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July 23, 2024

James Wooder and Ann Wilkie, Co-Chairs

Regional Assessment Committee for Offshore Wind Development in Nova Scotia

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Dear Regional Assessment Committee,

Thank you for the submission of the Committee's interim report on March 22, 2024, regarding offshore wind development in Nova Scotia. As signatories to the Regional Assessment Agreement, we would like to thank you for your efforts and to convey our appreciation for the work you have undertaken thus far and the attentive and respectful manner in which you have engaged interested parties. This Regional Assessment is critical for enabling the responsible and efficient establishment of a new industry in Nova Scotia. We recognize the dedication with which you have carried out this work to date. We would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank you for your prompt correction of the size of the potential future development areas initially published in the interim report.

Since the submission of the interim report, our officials have reviewed the interim report to provide feedback. We hope this feedback will help guide you through the remainder of the Regional Assessment, concluding in January 2025. We encourage you to reach out to our officials regarding this feedback should you have any questions or wish to discuss further.

Regarding the potential future development areas (PFDA), we recognize the need to balance existing ocean uses with potential offshore wind development. We had anticipated seeing larger initial areas with identified potential conflicts, which could be assessed, and avoided or mitigated as conditions of Impact Assessments or project reviews. This would align with the Committee's work on impacts, mitigation and follow-up programs, which would help governments better understand how offshore wind development may interact with other ocean users.

To support governments' understanding of the Committee's recommendations respecting the PFDA and other recommendations, it is suggested that all recommendations and assumptions be supported by citations, data, and explanations, where relevant, in the final report. For example, detailed reasoning behind the recommended 25km buffer around the coast of Nova Scotia should be provided so that governments can better understand the Committee's recommendation.

Similarly, officials noted the need for socio-economic data highlighting the potential benefits of offshore wind development as well as, the relationship between PFDA and the impact of sitting on the overall economics of an offshore wind project. If restricting projects to PFDA result in projects that are in deeper waters or farther from shore, there may be a material impact on project economics.

Given the Committee's mandate to understand the impacts of this new industry, inclusion of data that considers the potential positive socio-economic and environmental impacts of offshore wind would help to ensure a balanced final report.



Our officials also noted that, though the importance of geophysical data was conveyed, there was a lack of geophysical data present in the interim report. There is existing geophysical data that we would encourage incorporating in the final report. Given the importance of geophysical characteristics in siting offshore wind development, use of this data will help further guide siting of offshore wind developments, as well as identify where there are gaps in existing data.

Our governments also look forward to your continued work in the second phase of the Regional Assessment's mandate and your attention to the identification and recommendation of approaches that address potential effects of offshore wind development, mitigation measures, as well as monitoring and follow-up requirements for future impact assessments in the region. A better understanding of possible effects, mitigation measures, and follow-up programs is crucial to inform impact assessments and regulatory reviews of potential future offshore wind.

Moreover, we commend you for the engagement you have conducted with the public, Indigenous groups, the commercial fishing industry, and other interested parties over the preceding year. Engagement is an integral component of the Regional Assessment. It is needed to better understand the perspectives, concerns, and opportunities of those interested in the development of offshore wind off the coasts of Nova Scotia. We support and encourage an inclusive and equitable approach to engagement that ensures under-represented communities and individuals have opportunity and space to participate. In addition, we strongly encourage the Committee to continue consulting with the Scientific Information and Community Knowledge Advisory Group, the Indigenous Knowledge Advisory Group and the Fisheries and Other Ocean Uses Advisory Group specified in the Regional Assessment Agreement, and Terms of Reference, to provide specific and expert knowledge and advice to help inform the final report and recommendations.

Our respective officials have reviewed the recommendations provided by the Committee and are considering the following next steps.

1. Recommendation 1: Nova Scotia Offshore Wind Collaborative Research Initiative

Governments are aligned with the intent of the recommendation and recognize the importance of a coherent approach to researching the impacts and benefits of offshore wind activities. As a first step, officials are working to develop an inventory of existing research to better understand how a collaborative research initiative could be facilitated.

2. Recommendation 2: Governments do not exempt offshore wind proposals from project-specific impact assessments, until effects on the marine ecosystem and fishing industry are better understood.

Governments recognize the importance of ensuring offshore wind projects are subject to a rigorous process before they may proceed. Currently, there are no plans for the Regional Assessment to support project assessment exemptions.



3. Recommendation 3: Fisheries co-existence and compensation

Governments recognize the need for clarity on the approach to avoidance, mitigation, coexistence, and compensation, regarding offshore wind development, and are taking direct steps to address this important issue in parallel to the Regional Assessment.

We recognize that the Regional Assessment is a significant undertaking and are committed to supporting the successful fulfillment of the Committee's mandate as needed.

Sincerely,

<Signature removed>

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P. (il/lui/he/him)
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Canada

The Honourable Tory Rushton, Minister
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