



Joint Resolution on impact of offshore wind farms on fisheries

Whereas

The European Commission has announced in its communication of 19 November 2020 on an EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future (COM(2020)0741), as part of the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640), the objective to increase the EU's offshore energy production twenty times (twenty five times in the case of offshore wind) to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

The increase of competing activities in the maritime space such as waterborne transport, extraction of mineral resources, tourism, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and expansion of offshore wind farms, heavily impact fishing activities in terms of loss of valuable fishing grounds and access to healthy stocks.

The EU fishing fleet strives for fishing responsibly and sustainably, it also aims to uphold its strong contribution to other important EU objectives such as food security and socio-economic development, especially in rural coastal areas.

A shift is occurring in modern times from seas as a source of food towards seas as a source of minerals and energy, leading to a rough competition over maritime space. When the EU puts one objective above the other (for instance proposing 30% of electricity demand to be supplied by offshore wind farms), not only does it drive fishermen out of their traditional fishing grounds, but it also jeopardises their essential role in safeguarding food security (as recognised by the Paris Agreement) and thus frontally collides head-on with the objectives of other Sustainable Development Goals).

This shift in ocean paradigm is occurring without a careful analysis of the vast impact of such new uses. Current empirical studies are lacking assessments relating to the economic and social effects of offshore renewables on fisheries.

80% of the fishing companies in the EU are small-scale enterprises, with most being family-run businesses that go back generations. These vessels operate mainly in coastal waters where most of offshore wind farms are commissioned forcing them to displace fishing effort deeper in the ocean with subsequently higher operational costs and safety risks to face.

Offshore wind farms are already a reality in some European countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Belgium, Portugal and The Netherlands; new installations are planned in France and a high number of new farms will need to be created to meet the EU objectives.

Fisheries activities at present are in most Member States limited or banned from offshore wind farm areas and their buffer zones, and co-existence is hindered by safety and financial risks.

The European Social partners in the sea fisheries sector:

- Stress that, in principle, the sector is not opposed to offshore wind farms, as long as their installation follows an appropriate assessment of the environmental, social and economic consequences on the marine biosphere, biodiversity, ecosystems, and the human activities that already take place in the concerned area and appropriate measures are taken to mitigate as much as possible the negative consequences, starting with the application of the precautionary principle in accordance with Article 191(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union where decisions have to be taken before the required knowledge or information is available.
- The need for clean energy should not be prioritised over sustainable food production.
- Highlights that any restriction on access to traditional fishing grounds and on fully utilising rightful fishing opportunities directly affects the livelihoods of EU fishers and dependent jobs ashore, which goes against Art. 39 of the TFEU and undermines the responsible and sustainable provision of food security.
- Deplore that, in numerous occasions, the justified precautionary approach is not observed particularly as regards the planification, design and construction of offshore wind farms.
- Demand that when spatial planning decisions have a direct impact on fishing access or opportunities, a mapping, assessment, and consideration of any economic and social impact takes place prior to even starting the planning and design of offshore wind farms.
- Stresses that an open dialogue and cooperation with fishers at an early stage should be the precondition and ‘leitmotiv’ in the planning process for renewable energies. To ensure the participation of the fishing sector, it could be intertwined with the granting of the licence to the developer to operate the offshore wind farm (such as applied in Denmark), as well as the compensation of losses to individual fishermen or fisheries organisations in the form of a mitigation measure throughout the time the fishing sector is excluded from the particular marine space.
- Insist that for all activities and industries at sea, the EU must ensure that high environmental, social and safety standards are respected and monitored.
- Are concerned about the consequences on sea biosphere of the installation and decommissioning of offshore wind farms. While some reports support the idea that the construction of offshore windmills have a positive effect on the sea biomass and fish stocks, other experts' studies have opposite conclusions¹. More scientific research needs to be done to cover the short and long term impact of the windmills installation taking into account fish migration patterns, salt levels, local wind patterns, algae growth, turbulences, wave generation, and currents. Such research should also take into account the environmental and economic costs linked with the areas on shore that are needed to prepare the installation and maintenance of the windmills and also the effect of the degradation of certain components, such as sacrificial anodes, on the marine ecosystems.
- Underline that in most cases the possibility to fish in the areas where the windmills are installed depends on the decision of the Member State. In most cases, access is not granted

¹ <https://www.naturalsciences.be/en/news/item/18790/>

meaning that fishers are forced to renounce from rich fishing areas where they traditionally fish. Consequently, they are forced to undertake longer fishing trips to avoid areas attributed to offshore wind resulting in more fuel consumption, more trips, longer working hours, and more fatigue for the crew. In other cases, fishing intensity is reduced or fishers are imposed to change the activity or method altogether, for instance from active to passive fishing, irrespective of the financial capacity to do so. Besides, operating within offshore wind parks has yet to be socio-economically sound for fishers due to the safety and financial risks that come at play like accidental damage, ship strikes, loss of fishing gear, and unaffordable insurances with substantial premiums.

- Stress that the impact of windmills on the safety of fishing vessels cannot be neglected. In this sense, windfarms not only create safety navigation hazards but also the presence of pipes on the seabed can produce dangerous interactions with trawlers. Highlight that the decommissioning of offshore windmills should neither generate enduring environmental impacts nor pose safety risks to fishing vessels due to the remaining sub-seabed infrastructure.
- Are convinced that fisheries as an industry will suffer from the proliferation of offshore wind farms and jobs will be lost. The replacement of fishing jobs with new jobs linked with the windmills is an illusion and cannot be considered serious, due to the relevant difference in needed education and tradition. The alternative employment opportunities mentioned are applicable to researchers, engineers, scientists and engineering technicians, none of them related to the fishing industry.

The co-existence between fisheries and offshore wind energy cannot be fair and fruitful under the current circumstances. The sea, its environment, its biology and its sustainable exploitation is a delicate balance and any new human activity shall not be introduced without taking the utmost precautions and assessment on the impact on the environment and on the existing human activities, in line with the objectives of the Commission's 2020 Blue Economy Report and the European Green Deal, as well as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

It shall not be ignored that EU fisheries provide to global population a high quality animal protein with the lowest carbon footprint and the last protein source of totally wild origin.