



Offshore Stakeholder Engagement Overview / Stakeholder Mapping

- Stakeholder Strategies
- Neighbours of the Wind Farm
- Tourism Impact
- Stakeholders involved in offshore zoning and site selection considerations
- Capacity Building
- Visual Impact
- Political and Community Assessments

Stakeholder Strategies

Most stakeholders, individuals, and special interest groups and organisations (statutory and non-statutory) will have concerns legitimate to them, some will be articulated by professional consultants, which will form submissions as part of the consenting process. A comprehensive stakeholder engagement and communication plan, deployed by a qualified and experienced project management team, is a prerequisite to developing a new

offshore wind farm successfully. Sound community consultation and participation, with appropriate representations (i.e., visualisations) of the wind farm are often effective. On a strategic level, there are four degrees of public engagement based on the level of participation to be accorded to the public: 1) inform, 2) consult, 3) involve, and 4) collaborate or empower. Table 5 outlines the key principles for community consultation and stakeholder management.

Principle	Comment
Engage Early	• Clear community engagement plan known to all at early stages
Visualisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planners and developers should use visualisations, as project opponents may develop their own visualisations, which may be misrepresentations if not technically developed (e.g., in terms of scale) • Local councils or municipalities may not have the resources to develop such visualisations, particularly when a project is in its infancy or exploratory stage
Community Involvement	• Recognise the value of community involvement and local knowledge in planning
Consultation Process	• Plan and design consultation process with the local planning authorities and stakeholders
Inclusive	• Use an inclusive approach to engage and consider all stakeholder groups
Level of Strategic Engagement	• Use consultation methods and techniques appropriate to the local context; determine the level of strategic engagement
Transparency	• Transparency and accessibility at all times and in engagement activities disseminating information, and receiving feedback
Flexibility	• The plan must be flexible so as to incorporate stakeholders' perspectives
Dialogue	• Continuing meaningful respectful dialogue regarding changes to the project design/plan, which are communicated and discussed on a timely basis, cognisant of the planning regime.
Networks	• Recognise the importance of social and informal networks; establish collaborative relationship with community
Local Resources	• Leverage local resources to fulfil jobs and contracts
Benefit Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss mitigation, compensation measures, and benefit scheme with the local community • Be cognisant of ethical corporate socially responsibility and governance

Table 5: Key Principles for Community Consultation and Stakeholder Management

IEA Wind (TCP-Technology Cooperation Programme) Task 28 Joint Operating Agents:

Dr. Garry Keegan, CEO, Infrastructure Projects Consulting, Dublin, Ireland gmk@ipc10.com

Dr. Suzanne Tegen, Assistant Director, Center for the New Energy Economy Denver, Colorado, USA Suzanne.tegen@colostate.edu

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Capacity Building

Capacity building for communities should be a consideration, so as to ensure individuals and groups are equipped to contribute effectively to discussions. Developers should work and engage with stakeholders and agencies that can support the process. In the early stages of consultation, developers should signpost community groups to support, including:

- Grant support for communities to form a constituted group or to develop an action plan
- Advice and support from a regional development officer
- Online community guidance package to help with the process
- Local or regional government register of community benefits from renewables
- Local supply chain opportunities noticeboard
- Advice to access further tailored funding and support.

Agency support may be available for providing:

- networking services and community learning and capacity building
- support to groups wishing to form a community development trust.

On occasion, there may be conflicts within or between stakeholder groups. It is recommended developers seek advice or support, and to be mindful that 'community of place' does not necessarily translate into 'community of interest'.



Project promoters need to recognise inhabitants and other local stakeholders within the surrounding area of an offshore wind farm are impacted. A general information campaign is recommended at project initiation and during the planning process.

There may be supporters of wind energy who do not accept wind turbines in their locality, even though they perceive wind energy as an innovation within energy generation and transition. Opponents may view the offshore wind farm as a threat to nature, the environment, view shed, marine life, and the local economy (e.g., impact on fishing and tourism community).

When developing a consultation strategy, be clear about the level of involvement and the process by which that involvement should take place. Some members of the public will not care about the origin of the energy they use, while others will be drawn to a green energy electricity supply.

As the project mobilises and construction commences, the project manager needs to monitor contractors and sub-contractors to ensure the project complies with planning permission and any conditions attached. They should also have and continually assess and review implementation of the:

- Stakeholder Engagement Plan
- Communications Plan
- Local Supply Chain/Local Economic Benefits Plan
- Community Benefits Plan.

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Visual impact

It is recommended the local community and other identified local stakeholders be informed about the proposed development before the submission of a planning application through the normal communication channels (e.g., non-statutory consultation, localised information campaigns via print, broadcast and social media). The visual impact of wind turbines depends on their location, size, number, layout, design, colour, and the viewers' perceptions. From an early stage of the project, developers can prepare photomontages, perhaps polling the local and nearby communities on options to gain insight on this aspect.

As more wind farms are established, people will observe the visual impacts from offshore wind farms. The public's positive attitude could shift, particularly if the experienced visual impacts differ substantially from the development plans. Offshore wind turbines are much taller than onshore wind turbines, but their visibility is moderated, because they are located several kilometres from the nearest shoreline. At 7 to 10 kilometres (4 to 6 miles), the turbines appear to be about the height of a person's thumbnail, held at arm's length. Hence, the visual impact of offshore wind turbines is lower than visual impact of onshore wind turbines.

It is worthy to note the scale of offshore wind farms, which is in the hundreds of megawatts, can achieve generation capacities equivalent to many onshore projects. For example, in some European locations, one 400 MW offshore wind farm with 50 turbines is equivalent to 20 onshore wind farms of 20 MW, not counting the effect of higher and more consistent wind speeds offshore.

Tourism Impact

An important question for coastal communities is how offshore wind farms will affect recreation and tourism. The distance wind turbines are from the beach significantly influences how tourists feel about them.

A survey conducted in the US (Parsons and Firestone, 2018) interviewed almost two-thousand beachgoers, who were representative of a beachgoing population on the East Coast. Participants experienced visual simulations of a wind power project with 100 six-megawatt wind turbines, 150 meters tall to the tip of the blade at its apex, at different distances from shore, and in different conditions (i.e., clear, hazy, and night-time). The wind turbines were assembled into a photomontage by a firm, recognised as a leader of visual impact analysis and graphics in the wind industry.

Participants were asked whether the projects would affect their beach experience and prompt them to change their travel plans. The data were analysed using an economic model of trip choice. The Federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), which leases offshore areas for wind power generation, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funded the research.

Survey respondents were shown turbines ranging from 2.5 to 20 miles (4 to 32 km) offshore. BOEM leases and planning areas for wind power projects are projected to be installed at 13 or more miles (21 km) offshore. For example, the wind project proposed off Bethany Beach, Delaware would be located about 17 miles (27 km) offshore. At the 12.5-mile (20 km) mark, 20% of respondents reported their experience would be worsened by the turbines; 13% reported it would be improved, and 67% reported no effect. In contrast, at 20 miles (32 km) offshore, only 10% of respondents reported their experience would be worsened, 17% said it would be improved, and 73% said it would have no effect.

This research found beachgoers are more likely to go to another beach when the wind turbines are closer to shore and are more likely to remain when turbines are located farther from shore. The size of this effect is important to BOEM for documenting impacts of wind turbines on local economies. The break-even point is 15 miles (25 km) offshore. At this distance, there are as many people who would be better off, as there are people who would be worse off. While there are economic advantages to having wind turbines closer to shore, because it is cheaper to deliver the energy and easier to maintain the turbines, most proposed projects are placing turbines at the 15-mile (25 km) mark.

The researchers also found a surprising number of respondents would make special trips just to see wind turbines offshore. The expansion of offshore wind can promote local tourism. Researchers from the University of Rhode Island, USA, found the first offshore wind farm located on the east coast of the USA has strengthened local tourism. The Block Island offshore wind farm is located approximately six kilometres (3.7 miles) off the island of the same name. For their study, the researchers analysed three years of Airbnb booking data during the timeframe when the wind farm was commissioned. Their findings, published in the *Journal Resource and Energy Economics*, indicate bookings were approximately 20% higher than before the wind farm was built. When wind farm planners announced they intended to install offshore turbines off the coast of Block Island, concerns were raised that the project might harm local tourism. Several important indicators for the tourism market indicate that interest in visiting Block Island has increased. Coastal cities where the offshore industry operates have set up information centres and offer tours to offshore wind farms. Offshore wind farm tourism complements the North Sea island of Heligoland (also spelt Helgoland). In this case, tourism did decrease, but then recovered. More tourists have come to the island since the offshore service port was opened. The increasing demand for

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tours with fast catamarans and for sight-seeing flights to nearby offshore wind farms suggest visitors are interested in offshore wind. Wind power plants at sea can become a tourism attraction if local initiatives introduce visitors to the technology.

Offshore wind development can also have economic implications for coastal recreation demand, particularly for countries characterised by high offshore wind power potential, and for being popular tourist destinations. In this context, a Spanish study (Voltaire et al., 2017) examined the impact of offshore wind farm projects on beach recreation demand in Catalonia, Spain, during the 2012 summer season. The results demonstrate a significant welfare loss up to €203 million per season. The results suggest the installation of a wind farm will encourage tourists to seek Catalan beaches without wind farms; the estimated negative economic impacts occur in areas where wind farms are located. From a political economy perspective, this finding may call for the design and implementation of redistributive instruments to offset the negative impacts caused by wind farms. (Voltaire et al., 2017).



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Political and Community Assessments

A key consideration in an offshore wind project is to assess the political and community environments in which the project will be located. Table 6 outlines the general process developers and investors may follow, as a means to creating the foundation for an engagement plan.

Element	Comment
Key Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a core group of key stakeholders, who reflect the local and regional opinion
Scope Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify stakeholders, conduct an initial scoping of the issues, clarifying which issues are important to which stakeholders
Consultation Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design the consultation process, agreeing objectives and outputs, techniques, key events, timing, resourcing, budgets, and co-ordination with other statutory or non-statutory processes
Stakeholders' Liaison Representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and appoint an individual with whom stakeholders can communicate with such as a Community/Project Liaison Representative. Consider agreeing an Independent Chairperson and the establishment of a Residents Project Monitoring Committee, which is representative of the various previously identified stakeholders
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral communication methods such as public meetings, staffed exhibitions and establishment of local contact person or number would be required at the early stages to draw out views and concerns of the local community and interested parties, including clarity of the various groups of stakeholders, and the unique elements of the proposed location for the offshore wind farm
Communication Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project promoter needs to establish a comprehensive understanding of the local stakeholders within the project catchment area, and develop a strategy on how to approach them
Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the project developer is applying for consent, they must be able demonstrate a comprehensive assessment of the project's likely impacts on a wide range of stakeholders and factors, including the marine environment and birds, visual impact, fishing, and shipping

Table 6: Key Steps in Assessing the Political and Community Environments

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In developing a stakeholder engagement plan, it is advisable for the project developer to consider the manner in which to disseminate project information, timing of information, coordination with local governments, degree of engagement, community structures, how to leverage local intermediaries, identify stakeholder liaisons, and the need for independent facilitators. Table 7 illustrates the elements within a stakeholder engagement plan.

Element	Comment
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what networks will be most effective for disseminating information • Use local broadcast, print and social media platforms • Which local papers and which local notice boards are always read • Consider the availability of parish (Ireland & UK) newsletters • Are there local leaders who can share information • Identify groups that are hard to reach and how best to engage them
Timing of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing of information is important in several regards; for example, when to inform people - what and how much detail is available to share • Too much information in the wrong format can cause more confusion rather than enhance clarity • When to engage people; for example, consultation events arranged for day-time hours are not typically well attended because people are working
Local Government Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stakeholder engagement plan can be coordinated with county and local municipalities to be more efficient and effective
Degrees of Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider different degrees and activities of engagement at different stages throughout the process, making use of different methods
Community Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider community structures, geography of the area, the economic climate, and the current concerns of local communities
Local Intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult local intermediary bodies, such as Parish Councils and Rural Community Councils, and Public Participation Networks, that can help the developer to understand the various interests in the area and to find other community organisations
Stakeholder Liaisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a clear and well-linked contact to liaise with public and other stakeholders (e.g., Project/Community Liaison Representative, Fishing Liaison Representative), while encouraging identified stakeholders to do so as well
Independent Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With statutory stakeholders, consider whether there is the need for independent facilitator or intermediary • Cost of such services is usually born by the developer, low cost-high value

Table 7: Key Elements of a Stakeholder Engagement Plan

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Consultation processes can experience difficulties in identifying and reaching the different groups within a community, which is barrier to engaging the community in planning. Table 8 lists the questions on which developers should reflect during the consultation process.

Topic	Question
Impact (+/-)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who will be affected, positively or negatively, by the development?• Who holds official positions in the area and who are likely to be affected by the development?
Support and Opposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who supports or opposes the changes the development will bring and why?
Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who runs local organisations with economic, environmental, or social interests?
Influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is influential in the local community; who are the opinion leaders?
Previous Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who has been involved in any similar issues in the past?• Approaches for reaching hard-to-reach stakeholders?
Future Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who may not be affected by any immediate development, but may be impacted, if similar developments were to locate in the area?

Table 8: Key Questions in Relation to the Consultation Process



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Stakeholders Involved in Offshore Zoning and Site Selection Considerations

Informal discussions should be held at an early stage with local planning officers, or national planning officers, if the project is deemed to be national strategic infrastructure. The elimination of unsuitable sites at this stage avoids spending time and money on sites that have little chance of obtaining planning permission or may involve foreseeable opposition.

The impact on local ecology, marine life, and migratory bird routes should be investigated through the relevant state agency, searching state databases, performing a literature search, and conducting an initial field survey. Engaging relevant consultants during the site selection and feasibility stages should be considered. Also to be considered are other environmental considerations, such as recreational and conservation areas, telecommunications, aircraft safety, and restricted areas.

During this site selection phase, the preliminary internal research on the technical, social, environmental, and infrastructural characteristics of an area should be conducted. Site selection should draw on various published sources, such as maps, local development reports, and other relevant secondary sources.

Initial community consultation involves discussions with officers of the local planning authority and statutory consultees to identify and agree potential issues to be addressed and consider approaching other consultees, such as those suggested by the local planning authority. The level of consultation, at this speculative stage, is kept high and restricted to the planning authority. It would be inappropriate for developers to begin a process of local public consultation, which may cause unnecessary concern or excitement about a proposal. To assess public sentiments regarding the project, conducting public opinion surveys is recommended early in the project and on a period basis through the development of the offshore wind farm operation. These polls will assist in identifying appropriate strategies to engage and inform local stakeholder groups. The consultation activities, according to the project development phases, are itemised in Table 9.

Phase	Activity
Early Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a site Identify local communities Develop consultation strategy Conduct community and social audit Assess facilities, services, boundaries, and factions
Early Intermediate Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate initial information Raise awareness via leaflets, posters, press releases in local/regional print, social media, information packs, and letters to community groups Identify and approach key groups and local figures Prepare for a full consultation, including a virtual consultation option Conduct project feasibility
Advanced Intermediate Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a full consultation via press releases, a series of presentations, frequently asked questions, open days that include a virtual option, and a local base to respond to queries, Define majority views regarding location, size, and power output Identify main concerns by maintaining a contact book, database of residents and their concerns, and communications matrix (always adhering to Data Protection Regulations) Disseminate further information and responses regarding these concerns Clarify what constitutes non-statutory and statutory consultation phases Develop a community committee and identify roles Prepare statutory documents for planning applications Continue contact with interested parties, community liaison committees, and key personnel
Advanced Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate plans to the community via traditional media, social media, and virtual channels; social media and virtual channels proved important during the Covid-19 pandemic and they are likely to remain prominent in communication campaigns Continued contact with interested parties, community liaison committees, and key personnel Disseminate status and results of planning application Develop strategy for appeal or public inquiry

Table 9: Consultation Activities According to the Project Development Phases

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