

Winds of Change

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Executive Summary: The offshore wind industry is expected to grow in coming years, sourcing a global market for renewable energy. The waters off Morro Bay have been sanctioned by The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) as a viable site for offshore wind development, considering the town's existing electrical transmission capabilities. The introduction of an offshore wind farm would have devastating effects on Morro Bay due to the town's historic reliance on the fishing industry. This project has the potential to displace fishers and cause widespread economic harm to the community. Winds of Change explores the complexities of this case, while giving underrepresented fishers a voice in the matter.

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Jeremiah O'Brien

Everybody that lives here, loves it here.

We kid each other all the time that we live in paradise. And I personally, would rather nothing ever changed here, it's a beautiful place with beautiful people.

Bob Maharry

Morro Bay is our home. My wife's born and raised here, her family's got ties here for generations.

We never wanted to leave, we don't want to leave. This is our home.

Alan Alward

Now, the way we view it, is that we're being asked to make this sacrifice, because society thinks that this is something important that needs to be done.

Bill Brita Blue

We can't afford to lose any more fishing ground than we've already lost. We're constantly giving. We have marine protected areas. We have closed area for conservation. We've been giving, giving, giving for the last 49 years that I've been in the business and we've never gotten anything back.

News Broadcasters

The Biden administration announced it is taking coordinated steps to support rapid offshore wind projects. It's the largest proposed floating offshore wind project in the U.S.

Mayor John Headding

We had one major company come to the city and talk to us about the feasibility of actually developing floating windmills off of the coast of Morro Bay, to provide clean energy.

Steve Scheiblaue

The offshore wind industry expressed interest in this area because of its strong winds, and probably even more importantly, because of the electrical transmission capabilities that already exist here.

Mayor John Heading

We're excited about this because it helps California reach some very aggressive goals to be able to address climate change and transition to clean energy.

From an economic standpoint, there are some great advantages that, that can occur.

Eric Endersby

We, the city of Morro Bay, we're supportive of, of renewable energy and green energy. I think with everything, there's going to be a trade off.

Jeremiah O'Brien

My mother's side of the family comes from Newfoundland. It's all fishing. And my dad's side was from Ireland. Some of the family there was also involved in the fishing industry. So it's both sides of the family were historically involved.

My name is Jeremiah O'Brien. I'm a commercial fisherman here in Morro Bay. My last 40 years have been an incredible career in the industry. I wouldn't have changed it or for any other experience.

BOEM's job is to lease these areas offshore. But I, I don't believe they understand the fishing industry, how it works, how we work, and the pressures that we're under.

Bob Maharry

I started riding waves in the ocean of California at the age of 8 years old. I spent my whole life on the ocean. It's special.

I do my homework, before I form an opinion I like to be somewhat educated, and I've yet to see any answers that convince me that the people building these things have a fucking clue what they're doing.

They don't have answers to normal basic questions you would ask. What's the lifespan of these things? 15 years, maybe? You have a plan for when they're all rusty and shitty and they don't work anymore? You have a plan for getting them out of the ocean? It's not green.

Alan Alward

I don't think people understand what we're talking about here. You might drift into a windmill. Or if you shut down too close to the wind farms, the current and the wind may carry you into them at night.

I'm shutting off and drifting every night, and I fish alone. I'm not going to be able to stay up. It just creates a hazard. So for me, it's the threat of something that I have never experienced.

Bill Brita Blue

I've spent my whole life trying to do things to protect the environment. We've had to change our gear, do different things to protect the species that live in the ocean. And they're just going to come in and do away with what we've been trying to protect all these years at, at no cost.

It will definitely affect my livelihood because I fish in that area. I will be displaced from 400 square miles of ocean.

They can't, they can't pay me enough for what they're taking away from me.

Jeremiah O'Brien

We feel that BOEM has made an effort, but it's been a poor effort. They've heard from us, and I think they have to do that legally. But hearing from us, and hearing us are two different things altogether.

Alan Alward

We feel like BOEM has a policy where they have to listen to stakeholders. That's all they do is listen. They don't actually do anything about what they're hearing.

It's, it's kind of absurd, you know? Yeah, we have a voice, but it's a voice for the people on the other end have turned the volume off.

Bob Maharry

It doesn't matter what we as an industry think. We've been told, it's coming. And I asked this fellow, well, who was uh pretty high up there with the state of California. I said I got one question, was anything I said not true?

He goes, "oh no, you nailed it 100%". He goes, "that's the problem," "you're too real, they want you gone, you're a threat".

Mayor John Headding

Our major concern has always been the impact on the fishing industry. The economic engine for Morro Bay is twofold. It's tourism, and fishing. We've taken a hard line that appropriate mitigations for the fishing industry must occur in order for this to move forward.

Steve Scheiblaue

Fishermen are going to need to be compensated in some way for these effects or they're really going to die as an industry.

Jeremiah O'Brien

This issue, when we took a look at it, we realized that Washington, D.C. wants this bad. The state of California wants this bad. Our county wants this. Our congressmen wants this. We would have less than zero chance of survival. So, rather than fight, we took the mitigation option. But we're in a position where it's impossible to fight. You can't fight it, because you can't win it.

Trudy O'Brien

For us personally, I'm not sure how impacted we are going to be, but Jeremiah's fighting for all of the future generations. So I guess my opinion is that it's really sad that it's going to happen. I think wind energy can be a great thing, but I don't think they have enough of the facts to say how it's going to impact all of the people who use the ocean area that they're going to be taking away.

Bob Maharry

I don't think putting wind farms on the coast is the answer. Now I'm not saying drill, drill, drill. I get that. I don't have the answer. But you don't, replace one screwed up thing with another thing that's probably screwed up. You don't experiment. You don't experiment with the ocean. Go build it on Mars. And screw that up, it ain't going to matter.

Maybe it will. I doubt it. Maybe the Martians will be pissed off. Anyway, this is not a test tube, this is not a laboratory.

Alan Alward

When you rush into something, a lot of stuff doesn't get done. There's going to be a lot that's going to get learned. Some of it's going to get learned the hard way. This is a big deal. We should be taking the time to do it right.

Bill Brita Blue

For the next generation, for my kids, for my grandkids, for other fishermen who, you know, want to keep doing this, that, that option's gone.

We'll just, we'll survive, because that's what we do. Somehow, some way.

Bob Maharry

I'm the guy that's going to tell ya fuck you, and your windfarms, and all this other shit. Because it's bullshit. It ain't about energy. It's about money. They think it's a fucking negotiation. It ain't.

This is survival. Way I look at it. It's survival. This is a fucking street fight. There's only a handful of us. We don't count.

I'm just trying to take care of my family, that's all. You know, could've been a better father, but nobody went to bed hungry. I wish we didn't have to have this conversation. I'd rather be out there picking up glass to stand with my granddaughter

And, nah, it ain't no good.

Link to documentary: <https://vimeo.com/810363201?share=copy>

Link to website: <https://winds-of-change.squarespace.com/>