



Marine Users and Interests

Gippsland, Victoria

Offshore renewable energy off Gippsland - Sharing the area

The Minister for Climate Change and Energy has proposed an area in the Commonwealth waters off Gippsland, Victoria for offshore renewable energy projects, such as offshore wind.

The Australian Government wants to manage the offshore marine environment in a way that recognises all users and balances competing interests. **Future offshore renewable energy projects must share the area with other users and interests.**

Understanding existing users and interests in, and near, the area under consideration is important and will help inform the Minister for Climate Change and Energy's decision on whether the area is suitable for offshore renewable energy developments, like offshore wind projects.

This is your first opportunity to provide feedback as developers are also required to seek feedback on their projects and must demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator, how they will share the area with existing users.

The Gippsland region

This area is the traditional Land and Sea Country of the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong and Boon Wurrung peoples, an important consideration, as an offshore renewable energy industry will entail the installation of infrastructure across the land and sea estate in order to integrate with the Victorian electricity grid.

The region is renowned for its natural attractions. From beaches and rainforests, to snowfields and hiking trails. It is home to the Gippsland Lakes, the Strzelecki Ranges and Ninety Mile Beach. Wilsons Promontory National Park, one of Victoria's best loved parks, is a 50,000 hectare reserve threaded with walking tracks that showcase different natural environments and home to abundant wildlife.

Gippsland boasts a wealth of natural resources and commodities, with key industry sectors such as agriculture, fishing, forestry, dairy, mining, oil and gas extraction and tourism - which supports around 10% of the regions employment.

Historically, energy generation in Gippsland has been closely linked to coal historically. However, the focus is shifting to renewable energy and the role it could play as the region transitions away from coal-fired electricity generation.

Users and interests

We have undertaken preliminary consultation with a number of Commonwealth and Victorian Government agencies to identify interests in the vicinity of the area. Below is a non-exhaustive list of identified interests provided to facilitate conversations about the potential suitability of the area for offshore renewable energy.

We have also developed a [map](#) that allows users to interact with the Gippsland area under consideration and geographic information relevant to other users and interests in the area. Other

tools, visualisations and data relevant to Offshore Renewable Energy in Australian waters are also available on the [Australian Marine Spatial Information System](#) portal.

Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing is an important industry in the Gippsland region and many of the towns originally developed to support the fishing industry in the area. Commercial fishers in the region operate under a range of licensing systems, with many holding licences to fish in several fisheries managed by State and/or Commonwealth authorities. A number of Commonwealth fisheries are located within the area, including the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery, the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery and the Southern Squid Jig Fishery.

In most cases, commercial fishing activities will be able to share the space with future offshore renewable energy projects. However, the construction and operation of renewable energy projects in the ocean is a relatively new concept in Australia and there is further work required to understand what arrangements may be needed for fishing activities and these projects to share the same areas. **Developers will need to undertake consultation with the local community and demonstrate how they will share the area with other users** and will also need to have a plan for gathering and responding to ongoing feedback from stakeholders throughout the life of the project.

There may be small restricted areas around offshore renewable turbines and substations, as with other marine infrastructure such as navigation buoys and oil and gas platforms. These restricted areas are to ensure the safety of offshore workers and other users of the marine environment, and to protect the infrastructure from damage. There may be larger restricted areas while any approved offshore wind projects are under construction to ensure safety for marine users and construction workers. The exact details of these restricted areas will be determined on a project-by-project basis.

Recreational Fishing

Gippsland has over 500 kilometres of coastline offering extensive recreational fishing opportunities. This includes opportunities to catch flathead, snapper, gummy sharks, mullet, King George whiting, Australian salmon, silver trevally and more.

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The interaction of offshore wind on recreational fishing has been examined overseas. Evidence from overseas, where offshore renewable energy projects have existed for many years, suggests that offshore wind and fishing can, in many cases, share the same space. The installation of wind turbines may cause localised damage during installation, but may also have long term local benefits in the long run as turbines may function as nurseries, potentially increasing fish stocks in surrounding areas.

Natural Environment

The Gippsland region has diverse natural assets including coastal regions, woodlands, forests and alpine landscapes. The region is also home to a range of marine ecosystems protected by a series of Commonwealth and State Marine Parks.

For example, Ninety Mile Beach Marine National Park has very high levels of species diversity. In ten square metres 860 species were discovered living in the sand. The Gippsland offshore region also attracts a variety of marine mammals including humpback whales, elephant seals, southern right whales and dolphins at certain times of the year.

There are also a number of Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) in the region. These include the Orange Bellied Parrot, Swift Parrot, Pygmy Blue Whale, Southern Right Whale, a number of threatened Albatross and Petrel species, migratory bird species and internationally protected [Ramsar sites](#). New MNES may also be listed at any time.

Any proposed offshore renewable energy project will need to seek environmental approvals under the [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999](#) to proceed.

Native Title and Sea Country

The traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong and Boon Wurrung peoples are adjacent to the area under consideration. While no Native Title claims overlap the proposed offshore area, Traditional Owners have a vested interest in the offshore region, including cultural heritage.

Developers will need to understand their obligations if land-based transmission infrastructure is proposed and requirements under the [Native Title Act 1993](#) may apply.

Existing Titles and Infrastructure

The Gippsland region has a significant association with coal mining and electricity generation, which has been, and remains, a large part of the region's economy and employment. Offshore resource extraction also has a significant presence in the area off Gippsland.

There are a number of existing titles issued under the [Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006](#) (OPGGGS Act) within and near the area under consideration. There are also numerous existing wells, platforms, and pipelines.

Several subsea cables also pass through the area, including the existing Basslink cable.

Holders of existing titles, and owners of existing infrastructure, including subsea cables, will continue to have established legal rights within the area of their titles and in relation to their infrastructure. This may include rights to explore or produce, and rights of access to inspect, maintain and repair their infrastructure. There may be regular vessel and helicopter movements in the area.

Developers will need to undertake consultation and demonstrate how they will share the area with other users and will also need to have a plan for gathering and responding to ongoing feedback from stakeholders throughout the life of the project.

Tourism

The Gippsland region stretches 542 kilometres from Melbourne to the New South Wales border. The region is diverse and is home to fishing villages, beaches, major dairy and farming industries and Victoria's power generation industry. Major attractions include Wilsons Promontory National Park, vineyards, food outlets selling local produce and smallgoods, beaches and abundant wildlife.

Tourism is a significant contributor to Gippsland's economy, particularly the Bass Coast and East Gippsland. Domestic daytrips visitors are the most common visitors, followed by domestic overnight visitors. In 2019/20 the tourism industry contributed approximately \$836 million to the Gippsland economy and employed approximately 11,200 people.

The construction and operation of renewable energy projects in the ocean is a relatively new concept in Australia. However, insights from research undertaken into the first offshore wind project

in the United States indicated that, overall, tourism and recreational professionals had largely positive encounters with the project. The research suggested that people were curious about the project especially since it was the first one in the USA and that it helped attract sightseers and recreational fishers to the area. Overall, the researchers found little evidence that the project had adversely affected participation in tourism and recreation in the area.

Defence

There are two active Defence sites near the area under consideration. The Royal Australian Air Force Base East Sale and the West Head Gunnery Range with associated declared Defence Practice Area.

Developers considering projects in the vicinity of the two Defence sites should be aware that some sections of the area may not be suitable for some offshore renewable energy projects and that consultation with the Department of Defence will be required.

Vessel Traffic

The shipping sector plays a significant role in the global economy, and is critical to Australia as an island economy. Over 90% of Australia's exports depend on sea transport and the combined value of Australia's seagoing international imports and exports was over \$400 billion in 2015/16 — equal to 25% of Australia's gross domestic product.

The area off Gippsland sees a high volume of shipping traffic heading to a variety of locations, including the Port of Melbourne which sees around 3000 commercial ship visits each year.

To reduce impacts to vessel traffic in the vicinity of the area, high volume shipping channels, including traffic separation schemes, have been excluded from the area.

Weather Radars

The Bureau of Meteorology operates several weather radars whose range overlaps the area. These radars provide weather information and forecasting for the region, both onshore and offshore. Developers will need to work with the Bureau to mitigate any service impacts.