wind and sun in particular offer the biggest and cheapest possibilities. But development of offshore energy must look through the lens of other users of the sea, as well as marine wildlife. Transition must align with the BD Strategy 2030 targets. Energy + biodiversity go hand in hand. The ocean is full of solutions to fight the energy crisis. Now call on policy makers to consult widely before taking decisions on where to best place offshore renewable energy, but breaking down silos. Meet energy targets by 2040 and not 2050.

Felix Lienemann Commission on how to reconcile all interests and manage expectations. The policy context is the European Green Deal. Offshore could generate 25% of total energy needs for EU by 2050. Need a massive change of scale – this is unprecedented: to multiply energy generation by 30 by 2050. The industry is not yet ready. And at the same time we have to find the balance of the 30% of protection of the seas by 2030. The tool is maritime spatial planning (MSP), which is set to become a key enabler of offshore energy development. There is the MSP Directive¹ and we need to continue efforts on this. All offshore energy development has to comply with EU legislation, but also has to be compatible with environment goals. COM has produced updated guidance on wind energy development and on EU nature legislation.² Looking at go-to areas on where can work quickest – will be developing guidance on this by 18th May 2022. He hopes that co-existence, conflicts etc can be part of the discussions.

Gilles Dixon Chief Executive of Wind Europe - nature-friendly offshore wind - are we on track to meet the 2030 goals? On paper yes. At around 90 GW of wind energy target for 2030. But need detailed timescales from the governments. The industry is ready to deliver the volumes committed to for 2030. Offshore wind energy has become a Europe-wide affair and it is sustainable in terms of pay back. Components are recyclable (except the blades – how to deal with them, because no more landfill of blades allowed). But what about interaction with biodiversity? The most challenging is the long-term cumulative impacts on biodiversity – sedimentation, change in particles, stratification of water and of solid matters,

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014L0089>

² https://ec.europa.eu/environment/news/commission-issues-guidance-reconciling-wind-energy-developments-and-nature-2020-11-19_en

in hydrodynamics and on wider ecosystems of marine life, and wind parks are creating new ecosystems. They monitor and as they see impacts, they adapt, and they take preventative measures. The seabed is clean and can develop aquaculture e.g. Dutch farming oysters, farming seaweed in Belgium, and in Belgium are farming mussels inside offshore wind farms. What about decommissioning? Example of DK. Are engaging coastal communities thanks to offshore wind with regeneration of coastal communities and are informing on sourcing of sustainable materials for this industry. The fishing industry is involved when they build offshore wind farms - example of developing maritime spatial plan with Dutch fishing industry and reaching agreement. Project by project they engage the fishing communities where they think may be impacts. They do see gains for fish life – but they don't want bottom trawling in the offshore wind farm areas. Floating wind farms isolate a bigger surface, and physically that creates more barriers and are already discussing with the fishing industry. HIS FINAL MESSAGE: expansion of grids, simplify permitting – the rules are too complex

Claire Haggatt Senior Lecturer University of Edinburgh on coastal communities - their needs - and to go beyond lip service. We need to identify the communities, engage with them and offer them meaningful benefits. It's ethical and moral to work alongside them, distribute the costs and benefits and ensure fair decision making. If the process is seen as "fair" then folk are much more likely to support the outcome of the process. It's also practical and pragmatic because when an offshore project is proposed, there's vociferous opposition. So, need to tackle it. Development done well spreads good and positive news and engaging with the communities taps into the resources and knowledge of the local communities. On the basis of already 20 years' experience with this, they've developed a number of principles for engaging with communities. Try to deliver benefits to those communities. This is important because of the sharp contrast of impacts of coastal communities to the global benefits derived from offshore energy. Need to show examples of where benefits can and have come to the communities.

Jacob Fjalland WWF Denmark – how's it going in DK and the DK case for offshore renewable energy. Three things:

1. DK as a laboratory of industrialisation of the oceans.

Offshore wind development has been going on over last three decades (1991 was the first, now being de-commissioned). Are used to construction at sea (bridges and wind).

2. A key foundation for this to succeed is to not to further undermine the marine environment

Are aware of the limits of the sea and bad conditions of the marine environment. Last week DK scrapped its draft marine spatial plan, and set a target for reserving 30% of sea area for renewable energy. And this week are negotiations on a new marine spatial plan. Have under-estimated the complexity of the challenge. WWF insist that it must be ecosystem based, based on better data, take into account the accumulative pressures (e.g. from bottom trawling), and include 10% strictly protected areas and 30% protected areas, and must take into consideration other ecosystem services, e.g. blue carbon, climate change effects on marine life in oceans.

What do they mean about ecosystem-based? Need a debate on that and agreement on it

before making the marine spatial plan – take into account the natural systems and processes and the distribution of marine life. Area by area and the connectivity and seascape level of marine spatial planning AND look beyond the national borders.

3. This will require re-thinking, innovation and disruption of some of the sectors if are going to succeed in further intensification of use of marine space.

It's obvious that the overlap of different users and interests is huge and it won't be possible to do all development as business as usual. Must be some kind of re-thinking, innovation and even disruption. Need broad societal debate on how to use the resources at sea.

And are wind farms good for fish? It depends on how you build them and where you construct them. Offshore energy is becoming cheaper, so why not add a few cents to the energy price and put the wind farms further out at sea? Get consumers to pay for the damage and costs to the environment.

Antonella Battaglini Renewables Grid Initiative - to avoid potential risks to wildlife. They recently set up **ocean coalition for energy and nature** -a wide group of actors to include the wind industry. Finally everyone getting into the realisation of climate, biodiversity and energy crisis. We can only deliver if optimise across supply chain, across space and across users. Political objectives are often contradictory. There will be winners and losers. How to optimise the use of the limited space - not only at sea, but also on land (the electricity grids on land). Waiting for guidelines from COM on 18th May on speeding up renewable energy. Lot of industry actors think it's a bonanza. But need to find solutions that allow for developing renewable energy structures and protecting the environment (livelihoods depend on nature). And that's what this ocean coalition is about – to have a pact on nature. But have very little experience on how to achieve this. Need courage and leadership. Lack of knowledge of cumulative impacts of renewable energy and acting as a paralysing effect. So identify clear restoration targets and how to reach them. And need to make sure are very open in discussing how to take choices. The energy crisis is very severe. Need to exploit European resources and not ask new dictators to lessen the energy crisis. Need to use renewable energy very quickly, but don't forget about the dream assumption that can do it by destroying nature. Fishermen have asked for a moratorium on development of wind energy: this is going to be a difficult task.

Dan Wilhelmsson Independent Science Expert and from IUCN Has done studies on environmental effect of wind and wave power. How do we make blue energy green? They did a study in 2010, but the findings still hold:

Risks: During construction is the noise and other disturbances - this is the major impact
Operational phases -habitat loss, migration barriers, bird collisions, seabed changes, trawling/fishery exclusion, artificial hard substrata/reefs, navigational hazards/oil spills
Scale and importance of effects - also depends on the species and how sensitive they are to effects.

Can be cumulative effects of there being a lot of wind farms in the same area
A lot of mitigation can be done - e.g. on location, timing of construction

Discussion What rules and regulations are there in place?

COM: Under the Biodiversity Strategy is the nature protection law (unfortunately delayed, due to energy crisis). November 2020 came the offshore wind energy strategy and updated guidance on wind power in protected areas – can go in there under certain conditions – and applies to onshore as well. In theory and on paper we have a lot of commitments from MS, but need to speed up, but there are challenges.

Mattia Checcinato of Wind Europe – industry has made incredible progress on environmental aspects and on the needs e.g. investments in grids and in supply chain, and have to make the exponential growth happen, tackle MSP, climate law, the relevant strategies - these all give the tools to reach the targets.

Antonella Battaglini calls for one piece of legislation that's missing – we have framework of regional cooperation on economy and on energy, but NOT on regional environmental cooperation. If want to have an ecosystem based approach this has to cover a region. She underlines the permitting process which is usually very locally defined and not within the mentality of the ecosystem based approach.

COM doesn't agree – since 2014 when the MSP Directive entered into force they have been helping MS to work together on this – data collection, work on cumulative data and are regional organisations like HELCOM VASAB (blue economy WG of the COM) and have developed approaches together and on an ESB approach. The Baltic is going quite well. But in the N Sea, OSPAR has not been so much engaged.

How do you get governments to follow best practice and forcing developers to follow set standards?

WWF highlighted the example from Dutch Gov on this. This is needed

On coastal communities – is there anything in regulation requiring commitments?

Claire Haggett – no, so far it's principles, guidance and best practices, and actually the industry doesn't want more than that.

On knowledge and how to accelerate it?

Dan Wilhelmsson - are long term monitoring programmes and we're learning more and more, and research on impacts of offshore wind farms is becoming more of a research area; the number of researchers is increasing exponentially. Will be more. Research into environmental effects of offshore farms is very broad. You need larger scale regionally coordinated research work e.g. cumulative effects can't be grasped within research and monitoring.

We all want more wind farm development, and best practices, but what about the cowboys? What does Wind Europe do to prevent this?

Wind Europe The sector is showing more commitments, on sourcing the material from start to end. This is becoming common standard and trend – and due to increased political pressure. Establishing a stable relationship with the NGOs to find out what are the preferred options. It's not just project developers taking the lead, but also up to the governments. And on monitoring and research: there are example of centralisation of monitoring of windfarms – example in Belgium where it's being monitored wide scale and long-term by the same impartial entity, it assesses cumulative impact and adaptive governance. And it's not too early to put wind farms in protected areas – no because the alternative is to use more fossil fuels. So get on with it and monitor it. The learning curve for the industry has been steep. But sustainability is much more than carbon; need to mainstream it.

WWF Ester Asin – implement the existing acquis – only 6 of the coastal communities have submitted their plans for MSP. Comply with existing Birds and Habitats Directives. And the nature restoration law – this is where binding targets will be set and they're missing this. And there are things to avoid: end dependence on fossil fuel and stop developing nuclear and hydropower plants.

Cesar Luena of EP S&D and rapporteur from the Biodiversity Strategy had some concluding words, picking p on important things said by the speakers.

Chris Davies final question to the COM: what should we be calling for, to be turned into legislation and carried out by developers? What is the to-do list?

COM we need the Member States – to do the auctioning, the permitting, and one point it will make in its 18th May guidance paper is that we're all exploring new territory. We have to move on to something different, stop destroying the environment and develop good practices. And waiting for the nature restoration law.

So watch this space – the guidance paper 18th May 2022.