

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 15, 2023

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We are writing to request a study from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the effects of wind energy development in the North Atlantic Planning Area, as described in the 2017–2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Final Program (November 2016). The statutory authority to offer wind leases on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) is granted to the Department of the Interior (DOI) under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) and subsequent amendments, including the Energy Policy Act of 2005.¹ The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), in coordination with the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), oversees the leasing, site assessment, and environmental review processes for offshore wind energy development in federal waters.

The North Atlantic Planning Area, which encompasses the waters off the eastern coast of the United States, has seen significant activity related to offshore wind energy development in recent years² and several offshore wind projects are currently underway in this area.³ The requested study would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the potential effects of wind energy development in the North Atlantic Planning Area, and would assist in informed decision-making for future planning.

We request that the GAO conduct a study analyzing the potential impacts of offshore wind energy development and associated infrastructure in the North Atlantic Planning Area, including associated infrastructure and vessel traffic. Specifically, we request your study review potential impacts on:

1. Air and maritime safety, including the operation of radar systems;
2. Impacts to air traffic, including military training missions off the Atlantic Coast;

¹ Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) and subsequent amendments, including the Energy Policy Act of 2005. (n.d.) <https://www.boem.gov/Oil-and-Gas-Energy-Program/Regulatory-Information/Leasing/Offshore-Lease-Sale-Process>

²U.S. Department of Energy Offshore Wind Market Report, 2022 Walter Musial, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL).

https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/offshore_wind_market_report_2022.pdf

³ Bureau of Ocean Energy mgmt. April 12, 2023. Lease And Grant Information. <https://www.boem.gov/renewable-energy/lease-and-grant-information>

3. Commercial fishing activities, including fisheries-related surveys and associated management plans, fishing access in the OCS and economic impacts to the fishing industry;
4. Marine environment and ecology, including species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 or designated as depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 in the North Atlantic Planning Area; and
5. Resiliency of offshore wind infrastructure to hurricanes and other extreme weather events off the Atlantic Coast.

We also request that the GAO include a study analyzing the sufficiency of the environmental review process conducted by BOEM, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, prior to holding the offshore wind lease sales that have occurred to date within the North Atlantic Planning Area; and a study describing all state and federal grants, tax credits or other public funds available for offshore wind projects in the North Atlantic Planning Area.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to receiving the study upon completion. Please contact the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Majority staff at (202) 226-3044 or Ashley.Nichols@mail.house.gov and Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee Majority staff at (202) 225-8331 or Kiel Weaver at Kiel.Weaver@mail.house.gov with any questions about this request and to coordinate the delivery of your response to room 1324-A of the Longworth House Office Building.

Sincerely,



Chairman Bruce Westerman (AR-04)
House Committee on Natural Resources



Chris Smith (NJ-04)
Member of Congress



Andy Harris M.D. (MD-01)
Member of Congress



Jeff Van Drew (NJ-02)
Member of Congress