



Offshore Wind Industry - Hunter Consultation

The Hunter region is well suited for offshore wind due to a range of factors like excellent offshore wind capacity, nearby energy workforce, and proximity to existing grid infrastructure.

An area was proposed for declaration in the Pacific Ocean off the Hunter region by the Minister for Climate Change and Energy on 23 February 2023. This began the 65-day public consultation period, in which the Minister invited submissions on the proposed area. A total of 1,916 submissions were received during the consultation period.

The Australian Government worked closely with the New South Wales Government to understand the views of the community on a future offshore wind industry. The department undertook consultation across the Port Stephens, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, and Central Coast regions using the following methods:

- advertising through newspapers, radio, and social media
- letterbox drop of flyers encouraging the community to make a submission
- detailed information about the proposal and how to make a submission on the department's website
- targeted stakeholder meetings with federal, state, and local government agencies, industry, business, and community groups
- seven community information sessions from 6 March to 9 March 2023 in Wamberal, Doyalson, Swansea, Newcastle, Bar Beach, Nelson Bay, and Hawks Nest to answer questions and to encourage the community to make a submission.

The majority of submissions expressed concerns about the environment and visual impacts. Details of these concerns, and other concerns raised within submissions were:

- Environmental impacts - the potential impact of turbines on endangered migratory bird species as well impacts on whales, dolphins, and other sea life.
- Visual impacts - view of turbines and onshore transmission reducing the visual amenity of places along the coastline.
- Other industry impacts - tourism, commercial and recreational fishing sectors were concerned that an offshore wind industry could mean they will be excluded from the area.
- Shipping impacts - the risk to safe management of vessel traffic in and around the area.

A number of submissions expressed support for the development of an offshore wind industry. Potential benefits and opportunities highlighted in submissions included:

- Local economy - local jobs and industry growth, including opportunity for transition of skilled workers from retiring coal-fired power plants to offshore renewables, opportunity for local skills and training development, and local content.
- Clean renewable energy - the transition to sustainable low-emissions energy sources was widely supported.
- Environment - the potential of offshore wind projects to create new habitats for marine species.

The Minister for Climate Change and Energy has listened and declared an updated, smaller area for offshore wind development, taking on board reservations expressed as part of the consultation process:

- The declared area offshore of the Hunter, New South Wales, covers about 1,854 square kilometres, and runs from Norah Head in the south to Port Stephens in the north.

- The declared area contains conditions for prospective feasibility licence holders, including the need to consult with the Department of Defence, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, as well as concession or licence holders under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991 (NSW)*.
- The Government is continuing to work with states and territories, market bodies, networks, and communities on reforming the regulatory framework around transmission (the RIT-T), to include genuine engagement throughout – not just at the end of the planning process for transmission.

A substantial declared area has been retained that will support the growth of an offshore wind industry in the Hunter region and increase regional investment, create job opportunities, and improve energy security, while helping New South Wales and the nation reach our climate goals.

Further consultations will take place on any proposed developments and environmental studies once feasibility licences are issued.

Figure 1: Map of Hunter declared area

