

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 31, 2022

Amanda Lefton
Director
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Lefton,

As members of the Congressional delegations of Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, we write in support of critical baseline research and scientific studies to inform sustainable offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine. For several years, we have remained engaged with those at the White House and at BOEM regarding the advancement of offshore wind energy opportunities. With Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's recent announcement that BOEM plans to pursue offshore wind leases in the Gulf of Maine by mid-2024, we continue our engagement and reiterate our support for agency policy driven by rigorous scientific research.

We recognize the potential for our states to produce significant clean, renewable energy and to harbor a new industry and workforce through responsible development of offshore wind off our shores. Our state governments have already begun the process of engaging with a range of ocean users and leaders of the region's fishing and marine industries in order to minimize conflicts with existing users and marine life. However, it is essential that BOEM do additional outreach and research to inform the agency's planning process prior to conducting lease sales and to improve the ability to assess, predict, monitor, and manage potential environmental impacts of offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine.

The Office of Renewable Energy Programs has identified two studies on BOEM's National Studies List for 2022 that we see as key:

- (1) Ecological Baseline Study of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf Off Maine (AT-22-12);
and
- (2) Comprehensive Assessment of Existing Gulf of Maine Ecosystem Data and Identification of Data Gaps to Inform Future Research (AT-22-11).


In this next fiscal year, we urge you to invest in the Gulf of Maine through the development of an Ecological Baseline Study (AT-22-12) specifically to address limited regional bathymetric and benthic habitat data. Targeted benthic habitat surveys collected via high resolution multibeam mapping in addition to sediment sampling and benthic fauna characterization should be completed to create detailed sediment and habitat maps. These maps are essential to identifying habitat usage and distribution of a range of marine species, such as Atlantic cod and American


lobster, whose complex habitats are critically important in the Gulf of Maine. As the Gulf has been designated as critical habitat for species like the North Atlantic Right Whale, we also suggest the commencement of comprehensive marine mammal and wildlife surveys and the collection of fisheries data in partnership with NOAA and state marine resource agencies to provide full color to an analysis of potential impacts from offshore wind development on New England fisheries.

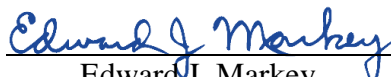
Ongoing stakeholder engagement in New England has identified additional data gaps in the areas of socioeconomic and cumulative impact assessments of offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine. As such, we support regionally specific research on the projected economic impacts of offshore wind to existing ocean users and an assessment of the data and approaches to evaluating the cumulative impacts of offshore wind in the region. As part of developing the needed research and understanding the impacts of development, the State of Maine recently submitted a federal lease application to BOEM for a noncommercial small-scale research array using an innovative floating wind turbine designed at the University of Maine. We support Maine's application for this research array and believe it would provide important and complementary data points to an Ecological Baseline Study and a comprehensive assessment of existing ecosystem data in the Gulf of Maine, all of which will help inform regional wind development potential.


As we work to advance offshore wind in the Gulf of Maine in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner, BOEM's efforts to bolster regional outreach and comprehensive wildlife and habitat data collection through the Environmental Studies Program with the best available science will be critical. We appreciate BOEM's focus on the Gulf of Maine and look forward to continuing our close engagement with the agency as these studies are initiated in advance of expected lease sales.


Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator


Susan M. Collins
United States Senator


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator


Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator