

# THE BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT

---

## Commercial Wind Leasing Process Offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts

### WHAT IS BEING ANNOUNCED TODAY?

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) has announced a Call for Information and Nominations (Call) to consider commercial wind energy leasing in an area offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). This is an early step in the possible leasing process and does not involve lease sales or issuance, which would occur at a later time under a separate public notice with further opportunities for public comment. Any potential leasing activities resulting from this Call would include additional opportunities for public comment, and review for potential environmental and multiple use impacts.

The area under consideration for the Call was delineated through consultation with the bureau's intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Forces with Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Responses to the Call will enable BOEMRE to determine whether there is interest in leasing and whether there is competitive interest in specific locations within the identified area.

BOEMRE is also seeking information on archaeological sites, cultural resources, commercial and recreational fishing, shipping traffic, socio-economic issues and other environmental data relating to this area. BOEMRE will use the information it receives in response to the Call to assist in modifying the area to eliminate obvious conflicts and identifying locations for proposed future commercial leasing and development.

BOEMRE is seeking public comments as it prepares an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the effects of wind energy leasing along with associated site assessment and characterization activities in the area under consideration offshore Rhode Island and Massachusetts. A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EA was published in the *Federal Register* along with the Call, and the bureau is seeking public input regarding the identification of the important environmental and/or socio-economic issues and alternatives to be considered. The bureau will accept comments on the Call and the NOI for 45 days after the *Federal Register* publication.

The EA to be prepared is part of the "Smart from the Start" initiative to facilitate efficient and environmentally-responsible development of renewable energy resources on the Atlantic OCS. The initiative includes the identification of areas on the OCS that appear to be suitable for renewable energy development where BOEMRE will focus its planning efforts. Any leases ultimately issued will not authorize construction or operations; instead, specific proposed projects will be the subject of subsequent environmental review and analysis with additional opportunities for public comment.

### BACKGROUND

In 2008, Rhode Island began working on an ocean Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). This three-year study included: mapping ocean floor geography; surveys of birds, fish, marine mammals, and turtles; and collecting data about commercial and recreational fishing, shipping, cultural resources, and physical oceanography.

Rhode Island has since worked with Massachusetts to develop an Area of Mutual Interest (AMI), which lies within the area studied for the SAMP. Based upon several years of research and consultation, Rhode Island and Massachusetts consider the AMI to be an optimal area for offshore wind energy development. The Call area, developed by BOEMRE in consultation with Rhode Island and Massachusetts, makes up a subsection of the AMI.

This Call is separate from BOEMRE's earlier Request for Interest (RFI) covering an additional area on the OCS directly offshore Massachusetts. BOEMRE is currently reviewing the information and nominations received in response to the December 29, 2010, RFI and will be drafting a separate Call to determine competitive interest after consulting with the BOEMRE – Massachusetts Renewable Energy Task Force. BOEMRE will then issue a Call for Information and Nominations and then proceed to evaluate the potential impacts of leasing and site assessment activities within that area in an environmental assessment.

### **HISTORICAL MILESTONES**

- Rhode Island issued a Request for Proposals in 2008 for the development of offshore wind facilities to supply 15 percent or more of the state's electricity needs.
- BOEMRE established an intergovernmental renewable energy task force with Rhode Island in November 2009 to facilitate coordination among affected federal agencies and state, local and tribal governments.
- Rhode Island and Massachusetts developed a partnership that resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the Governors of both states in July 2010. This MOU created their AMI, and set a framework for the two states to collaborate on issues concerning offshore wind development in the AMI.
- The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council approved its two-year ocean SAMP effort in October 2010. On July 22, 2011, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) approved the incorporation of the ocean SAMP into the state's federally approved coastal management program.
- There have been three joint meetings with both the BOEMRE Rhode Island and BOEMRE Massachusetts Renewable Energy Task Forces to develop shared understandings among their intergovernmental stakeholders.
- BOEMRE has participated in nine public information sessions hosted by the states in Rhode Island and Massachusetts since February 2011.
- BOEMRE has initiated government-to-government consultations with three federally-recognized tribes in Rhode Island and Massachusetts on wind energy development on the OCS.
- BOEMRE has discussed the leasing process with interested and affected stakeholders including the Rhode Island and Massachusetts fishing industries. Rhode Island formed a Fishery Advisory Board, which includes both Rhode Island and Massachusetts fishermen. Massachusetts established a Fisheries Working Group on Offshore Renewable Energy and a Habitat Working Group on Offshore Renewable Energy to enable the fishing industry to inform the federal leasing process about commercial fishing interests.