

Memorandum of Understanding

Coalition for aligning the development of offshore wind energy with nature protection and healthy marine ecosystems.

Purpose

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is to define how the Coalition for aligning the development of offshore wind energy with nature protection and healthy marine ecosystems (the Offshore Coalition) will work together to develop a voluntary collaborative approach to planning environmentally-friendly development of offshore wind energy and grid infrastructure, furthering the elaboration and implementation of the European climate, energy and environmental protection objectives, including the European Green Deal. Our joint work will contribute to the sustainable deployment of offshore wind energy, protecting the natural environment, preventing the loss of biodiversity and safeguarding healthy ecosystems when deploying energy infrastructure.

This document is complemented by the Rules of Procedure where the structure and cooperation principles of the Coalition are defined, among other elements.

Background information

Achieving the target set out in the Paris Agreement of limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5°C will require significant new amounts of renewable energy capacity, including onshore distributed resources as well as offshore capacity. Specifically, the European Union long-term decarbonisation strategy, *A clean planet for all (2018)*, is placing offshore wind as a key energy source, supplying up to 30% of Europe's electricity demand by 2050, around 20 times the offshore wind capacity of today. However, our oceans' space is limited and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) conservation targets of reaching clean, healthy and productive seas - a situation also referred to as "Good Environmental Status" - by the year 2020 at the latest has not been achieved.

In line with the EU Nature Directives (Habitats Directive, Birds Directive), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (article 5-1 and 5-2), the development of offshore wind farms has to be planned with the ecosystem and the carrying capacity¹ of the seas uncompromised. Additionally, the EU's 2030 Biodiversity strategy requires EU Member States to effectively protect and conserve at least 30% of European seas by 2030, with at least a third of these placed under strict protection and develop legally binding restoration targets for all habitats.

¹ This concept will be discussed for the European context by the Offshore Coalition. See also discussion topics.

The average global temperature has already increased by about 1°C and the impacts of climate change and nature degradation on people, the environment and the economy are visible all across Europe's seas. Large areas of the seabed have been disturbed and depleted², fish stocks are not being sustainably fished³ and seabird populations are struggling⁴. About 22% of Europe's marine mammals are threatened⁵ and biogenic reef structures have largely disappeared.

Only strong and resilient ecosystems can withstand the negative effects induced by climate change. To gain resilience and to strengthen natural carbon sinks, our marine ecosystems have to be protected and restored. One of the crucial measures to stabilise and mitigate climate change and prevent further acidification of oceans is by removing fossil fuels from the entire energy sector within a timeline compatible with limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5°C. Offshore wind energy development should be balanced with the strengthening of ecosystems and aligned with all spatial uses of the sea (e.g. fishing, shipping, energy generation, military uses) with climate and conservation goals.

A future with a higher share of offshore wind energy production that respects marine biodiversity protection and conservation as a guiding principle must be planned collaboratively, long-term and taking into account cumulative effects of human activities at sea on a regional/basin/sub-basin scale.

There is a general lack of alignment between the long-term EU ambitions and the short-term planning horizon. We need clear milestones set for 2030, 2040 and 2050 and Maritime Spatial Plans that go beyond their current six-year cycle. We also have to consider the entire sea basin not just as a physical space that is divided up for different purposes, but as an ecosystem that must be restored to and maintained in good health, thus taking into consideration habitats, species and the interactions between them, as well as future impacts of changes in the marine environment due to climate change and human use. This includes grid connections, landing points and the impacts on coastal and onshore environments. Offshore wind development will need to be connected to the grid in smart, efficient and environmentally friendly ways to meet a higher European renewables target, pave the way for realising a more ambitious target and, in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy, first avoid and minimise, then restore and, if necessary, offset biodiversity impacts.

² EEA Marine Messages II (2019): 24-33.

³ Froese, Rainer, et al. "Status and rebuilding of European fisheries." *Marine Policy* 93 (2018): 159-170.

⁴ Dias, Maria P., et al. "Threats to seabirds: a global assessment." *Biological Conservation* 237 (2019): 525-537.

⁵ IUCN Red List Status (2019): <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/redlist/mammals/status.htm>

Aim of the Coalition

This Coalition aims to support a comprehensive and collaborative planning approach for offshore wind energy development to align environmental protection and restoration strategies with global climate goals.

The Coalition brings together NGOs, wind farms and grid developers. The Coalition further engages with suppliers, academia (universities and research institutes), the European Commission (in particular DG MARE, DG ENER and DG ENV) and other relevant national, European and international bodies.

The Renewables Grid Initiative (RGI) will act as convener and moderator of the Coalition.

Participation to the Coalition is subject to the voluntary active regular and constructive participation of each member.

By signing this MoU, members agree to develop, regularly update and follow the Rules of Procedure.

Members also commit to work actively in defining and agreeing on a work plan which will be updated on a yearly basis.

Members will also contribute actively on the realisation of the work plan depending on their capacity and abilities. Working groups will be established to carry out agreed work. Participation in working groups will be defined on a case by case basis depending on the skills required to fulfil the defined tasks and the willingness to contribute.

Discussion topics

The MoU is complemented by a work plan which is updated on a yearly basis and spells out the concrete activities to be undertaken by the members of the Coalition.

The Coalition will provide an open forum for discussion, where existing information and experiences are assessed and collated, needs for further research are identified and suggestions are made on how to improve planning offshore wind development for the European seas.

The discussion will include, but will not be limited to the following topics:

- Explore how offshore renewable energy can be fully integrated into the planning and modelling of the entire energy system.
- Assess research and information gaps for offshore infrastructure planning.
- Identify knowledge gaps about sensitivity of habitats and species, and how these can be addressed.
- Evaluate how Marine Spatial Plans can be improved.
- Investigate how to implement an ecosystem-based approach to planning.
- Discuss what the concept of carrying capacity means in the context of European marine ecosystems.

- Identify the main barriers to standardising processes and rules, e.g. on environmental protection standards in different countries.
- Protected areas are fundamental instruments to stop biodiversity loss⁶. Understand which principles should apply to preserve Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), buffer zones, blue corridors, and other ecologically valuable areas for sensitive species and habitats or providing climate refugia.
- Assess risks, options for mitigation and innovation, opportunities of offshore wind and ecology. Investigate potential risks and opportunities of enhancement, multi-uses of infrastructure and nature inclusive design.
- Understand which measures can prevent and minimise cumulative impacts on habitats and biodiversity of grid and landing infrastructure, including in coastal environments.
- Investigate solutions to minimise costs and impacts when developing infrastructure further out at sea.
- Describe and assess the environmental impacts of different wind farm technology options.

Parties to this Memorandum



⁶ IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019)