Tide machines may be major power sources

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The Norwegian firm, Statkraft, has proposed creating underwater tide-harnessing machines to provide up to 3 percent of the European Union's electricity.

The floating machines -- about 130 feet long by 50 feet wide -- use tidal water movements to turn submerged turbines, the EU Observer reported Thursday.

Statkraft estimates the technology eventually could supply up to 100 terawatts of power for the EU, with Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands already interested in the project.

"They are commercially competitive with wind power," the firm's senior advisor, Bjornar Olsen, told reporters. "But unlike wind, tidal movements are constant. The waters only stay still for two to four hours each day."

The low visibility tide machines also have a lesser environmental impact compared with the nearly 400 feet high windmills already in operation in the United Kingdom and Norway, the EU Observer said.

A prototype tide farm is to begin operating later this year near Tromso, Norway, with commercial energy production expected within four to six years, Olsen said.

Statkraft says it is the third largest producer of power in the Nordic region and Europe's second largest producer of power based on

renewable energy sources.

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