



Ensuring Fishing Access in Light of Offshore Wind Development

In President Biden's first week in office in 2021, he issued Executive Order 14008 that calls for the nation's leaders to build a new American infrastructure and clean energy economy to create new jobs. As part of this initiative, the President set out a goal to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and have 30 gigawatts of offshore wind generation capacity by 2030.

With the big push for offshore wind development, many different fisheries sectors have expressed concerns. What impacts will this have on fishing communities, habitats, ecosystem functions and protected species? To address this, in November 2021, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the National Marine Fisheries Service began developing a guidance document to mitigate impacts to commercial and recreational fisheries from offshore energy development.

The agencies sent out two requests for information in May and August 2022. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council provided comments that to avoid negative impacts, developers should engage early with its members, its advisory groups and the community in the planning, permit and construction process. To ensure equity and environmental justice issues are addressed, the recreational and commercial fishermen in the Pacific Islands must maintain access to their traditional fishing grounds and their ability to provide locally produced seafood to their families and communities.

The Council's Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) recognizes that offshore energy is a priority for the President. However, with new ocean spatial management actions like offshore energy potentially further closing off areas to fishing, the Hawai'i AP decided to launch a participatory mapping project called "FishMaps" to characterize Hawai'i's fisheries. The purpose of the tool is to show that there are fishing ko'a (traditional fishing areas) that should be preserved for the fishing communities. It will improve data collection and data gaps in

the bottomfish, pelagic, coral reef, crustacean and precious coral fisheries.

The Hawai'i AP recognizes fishermen revisit locations where they grew up fishing, areas close to home and comfortable access points. Fishermen go to different ko'a based on their observations of the moon and tide, and ocean temperatures, currents and waves. Closing one fishing area restricts fishers from one location rather than allowing them to circulate through their different spots. This project intends to demonstrate that fishers rely on many ko'a around the state.

In the coming months, the Hawai'i AP will call on local fishermen to kokua (help) and contribute towards the ko'a map. Panel members need to know who they should contact to get a seat at the table during discussions with managers or developers. The AP isn't looking for fishermen's exact fishing spots, but rather which areas are good for certain species (e.g., ono are typically found around this contour; this particular area outside of the westernmost point is important for hapu'upu'u, etc.). The Hawai'i AP plans to hold sessions with fishermen to provide background on the project, share current information and solicit additional input to make the map as complete as possible. Keep an eye on www.wpcouncil.org for more information. 🐟



The coexistence of fishing and offshore wind development requires careful planning and collaboration between the potentially competing interests. Photos: Principle Power (top) and Abraham Apilado Jr. (above).