



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

FEB 24 2012

The Honorable Jack Reed
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reed:

Thank you very much for all of your support and collaboration with respect to offshore wind development, and more specifically, for all of your help leading up to the identification of a Wind Energy Area (WEA) in the area of mutual interest (AMI) off the Rhode Island and Massachusetts coasts.

As you know, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has reached a decision regarding the identification of this WEA, which we will be announcing later today, Friday, February 24, as the next step toward offshore wind energy development in Rhode Island. The WEA is comprised of approximately 209,585 acres within the AMI that your State identified in a Memorandum of Understanding with the State of Massachusetts in 2010.

As part of the competitive leasing process, BOEM identified this WEA following a Call for Information and Nominations (Call) that invited developers to identify locations within the AMI in which they seek commercial leases for wind projects.

The BOEM also sought public comment — through both the Call and a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment — on important issues and reasonable alternatives related to the proposed leasing, site characterization and assessment activities in the area under consideration. The public provided information about site conditions, resources and multiple uses in the Call area that assisted BOEM in reducing or eliminating conflicts and defining the Wind Energy Area ultimately identified for consideration for future commercial leasing.

The Bureau analyzed public comments and information in conjunction with its Rhode Island and Massachusetts renewable energy task forces, which include Federal, State, local, and tribal government partners. The Rhode Island task force was established in November 2009, and BOEM has since convened a series of joint task force meetings with the Rhode Island and Massachusetts task forces to discuss the commercial leasing process within the AMI. The joint Rhode Island and Massachusetts task force has met a total of four times.

Throughout this process, we have also benefitted tremendously from the rigorous analysis conducted in Rhode Island in conjunction with the development of the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP).

Based on extensive consultation and analysis, BOEM narrowed the focus of the WEA by excluding commercially important fishing grounds from the area. In light of significant environmental concerns and fishing interests, BOEM removed from the AMI area the sensitive Cox's Ledge region.

Before any leases are offered, BOEM will complete an environmental assessment to determine impacts associated with issuing leases in the WEA. Key considerations will be further analyzed in the environmental assessment, including the endangered North Atlantic Right Whale, vessel traffic, and visual and cultural resources. In addition, BOEM will conduct comprehensive site-specific National Environmental Policy Act review, including opportunities for public comment, for the construction of any proposed wind power facility.

I look forward to our continued collaboration as we pursue the next steps in this important process.

Sincerely,


Ken Salazar