

Underwater video shows marine life growing at wind farm

15 February 2018, by Philip Marcelo

Offshore wind proponents are touting new undersea footage that suggests a vibrant marine habitat is growing around the nation's first offshore wind farm—a five-turbine operation off Rhode Island's waters.

The American Wind Energy Association, an industry trade group, says the roughly two-minute clip it posted on YouTube this week shows the potential for the nation's fishing industry as larger projects are envisioned up and down the East Coast.

"The turbine foundations are now acting as an artificial reef," said Nancy Sopko, the wind energy association's director of offshore wind and federal legislative affairs. "This is a success story that can be replicated all along our coastlines."

But the video does little to temper the concerns of commercial fishermen, who are worried about navigating dense forests of turbines to get to their historic fishing grounds, says Jim Kendall, a former scallop fisherman in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

"This is nice and fun to see, but it doesn't tip the conversation," Seth Rolbein, of the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance in Chatham, Massachusetts, said of the video.

Offshore wind developers from New England to the Carolinas are racing to build the nation's first large-scale wind farm. Many of the projects call for hundreds of turbines to be built miles away from shore, sometimes within or along the path to lucrative fishing spots.

The wind energy association video shows beds of mussels taking shape and small fish swimming around the turbine bases. The brief underwater footage is juxtaposed with longer testimonials from local recreational fishermen and charter boat owners who say the Deepwater Wind project has been a boon for them since opened it more than a

year ago.

But commercial fishermen are notably absent from the video, and it doesn't acknowledge the experiences of Rhode Island fishermen who say they've had their trawling gear damaged by buried power cables, countered Daniel Farnham, co-owner of Silver Dollar Seafood, a seafood wholesaler in Montauk, New York.

"Unfortunately this does not tell the whole story," he said.

The wind energy association didn't immediately respond, but Deepwater Wind CEO Jeff Grybowski said the company has received "no evidence" from any fisherman of gear damage. "I believe that's a complete fabrication," he said.

The "artificial reef" effect is also only beneficial to certain species—and not necessarily the ones that U.S. commercial fishermen depend on for their livelihood, argued Meghan Lapp, of Seafreeze Ltd., a seafood harvester and dealer in North Kingstown, Rhode Island.

"Squid, flounders, scallops and other species need sandy bottom without structure to thrive," she said. "So, the turbine bases not only destroy their habitat, but also introduce an entirely different ecosystem that attracts species that didn't aggregate in the area before."

Preliminary data from a multi-year study commissioned by Deepwater Wind suggests fish and lobster numbers have not changed significantly with the introduction of the [wind](#) farm, said Aileen Kenney, the company's vice president for permitting and environmental affairs.

"We have not seen a statistical increase or decrease," she said. "We're hearing anecdotally that there appears to be more fish, but we'll have to wait for the results of the science."

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