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UNITED Project Final Event Opening Session

Offshore wind multi-use – food security or nature restoration, how to reconcile different priorities?

Date: Tuesday, November 14th, 2023

Key recommendations from the policy perspective - Opening Remarks and session moderation by Marijn Rabaut, University of Ghent

Marijn Rabaut initiated the session with a focus on the planning, regulatory, and insurance challenges in multi-use offshore project development. He highlighted key learnings from the UNITED project, pointing out the absence of a unified approach (“one-stop-shop”) in government ministries and the lack of cumulative impact assessments for multi-use (MU) projects.

Coexistence of offshore wind power with commercial fishing, aquaculture and nature conservation - Joacim Johannesson, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SWAM)

The intervention outlined Sweden's approach to planning for multi-use, offering insights into potential multi-use opportunities in the country. The presentation detailed the planning structure across various levels – coastal, territorial, and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters. A notable point was the municipal veto right in Sweden's territorial waters, contrasting with **differing regulations among EU Member States**. **Insurance emerged as a significant economic constraint**, potentially more impactful than regulatory issues, underscoring the need for innovative solutions in this area. In his presentation, Johannesson further explored the potential for integrating OWFs with fishing activities, placing particular emphasis on the challenges presented by the deployment of floating offshore wind farms due to the anchoring. The presentation underscored a **lack of comprehensive information on the environmental impacts of multi-use**, which would be essential for integration in national Maritime Spatial Plans (MSPs). This highlighted the importance of the precautionary principle, especially when dealing with uncertainties in environmental impacts. However, given the high targets for renewable energy and nature protection, the **integration of OWFs in two Natura 2000 areas may need to be considered in new MSPs**. The application of the precautionary principle in these endeavors was stressed. The ongoing consultation of new MSP plans in Sweden and the overlapping uses in these plans were also noted.

Panel Discussion - How to reconcile different priorities through multi-use?

Jochem Vermeir - ParkWind

Eline Van Onselen - The Ritch North Sea

Zinzi Reimert - North Sea Farmers

Bettina Käppeler - German Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency

Joacim Johannesson - SWAM

Anne Gunnäs - Lysekil municipality

Céline Frank – European Commission, DG MARE

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The panel, moderated by Marijn Rabaut from the University of Ghent, composed of varied experts from the planning, policy and industry, explored different aspects of multi-use in offshore wind farms. They discussed how **larger turbines, with ample spacing between them, create new opportunities for multi-use** applications, such as certain types of fisheries or nature restoration. However, they acknowledged that there are still challenges to overcome, particularly for aquaculture operations, due to the distances involved. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of **allowing access for research purposes within wind farms** to further understand and optimize multi-use strategies. The feasibility of multi-use, they noted, is highly case-specific and must be assessed for each offshore wind farm scenario.

The overarching theme was that the transition to **multi-use offshore wind farms is not a matter of 'if' but 'how'**. Generating additional opportunities like food production and nature restoration requires moving beyond singular offshore wind use and co-create solutions, if possible, from the design phase. Initiatives that bring different sea users together, such as the new European Blue Forum, will support this approach. The panel stressed the importance of regulatory and financial incentives, along with the application of the precautionary principle in areas with unknown impacts.

"70% of our energy is imported in this region, highlighting our dire need for energy. It's certain that wind parks will be established; the real question is where. We must consider how to make the most out of these developments. From the coast, our maritime space may seem vast, but it's actually quite limited. Therefore, we need to strategize intelligently about utilization - and multi-use is an integral part of this smart approach." Anne Gunnäs - Swedish Lysekil municipality

Current regulations, predominantly designed for mono-use, necessitate adaptation for multi-use. The discussion acknowledged that the shift to multi-use demands time, emphasizing the necessity for government incentives, such as incorporating non-price criteria in tendering processes and providing financial support. In order to reach our common objectives under the European Green Deal, co-location of Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) and nature protection will be needed in some areas, particularly in Natura 2000 areas. The European Commission already provided guidance to support Member States in addressing the challenges that this type multi-use poses. With the wind package and the Communication "Delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions" published by the Commission on 24/10, the call for multi-use was even made clearer: "By means of expert group meetings, regional cooperation and support for dedicated projects, the Commission will work with Member States to include areas for multi-use when revising national MSPs. This would facilitate permitting processes and co-existence of offshore developments including grids. " Nevertheless, despite regulatory approvals, the lack of concrete business cases and financial investments in multi-use projects remain a hurdle in many countries.

In conclusion, to fully leverage the potential of areas like offshore wind farms, **there needs to be a tangible benefit for multi-users involved (tangible business plans), underlining the need for well-structured incentives and innovative regulatory adaptations.**