



Staff Recommendation

December 12, 2023

Item 10

Action Item:

Consideration and Approval to Disburse Funds to Augment Offshore Wind Environmental Monitoring Guidance Development

Yi-Hui Wang, Offshore Wind Program Manager

Recommended Action: Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) to enhance participation, coordination, and outreach in the development of a comprehensive offshore wind environmental monitoring guidance. This authorization will provide a budget augmentation to a disbursement of \$450,000 for the development of a comprehensive offshore wind environmental monitoring guidance previously approved by the Council on April 24, 2023.

Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through a Sustainable Blue Economy; Objective 4.4: Guide Sustainable Renewable Energy Projects

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits: This project will create a comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance for informed decision-making that can help minimize negative impacts of offshore wind development on local and vulnerable communities. It will support the participation of stakeholders, including California Native American tribes, underserved communities and fishermen, expand outreach opportunities, and provide online information for public access to project updates and offshore wind resources.

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;

2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Budget Acts of 2021 and 2022 which included \$2 million Offshore Wind General Fund appropriation and a \$1 million Offshore Wind General Fund appropriation for offshore wind research to improve understanding of impacts on ecosystems, fisheries, and cultural resources; and
3. The proposed projects are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$150,000 to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation (CMSF) to enhance participation, coordination, and outreach in the development of a comprehensive offshore wind environmental monitoring guidance.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, CMSF shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management and delivery.”

Executive Summary:

Staff recommends that OPC approve the disbursement of up to \$150,000 to CMSF to augment the development of a comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance (guidance) tailored to offshore wind (OSW) development in California. The guidance, originally approved for funding by the Council in April 2023, is intended to provide specific long-term monitoring recommendations across various spatial scales, ranging from project levels to regional/statewide levels, and will provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating potential local and cumulative impacts of offshore wind development. This additional funding will expand beyond the initial scope of the project to increase the number of working groups to include cross-cutting topics; increase engagement and participation with tribes, including incorporation of tribal ecological knowledge (TEK); and enhance public outreach and communication.

Project Summary:

Background:

California is committed to carbon neutrality by 2045, which will require unprecedented changes to the state’s energy portfolio and infrastructure. To meet these bold renewable energy targets,

California’s offshore waters have emerged as a prime location for floating OSW projects, and OSW development in California has rapidly progressed in recent years. On August 10, 2022, the California Energy Commission adopted ambitious OSW energy goals of 2-5 GW by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045. On December 7, 2022, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management conducted the first-ever OSW energy lease sale along the Pacific coastline for five wind energy areas, including two off the Northern California Coast near Humboldt Bay and three off the Central California Coast near Morro Bay. The announcement of provisional lease winners followed the conclusion of the lease sale. Following the effective date of these leases, lease holders have begun their survey planning for site assessment and characterization that will collect project area specific information to inform their construction and operation plans. Simultaneously, California is developing a strategic plan, as required by [Assembly Bill 525 \(Chui, 2021\)](#) that will identify recommendations to address environmental, tribal, and community impacts and mitigation strategies for OSW development, and new sea space to accommodate additional OSW development sufficient to meet the goal of 25 GW by 2045.

Unlike most operating offshore wind projects worldwide, which have fixed-bottom turbines installed in oceans shallower than 60 meters, OSW projects off the California coast require floating turbines due to the deep water and steep slope. This technology relies on attaching a wind turbine to a floating structure that is tethered to the seabed. Currently, approximately 0.2 GW of floating wind turbines are operating worldwide, compared to over 60 GW of fixed-bottom turbines. Given the limited information available from existing projects and the unique features of the California Current System, the impacts of floating offshore wind development to wildlife and habitats in California are not well understood. Therefore, it is critical to collect long-term monitoring information, ranging from project to regional/statewide levels, and at all project phases.

Although some environmental monitoring guidelines for OSW development exist, they are designed for projects in other regions of the world with fixed-bottom structures and different marine ecosystems, for project levels that cannot adequately address cumulative impacts, nor contain the level of detail required. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance document that is tailored specifically to OSW development in California to inform project design, construction, and adaptive management of OSW operations.

In April 2023, [OPC approved up to \\$450,000](#) to develop a comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance to support OSW development in California. The guidance will provide specific long-term monitoring recommendations across various spatial scales, ranging from project levels to regional/statewide levels. Its purpose is to provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating potential local and cumulative impacts of offshore wind development, many of which are still not fully understood.

After a competitive solicitation process, CMSF was selected as the grantee. The project will synthesize existing efforts and resources, identify data required for permitting and environmental policies, provide interim monitoring recommendations, and develop a final guidance document covering marine mammals, birds and bats, fish and fisheries, habitat and ecosystem, and oceanographic processes. Each of these topics requires advice and direction from a coordinated group of subject matter experts.

Project Summary:

This budget augmentation will expand the scope of the originally funded project to increase the number of working groups to include cross-cutting topics; increase engagement and participation with tribes, including incorporation of TEK; and enhance public outreach and communication. This augmentation will specifically enhance scientific expertise and engagement by forming 2-3 additional working groups focused on the cross-cutting topics of data sharing, technology, and climate change impacts on marine ecological processes over time. Increased engagement with tribes will also be supported by this augmentation, including the involvement of tribal scientists in select working groups to incorporate TEK into guidance development.

The funding augmentation will additionally increase outreach and meaningful engagement with local communities, especially those near existing lease areas in Humboldt and Morro Bay, commercial fishermen through the state’s existing fisheries groups such as the Commercial Fishermen’s Resilience Association, and industry. A publicly accessible website will be established to provide updated information for the stakeholders and the public.

Equity and Environmental Justice:

Comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance can help ensure the collection and evaluation of relevant and accurate observational data, improving our understanding of potential environmental impacts of OSW development. It fosters equity by informing decisions to reduce harm to marine ecosystems, tribal cultural resources, and underserved/port communities. This budget augmentation will increase tribal engagement by including tribal expertise in appropriate working groups to understand their concerns and priorities as well as traditional ecological monitoring efforts, which will be integrated into the guidance. The funding will create additional opportunities for outreach to local communities, particularly those near existing lease areas in Humboldt and Morro Bay. Furthermore, it will enable the involvement of commercial fishermen through the state’s existing fisheries groups such as the Commercial Fishermen’s Resilience Association. This expanded outreach and an accessible website will increase transparency, information sharing, and access to project and other relevant OSW updates in California.

About the Grantee:

The CMSF, a nonprofit organization established in 1995, is dedicated to safeguarding California’s coastal ecosystems and enhancing coast resilience amidst a range of challenges, including climate change and resource extraction. With a proven track record, CMSF has conducted successful environmental studies. CMSF has also forged meaningful relationship with government agencies, scientific experts, tribal and local communities, as well as stakeholders across diverse sectors, including the offshore wind sector.

Project Timeline:

The project is expected to start by early 2024. All tasks, including the final guidance document, are targeted for completion within two years of the project launch.

Project Financing:

Staff recommends that OPC authorize encumbrance of up to \$150,000 to CMSF to enhance participation, coordination, and outreach in the development of comprehensive OSW environmental monitoring guidance. Including the previously approved \$450,000 for development of the environmental monitoring guidance, this brings the total funding authorized for this project up to \$600,000.

Ocean Protection Council	\$150,000
TOTAL	\$150,000

The anticipated source of funds will be from the FY 2021-2022 and FY 2022-2023 Offshore Wind General Fund appropriations, which included \$2 million General Fund appropriation in FY 2021-2022 and \$1 million General Fund appropriation in FY 2022-2023 for OSW research to improve understanding of impacts on ecosystems, fisheries, and cultural resources. Given the diverse OSW-related topics, various key players in the OSW sector, and the broad impact on communities, this recommendation aims to enhance participation, coordination, and outreach in the guidance development. These efforts are pivotal in fostering effective collaboration, securing meaningful contributions from key players, increasing outreach opportunities for the development of a comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance for OSW development in California.

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the project involves only data collection, research and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.