

Madness or Fairness: Community Perspectives on Offshore Wind Power in the Mid-Atlantic, United States

*Emma Korein¹, Lorren Ruschetta¹, Zoë Ketola², Lucia Paye-Layleh¹, Nina David², and Jeremy Firestone¹

¹ University of Delaware/School of Marine Science and Policy, Newark, Delaware
ekorein@udel.edu, ruschetta@udel.edu, luciayah@udel.edu, jf@udel.edu

² University of Delaware/ Biden School of Public Policy and Administration, Newark, Delaware
zketola@udel.edu, npdavid@udel.edu

KEYWORDS

offshore wind; energy justice; community engagement; fairness; transparency; trust

ABSTRACT

Offshore wind power is seen as a promising pathway for U.S. states to reduce their carbon emissions and transition from fossil fuel dependency to renewable energy independence. However, the U.S. offshore wind industry has faced recent setbacks, in large part due to social opposition and political pushback. Understanding community perceptions of offshore wind energy is critical for the development of policies and community engagement practices that promote a just and fair renewable energy transition. The goal of our study is to quantitatively analyze community perceptions of the justice dimensions of offshore wind energy development in the Mid-Atlantic United States. Developer US Wind has federal permit approval for offshore wind project development in this region and has signed a benefit agreement with the State of Delaware for the connection of a transmission cable; however, opposition from residents and politicians has slowed down the development timeline. Attitudinal surveys were distributed to ocean-adjacent communities in Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland, including focus communities that host fish processing facilities and coal generation plants. Our results revealed that while participants were generally supportive of offshore wind energy, they found processes to be un-inclusive, communication and information dissemination to be inadequate, and decision-makers to be untrustworthy and non-transparent. Trust was greater for local government officials than for state and federal government officials, and local news sources were a preferred source of information to national news. Meetings were seen as highly important for providing information about offshore wind energy development, and yet the majority of participants stated that they were not invited to attend an in-person or virtual meeting. Participants expressed uncertainty about the benefits and burdens of offshore wind energy and were concerned that certain communities were not being recognized enough in the offshore wind planning process (e.g., future generations, wildlife, Indigenous communities), while others were being recognized too much (e.g., wind energy companies). We are in the process of conducting follow-up interviews with those working in the commercial fishing and coal industries in order to better understand the unique perspectives of these groups regarding this energy transition. These results have important implications for how offshore wind decision makers can improve public

engagement and meet the needs of communities in the Mid-Atlantic, with broader applications for just renewable energy transitions across the US.