



Marine Users, Interests, and the Environment

Illawarra region, NSW

The Minister for Climate Change and Energy is proposing an area in the Pacific Ocean off the Illawarra region of New South Wales from off Wombarra in the north to Kiama in the south, to be considered as an area for offshore wind development.

This is a **proposed area** and is **not** final. It acts as a starting point to identify an area that could support offshore wind. The Minister will consider public submissions to help inform his decision as to whether the proposed area is suitable for offshore wind development. Future projects can only be progressed in an area declared by the Minister.

The Australian Government wants to manage the offshore marine environment in a way that recognises all users and balances competing interests. **If this proposed area is declared by the Minister, any future offshore wind projects within the area must work with existing users and interests to ensure the area is shared, while maintaining a safe marine space during construction, operation and maintenance phases.**

Understanding existing users and interests in, and near, the proposed area is important and will help inform the Minister's decision on whether to declare all, part or none of the proposed area suitable for offshore wind development.

This is your first opportunity to provide feedback. If a declaration is made in the future, developers will be required to seek feasibility licences to advance their project proposals. Feasibility licence holders will then be required to seek feedback on any proposed projects and demonstrate how they will share the area with existing users.

Users and interests

We have undertaken initial consultation with Commonwealth and NSW government agencies to identify many interests in the vicinity of the area. We have developed a map that allows users to interact with the proposed Illawarra area and see geographic information on other uses and interests in the area. The map is available on the [Australian Marine Spatial Information System](#) portal.



First Nations, Native Title and Sea Country

This area is the First Nations land and Sea Country of the Dharawal people. The Wodi Wodi are the First Nations custodians of the Illawarra who spoke a variant of the Dharawal language. Dharawal speakers lived and live in the country from Botany Bay to the north, through Campbelltown and Moss Vale to the west, and south to the Shoalhaven River and Jervis Bay.

First Nations Australians have significant interests in the marine region, as part of their cultural heritage. Sea Country is a complex concept derived from custom, practice, use and occupation and traditional law. First Nation peoples do not separate between land and Sea Country, and hold traditional rights, responsibilities, and interest across the sea floor, islands and the whole of Sea Country. Many sacred sites exist on Sea Country, and there is ancestral connection to seabeds that were once dry land. Likewise, plants and animals found within Sea Country hold significant cultural, environment and traditional importance.

Acknowledging this, the Australian Government will consult with First Nations people prior to awarding any licences in a declared area. Developers will also need to understand any obligations that may apply under the [Native Title Act 1993](#).

There are currently no Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) either on land or in the sea within the proposed Illawarra area, or surrounding areas.

Natural Environment

The Illawarra region is home to a range of marine ecosystems. The Royal National Park is north of the proposed area and the Jervis Bay Marine Park is south of the proposed area.

The proposed area excludes areas with environmental significance including the marine parks, Shelf Rocky Reef Key Ecological Feature (KEF) and Biologically Important Areas for breeding for the Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*). Key ecological features define areas of ecological importance in the Commonwealth marine environment that are of regional importance for either biodiversity or ecosystem function and integrity.

There are Matters of National Environmental Significance, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), in and near the proposed area. These include biologically important areas for:

- Sea birds (Wedge Tailed Shearwater, White-Faced Storm-Petrel, Great Winged-Petrel, Northern Giant-Petrel, Albatross sp.)
- cetaceans (whales and dolphins)
- Sharks, rays and turtles.

Future offshore wind project proposals in Commonwealth waters must not be:

- inconsistent with recovery plans for relevant Matters of National Environmental Significance,
- be likely to interfere with the long-term conservation of threatened or migratory seabird species, and
- be inconsistent with the requirements of migratory species treaties.

The [Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021](#) (OEI Act) has been designed to operate in conjunction with other regulatory regimes. Specifically, offshore renewable energy infrastructure activities are subject to requirements for environmental approval under environment legislation, including the EPBC Act administered by the department. Approval under the EPBC Act will be required for all prospective projects. This includes an assessment of the relevant impacts and proposed avoidance, management, mitigation and, where appropriate, offset measures, to demonstrate appropriate environmental outcomes can be achieved.

Obtaining early environmental approvals under the EPBC Act (and other relevant NSW and Commonwealth legislation) provides no guarantee that a proposed project location will be included in a declared area or that a proponent will be successful in obtaining a relevant OEI Act licence in the area. Developers must ensure they receive all relevant approvals and undertake any required consultation processes under applicable regulatory regimes before they can apply for a commercial licence to construct offshore wind infrastructure.

Airports and Defence

The area offshore of the Illawarra is used extensively for Defence naval and aviation activities. In accordance with Department of Defence advice, developers of wind turbines and other infrastructure in the area under consideration will likely have to consult with the Department of Defence through the licensing stages to determine potential impacts of their proposed project on Defence activities.

The proposed area is also in proximity to Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport. Developers will likely have to consult with aviation authorities to determine potential impacts of their proposed project on civil aviation.

Vessel Traffic and Ports

Port Kembla is a highly significant port and is one of Australia's busiest ports. The port provides connectivity to national road and rail networks and is strategically located within a significant industrial estate and export markets for agricultural products.

The development of offshore wind needs to ensure that it does not disrupt the safety of vessel traffic and port operations.

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 Illawarra region sees a high volume of domestic and international shipping traffic heading to a variety of locations. The department is working with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and the Port Authority of New South Wales to seek further details on vessel traffic in the proposed area and consider the safe management of shipping to and from Port Kembla.

The needs of existing recreational boating will also be considered in the consultation process, and if an area is declared boating will need to be considered by individual developers during the licensing phase.

Weather Radars

The Bureau of Meteorology operates the Wollongong (Appin) and Terrey Hills weather radars that cover the proposed area. These radars are used by the community and other industries including shipping and commercial fishing. Wind turbines may pose a risk of interference to weather radar. If an area is declared as suitable for offshore wind, developers will need to work with the Bureau as part of testing the feasibility of their proposed projects to ensure they do not interfere with weather radars.



Commercial and Recreational Fishing

There are several Commonwealth fisheries that exist within and around the Illawarra region, including the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery, South East Trawl Fishery (sector of the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery), Small Pelagic Fishery and Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery. While there is relatively low fishing effort across the proposed area compared to other parts of Australia from Commonwealth commercial fishers, most of this tends to be concentrated on the continental shelf and slope. In consultation with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), areas of relatively high effort for Commonwealth managed trawl fisheries have been excluded from the proposed area.

The interaction of offshore wind on recreational fishing has been examined overseas. Evidence from overseas, where offshore wind 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 have long term local benefits as turbines may function as nurseries, potentially increasing fish stocks in surrounding areas.

Depending on the location of offshore wind projects, commercial fishing operators that hold existing fishing rights in the area may be impacted during the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning stages. Future offshore wind licence holders will need to consult with the commercial fishing sector to discuss how proposed projects area can be shared, the potential impacts and how can impacts be mitigated. Licence holders will need to have plans for gathering and responding to ongoing feedback from marine users, including the commercial fishing industry, throughout the life of projects.

In most cases, commercial and recreational fishing activities may be able to share the space with future offshore wind projects. However, fisheries that use methods such as trawling and longlines will be subject to exclusion around infrastructure, including towers and cables. The specific dimensions of these exclusions will be determined on a project specific basis. Construction and operation of offshore wind 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.

There may be small, restricted areas around offshore wind infrastructure such as turbines and substations, as with other marine infrastructure like 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 vessels and the infrastructure from damage. There may be larger restricted areas while 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.

Tourism

The Illawarra is home to national parks, beaches, lakes, and scenic views along the Grand Pacific Drive and the Illawarra escarpment. The Illawarra region is within the South Coast of NSW and is a significant tourist destination. In 2021-2022, there were 11.8 million visitors to the South Coast NSW region, generating approximately 3.8 billion dollars in expenditure¹.

The construction and operation of renewable energy projects in the ocean is a relatively new concept in Australia. However, insights from research undertaken² 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

¹ [NSW Tourism Regions Infographics - template - for website.xlsx \(destinationnsw.com.au\)](#)

² [Sustainability and tourism: the effect of the United States' first offshore wind farm on the vacation rental market - ScienceDirect](#)

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.

Potential Projects and Coexistence with Existing Users

As part of testing the feasibility of a proposed offshore wind project, and prior to approvals for the construction of any infrastructure, licence holders must undertake consultation and show how they will share the area with other users. Licence holders will also need to have a plan for gathering and responding to ongoing feedback from marine users throughout the life of an approved project. This is in addition to the obligations for licence holders to consult with government agencies to ensure constraints are thoroughly considered and addressed throughout their projects.

Access to any future declared area or licence area by other marine users will not be restricted any more than is necessary to ensure safe navigation and operations, and the protection of infrastructure. This is consistent with the principle of shared use of the marine environment. As with any infrastructure in the marine environment (such as navigation buoys, and oil and gas wells), there may be restricted areas placed around offshore wind infrastructure, such as individual wind turbines and offshore substations. The size and limitations of restricted areas may vary to reflect the changing activities between construction and general operation of offshore wind projects to ensure the safety of marine users and workers.