

Summary of Interim Report for the Regional Assessment of Offshore Wind Development in Newfoundland and Labrador

The Committee for the Regional Assessment for Offshore Wind in Newfoundland and Labrador is tasked to complete its Regional Assessment Report by January 2025. As part of the terms of amended agreement set out by the Governments of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador, the Committee prepared an interim report. The report includes:

- a preliminary map of recommended areas for offshore wind;
- a description of the process for identifying these areas;
- a summary of engagement;
- existing information gaps that need to be addressed; and
- early recommendations.

The findings in this report are preliminary and will continue to be shaped by further engagement and research until the final Regional Assessment Report is submitted in January 2025 to the federal Ministers of Environment and Climate Change and Energy and Natural Resources, and the provincial Ministers of Industry, Energy and Technology, the Environment and Climate Change, and the Intergovernmental Affairs. Engagement will also include a 60-day public comment period starting in September 2024 where everyone will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft Regional Assessment Report.

Preliminary Offshore Wind Licensing Areas

The Committee identified recommended preliminary offshore wind licencing areas using a stepwise approach.

First, the Committee used water depths and information about icebergs and current offshore wind technology to narrow the Study Area outlined in the Agreement for the Regional Assessment.

Then, the Study Area was further refined by removing areas where there was a high chance of environmental, health, social and economic impacts. This included, for example, avoiding Marine Protected Areas, sensitive areas close to shore, and commercial fishing areas.

The remaining areas are where offshore wind development is most likely feasible and will likely have the least impacts. These are the preliminary offshore wind licencing areas and will be further refined throughout the Regional Assessment.

Engagement

Since May 2023, the Committee engaged with Indigenous peoples, fishers and other ocean users, municipal leaders, federal and provincial governmental agencies, environmental organizations, research groups, offshore wind developers, and individuals that have information, knowledge, and interests relevant to the Regional Assessment. The Committee hosted over 60 meetings and engagement sessions, attended by nearly 700 participants. The Committee considered input received in selecting the preliminary offshore wind licensing areas and in developing their recommendations.

Information Gaps

The Committee identified several information gaps, including incomplete datasets and lack of studies on how offshore wind development may affect local species and environments. This is understandable since offshore wind does not yet exist in Canada.

Recommendations

To date, the Committee has made the following recommendations about offshore wind licencing in the Canada – Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Area. These include:

- The federal and provincial governments should include Indigenous peoples and their knowledge in the development of the joint management framework for offshore wind development.
- The federal and provincial governments should expedite the development of a Marine Spatial Plan for the offshore area. This plan can help reduce potential conflicts for future licencing and impact assessment processes.
- The federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change should require all offshore wind projects to undergo impact assessments.
- Various government agencies should address information gaps by conducting additional research and studies before offshore wind development occurs.