

# Offshore Renewable Energy Declaration

Bass Strait Region, Tasmania

Public Consultation Submissions Summary Report

December 2024

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## Introduction

On 24 October 2023, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy announced that an area offshore extending from Bridport to Devonport, Tasmania; for this purpose, referred to as the Bass Strait region; was being considered for its suitability to be declared as an offshore renewable energy area under the *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021*. This was the fifth area to be considered under the legislative framework and is another step forward in enabling the development of offshore renewable energy in Australia.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of consultation on the Notice of Proposal for the area proposed in the Bass Strait region, including a summary of the responses, including from submissions received during targeted and public consultation.

The responses received as part of the public consultation process reflect considerable time and effort on the part of the respondents. Submissions are used to understand how the proposal could affect communities, determine areas to avoid and if applying conditions will ensure areas of importance or concern are protected. The submissions provided valuable information for the Minister to consider when deciding to declare an area in the Bass Strait region as suitable for offshore renewable energy infrastructure. Additionally, submissions provided insight into how local communities might benefit from any offshore renewable energy infrastructure project in the region and what other positive impacts this kind of development might bring. The consultation process provides communities and associations with information about the declared area and how offshore wind will operate in Australia including through the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's [website](#).

The opinions expressed in this report were presented by stakeholders during the public consultation period and do not reflect the views of the Australian or Tasmanian governments.

## Development of the Notice of Proposal

The Notice of Proposal to declare an area in the Bass Strait, extending from Bridport to Devonport, Tasmania as suitable for offshore renewable energy infrastructure was developed through consultation with Commonwealth and Tasmanian Government agencies.

## Consultation process

### Public consultation

The Minister published the Notice of Proposal for the area in the Bass Strait region on 24 October 2023. This commenced the statutory public consultation period as required under the *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021*. Members of the public were able to make submissions via the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's 'Have Your Say' web platform. On 31 January 2024, the public consultation period closed.

The Notice of Proposal was accompanied by a dataset titled '*Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021 – Proposed Area – Bass Strait*' that identified the proposed area. An indicative map of the proposed area was also included in the notice. The Consultation Hub page included several resources to provide respondents with additional information in relation to the proposal. This included:

- document providing an overview of the proposed area and FAQs titled 'Overview of the Proposed Area – Bass Strait Region';
- document providing an overview of existing marine users and interests in the vicinity of the proposed area titled 'Marine Users, Interests and the Environment – Bass Strait Region';
- shapefile of the proposed area for download; and

- link to an interactive map of the proposed area hosted by Geoscience Australia.

Information on the public consultation was shared across a number of platforms, including on the department's [website](#) and social media channels: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. The department also carried out several forms of advertising for the proposed area, notices in local and regional newspapers, articles in local newspapers, radio advertisements and flyer drop to residents in coastal areas adjacent to the proposed area.

The announcement received media coverage, and information on the proposed area was shared more broadly across larger regional newspapers and websites.

The purpose of the public consultation was to inform the community of the proposal and seek feedback on current uses and users of the area to inform the Minister's decision on whether the proposed area is suitable for offshore renewable energy development.

## Tasmanian Aboriginal Community consultation

There are various groups representing the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community. Significant effort was made to ensure that the Tasmanian Aboriginal community were informed of the declaration process and how to make a submission, this included;

- Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania
- Melythina tiakana warrana Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC)
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)
- truwana / Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Association
- Flinders Island Aboriginal Association
- Tasmanian Regional Aboriginal Communities Alliance.
- Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation
- Land and Sea Aboriginal Corporation Tasmania (LSACT)
- Circular Head Aboriginal Corp

Where possible, contact was established with each group during the preliminary area assessment stage and continued through the public consultation period. Consultation was held via a combination of face-to-face and online meetings. Departmental representatives also attended meetings convened by Aboriginal community groups where appropriate.

In response to feedback, the department extended the period for feedback on the proposed area from these groups by four weeks to 29 February 2024. This was in acknowledgement that the timeframes for engaging on a proposed area were challenging, with many Aboriginal groups advising that there was insufficient time for the community to be informed about the process, to propose a position on offshore renewable energy and the proposed area, and to obtain community endorsement on the feedback.

## Community information sessions

The community was invited to participate in community drop-in sessions held during the consultation period across the adjacent region of northern Tasmania and Flinders Island. Five community information sessions were held in Bridport, George Town, Devonport, Burnie and Whitemark, Flinders Island from 4 December to 7 December 2023, with approximately 100 attendees.

For each session, departmental staff were on-site and available to talk to members of the community, with the sessions supported by representatives from the Tasmanian Department of State Growth, Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania (ReCFIT) section.

At the sessions, attendees were briefed by department representatives on elements of the proposal, provided with the opportunity to ask questions, discuss key issues, and understand the importance of providing feedback via a submission.

## Online sessions

Between 11 December and 17 December, relevant local industry stakeholders were invited to participate in online, industry-specific sessions targeting commercial fishing, tourism and local business, community and environmental groups and a general community session.

These sessions allowed targeted discussions on the interaction of potential offshore renewable energy projects with specific local industries and gave an opportunity for local industry representatives to have their questions answered.

## Community Pop-Up Sessions

On 23 and 24 January 2024, 'pop-up' community information stalls were held by department representatives in shopping malls in Launceston and Devonport. These stalls were staffed from 10am-5pm as a part of the continued goal of ensuring local community members were aware of the proposed area and how they could have their say. Department representatives were available to answer questions related to the process.

Stalls were held in locations highly frequented by members of the community to ensure as many people as possible could be informed about the process. Over 100 people across both locations were spoken to directly, with the accessibility of the stall locations leading to a wider audience than just the traditional drop-in and online sessions.

## Analysis of submissions

The department undertook an analysis of the submissions received, as set out below. The analysis provides an overview of public sentiment concerning the proposal as represented in the submissions and outlines the range of concerns and benefits identified by respondents. This feedback informs the Minister's decision on whether to declare the area as suitable for offshore renewable energy infrastructure.

## Overview of submissions

### Types of respondents

Respondents were able to lodge submissions as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. A total of 270 submissions were received. 32 submissions (11.85%) were made on behalf of an organisation and the remaining 238 submissions (88.15%) were made by an individual or individuals.

### Individuals

Individuals were asked to identify what best describes themselves, and Figure 1 shows the breakdown of responses. Individual submissions comprised (88.15%), with the remaining (11.85%) coming from organisations.

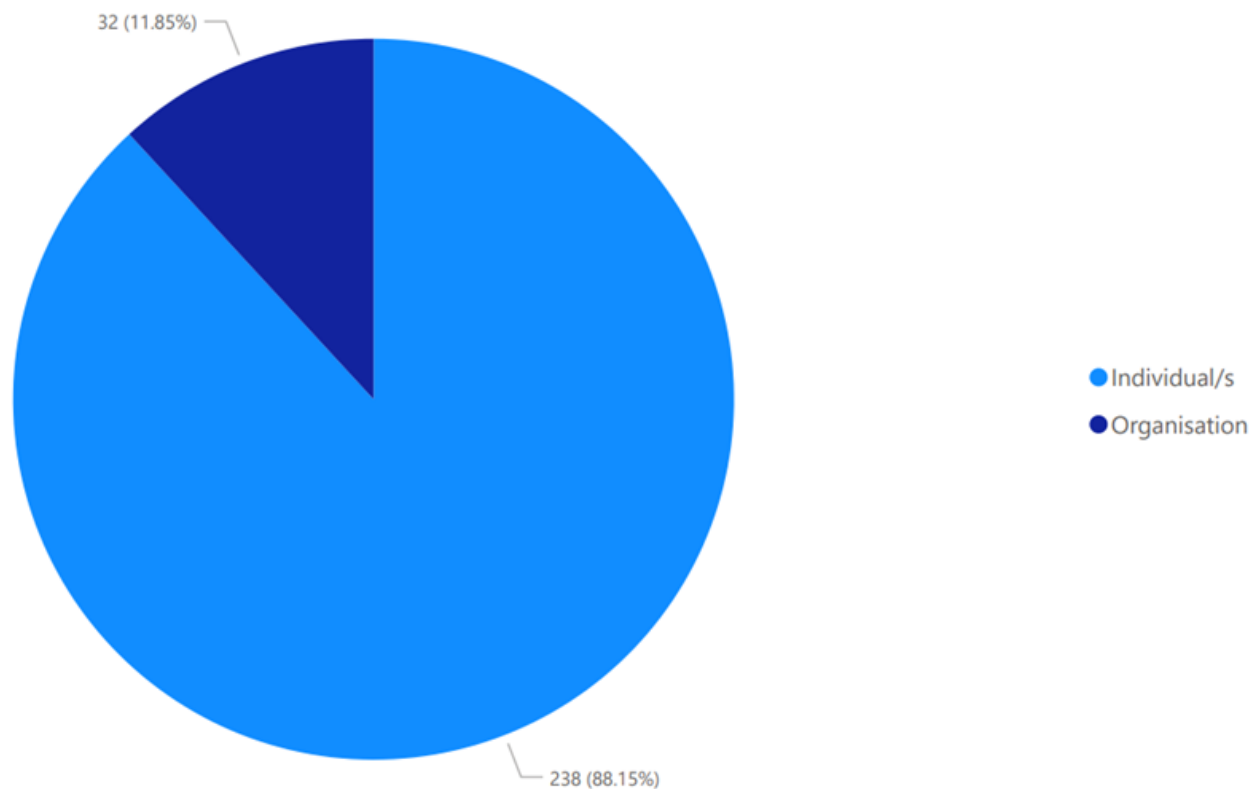


Figure 1 – Individual or Organisation.

Respondents were also asked to identify their postcode. A breakdown of the locations of the individuals who made submissions can be seen in Figure 2.

Of the submissions from individuals, over 78% of submissions were from residents in Tasmania. 18.89% of the individual submissions received from mainland Australia.

### Submissions by Location

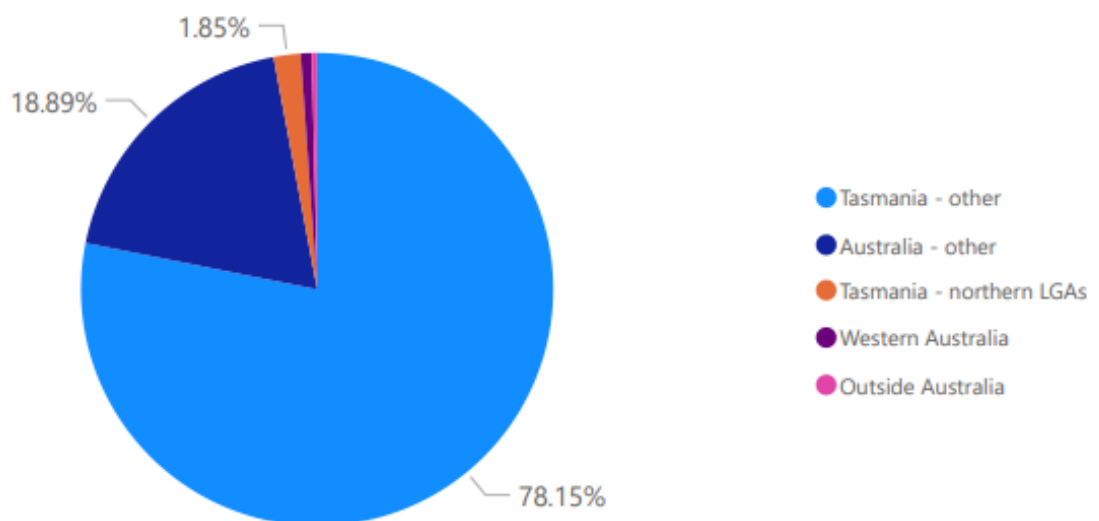


Figure 2 – Locations of individuals submissions



## Organisations

Organisations which made a submission were asked to categorise the sector that best describes their organisation. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of sectors for the 32 responses from organisations. Overall, the largest portion of responses from organisations came from the energy, electricity and renewables industry (40.6%). The next most represented sectors were non-government and community organisations (15.6%), industry (12.5%) and peak business bodies or unions (12.5%).

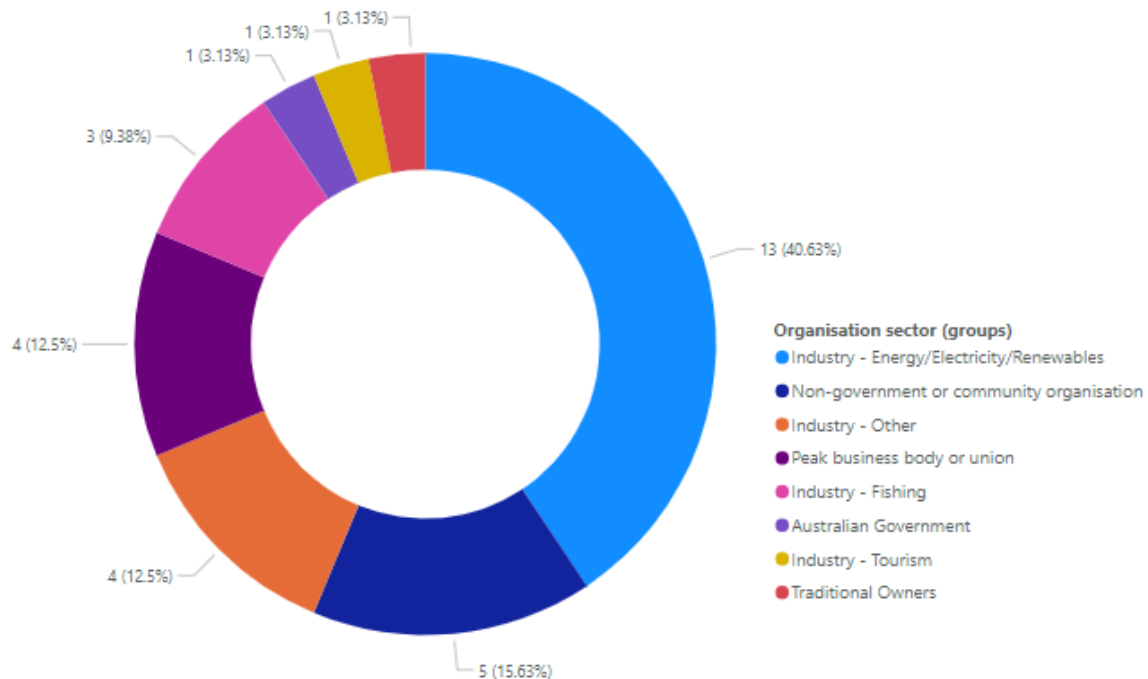


Figure 3 – Submissions from organisations by sector

## Organisations representing members

Approximately 30 submissions from organisations were from those representing their members, including fishers, workers, Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, and environmental groups.

## Feedback within submissions

### General sentiment

Respondents were not requested to explicitly state their opposition or support for the proposed declaration. Instead, sentiment was expressed through the identification of both opportunities and/or concerns.

All respondents were provided the option to expand on concerns, opportunities and benefits of the proposal across the main themes of community and onshore transmission, environment, fishing and other. A variation of sentiment was observed within submissions. Commonly submissions that cited opposition to the proposal also included details of benefits and opportunities, while other supportive submissions contained concerns in respect to individual themes. The variation and range of concerns, benefits and opportunities expressed in submissions have been examined further in the following sections.

### Benefits of offshore renewables and opportunities for the region

Many submissions noted benefits of offshore renewables and opportunities for the region, across various themes. Please note that there is overlap in these submissions (multiple positives identified within one submission). Figure 4 shows the percentage of submissions that identified benefits and/or opportunities across the main themes. These are expanded on in the sections below.

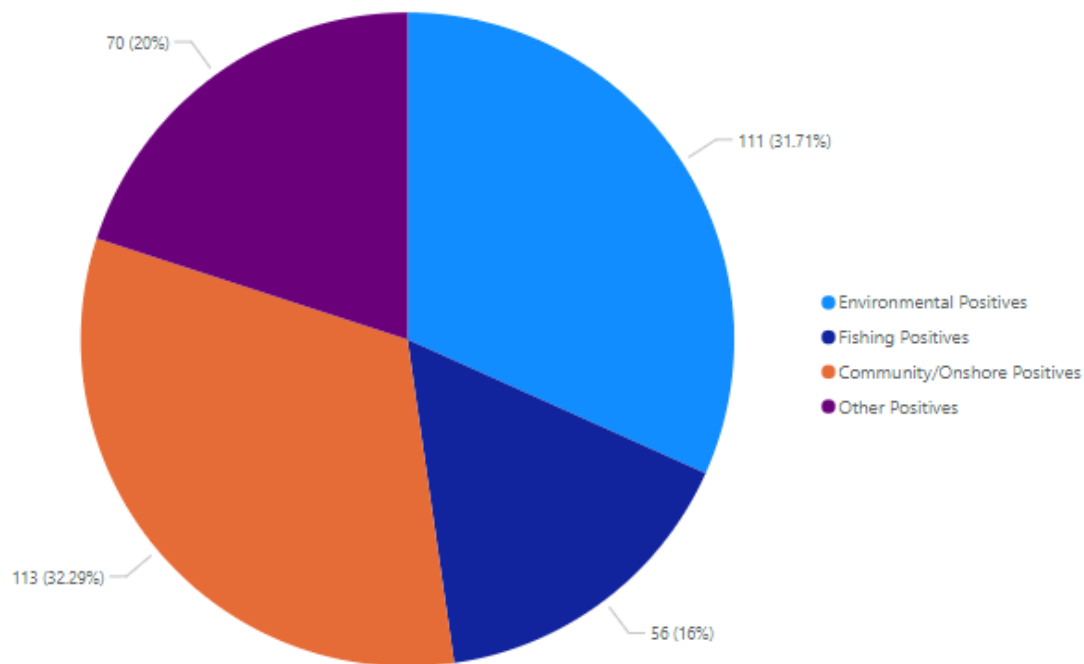


Figure 4 – Submissions identifying benefits or opportunities

### Community, local economy and onshore transmission

Approximately 32.29% of submissions (113) noted benefits of offshore renewable energy projects to the community, local economy and onshore transmission. These included broad sentiments focused on economic benefits such as an increase in employment opportunities related to construction, manufacturing and maintenance of transmission and offshore infrastructure, educational opportunities, cheaper electricity and increase/diversity of supply. Additionally, action on climate change, upgrade to local facilities and local supply chain opportunities were highlighted. Some respondents - Nexsphere- referred to the importance of supplying reliable renewable energy for the purposes of hydrogen production.

Organisations such as the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineer, Australian Maritime Officers Union, the Clean Energy Council, Tasmanian Ports Corporation identified opportunities from the development of a new industry including economic opportunities and the training of a skilled workforce and long-term employment for the region.

Submissions also emphasised potential community benefits, such as a local source of reliable renewable energy and a possible increase in local tourism and other investment opportunities in sectors like education, healthcare and community infrastructure. 81 respondents noted the investment in local infrastructure to support offshore energy projects as a community benefit and 32 submissions saw offshore windfarms as a potential tourist attraction in the region.

### Addressing climate change, renewable energy, and the environment

111 submissions stated that they could see benefits or opportunities related to the environment for offshore renewable energy projects in this proposed area. Submissions from organisations noting the benefits of this proposal in generating more renewable energy and addressing climate change included the Clean Energy Council.

Renewable energy and the displacement of fossil fuels was mentioned as one of the central environmental benefits. Some submissions commented that the long-term benefits would outweigh short-term impacts associated with the construction of the offshore renewable energy infrastructure. Additional benefits also noted in submissions included cheaper energy, improvements to energy security through grid diversification and stability, and being a positive alternative to further harm of the onshore environment.



While many were supportive of offshore renewable energy, the need to ensure that the marine environment was protected, with any impacts being avoided, reduced, or compensated for was strongly expressed. Many requested that adequate research be conducted into bird flight paths to assist in the positioning and operation of wind turbines minimises impacts to bird life. Likewise, whale migration pathways was also identified as an area requiring additional research.

Several submissions noted the potential environmental benefits of offshore renewables, separate to the broader climate benefits associated with renewable energy. These submissions identified the potential for offshore renewable energy infrastructure to create new habitats for marine life in the offshore area by functioning as artificial reefs.

### Visual amenity

Support for offshore wind turbine visibility was expressed in 96 submissions. This represents approximately 35% of all submissions received.

Submissions in support stated the distance from the shore would mean any visual impact would be minimal even on clear days. Some submissions stated that they are no worse to look at than ships and other existing infrastructure and much better to look at than an oil rig or a smokestack. Some submissions stated the benefits they would bring far outweighed any potential visual impacts. Many submissions stated they are not bothered by the sight of wind turbines, and some stated they enjoyed looking at them, describing the turbines as sculpturally beautiful, majestic, uplifting and giving hope.

### Commercial and recreational fishing

A total of 56 submissions identified potential fishing benefits. This represents 20% of all submissions received.

Submissions in support stated the potential for fishing vessels and personnel to be used to support construction and operation. They acknowledged the threat of climate change and warming oceans to all marine species and its potential impact on fishing and identified subsea infrastructure which could act as an artificial reef and provide a new marine habitat, improve marine biodiversity and provide both a refuge for species and benefit recreational fishing.

## Concerns

Many submissions noted concerns. Figure 5 shows the percentage of submissions that identified concerns across the main themes. These are expanded on in the sections below.

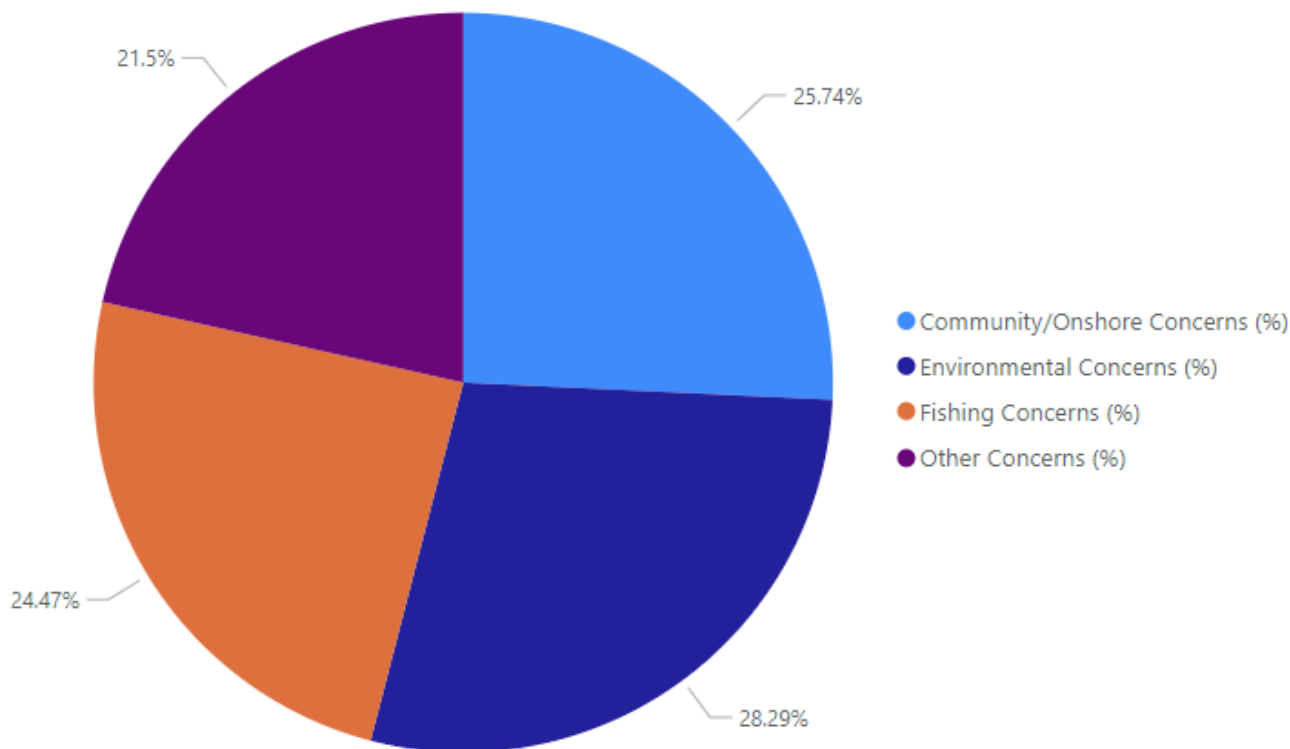


Figure 5 – Submissions identifying concerns

## Environment

74 % of submissions raised concerns relating to environmental impacts. The most common concern related to potential collisions risks for migratory birds and noise impacts upon whales.

Additional environmental concerns included;

- Decommissioning and recycling of materials
- Impacts upon migration of pelagic species through infrastructure creating fish aggregating devices (FADS)
- Physical impacts upon the seabed from construction and undersea cables
- Noise and vibration impact during construction and operation
- Visual impact from the coastline
- Perceived risks of oil leaks from turbine infrastructure
- Risk of collisions with ships and subsequent environmental impacts

Two environmental NGOs specifically identified noise impacts associated with the construction method of pile driving associated with monopiles. They believed they represent an unacceptable impact on marine life. They requested that pile driving for monopiles not be undertaken within Australian waters.

More broadly, some submissions questioned the scientific basis of climate change and the need for offshore wind. Relevant to the need, some of the submission that raised environmental concerns also questioned the demand for additional energy supply for Tasmania specifically. Many of the environmental concerns identified a lack of scientific research into the impacts of offshore wind farms in an Australian context. These submissions highlighted concerns regarding a lack of existing baseline environmental studies of the impacts of offshore wind farms on the marine environment in general. Submissions that identified an absence of baseline studies for migratory marine and avian species.

Potential impacts on birds were the most significant environmental concern. Migratory bird species were highlighted in the context of the Bass Strait being within the East Asian- Australian Flyway. Many submissions that made reference to birds, specifically highlighted that many of the species of concern are covered under international conventions including the Convention on Migratory Species (CAMBA) combined with all of requirements under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

One species in particular, the short-tailed shearwater (mutton bird), also referred to as yula by the Aboriginal community, was highlighted as a concern spanning both environmental and cultural impacts. During the muttonbird season, chicks are taken for their feathers, flesh and oil and this harvest forms an important part of Aboriginal culture in Tasmania.

Bird Life Australia highlighted that the offshore islands within Bass Strait host approximately 35% of the total breeding population of the endemic EPBC-listed Endangered Shy Albatross, and 75% of the Australian population of the EPBC-listed Migratory Short-tailed Shearwater. Submissions identified 52 seabird species or subspecies at high or medium risk from offshore wind facilities in Bass Strait waters greater than 20km from the shore. Six of these species are listed as Endangered under the EPBC Act: Northern Royal Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Amsterdam Albatross, Shy Albatross, Australian Gould's Petrel, and the Southern Giant-Petrel and a further 13 listed as Vulnerable. Of the seabird species considered to be at risk, 28 are listed as Migratory under the EPBC Act.

Submissions raising other environmental concerns also brought up extreme weather conditions being too much for wind farm infrastructure to handle, which could lead to infrastructure being heavily damaged, consequently damaging the marine environment in the process.

## Visual amenity

The impact of offshore wind farm projects on the visual amenity of the region was a concern raised throughout consultation. Of the 270 submissions received, 167 (62%) mentioned the impact on visual amenity as a concern.

Submissions outlined concerns with the reduction of visual beauty from places of natural beauty and significance. In addition to general concerns about visual amenity, some raised concerns specific to the Bass Strait region which included:

- Many parts of the coastline are elevated and have a view further out to sea meaning the turbines will still be quite visible even at 20km.
- Tasmania promotes and brands itself globally as a pristine wilderness escape and installing wind turbines in Bass Strait does not fit with that image and will damage the brand.
- The brand impact would be particularly strong on people arriving via the Spirit of Tasmania as they would first sail between wind farms before arriving in Tasmania.

## Commercial fishing

Fishing concerns were raised in 64% of all submissions received during the public consultation. Notable fishing industry organisations raised detailed concerns impacting commercial fishing as well as recommendations for helping address issues with the development of an offshore renewable energy industry, including Australian Fishing Trade Association, Scallop Fishermen's Association of Tasmania Inc, South East Trawl Fishing Industry Association (SETFIA) and Southern Shark Industry Alliance (SSIA).

Numerous submissions raised the potential impact to commercial fishing including;

- Exclusion/restricted access from the proposed area from fishing activities
- Destruction of seafloor and habitat
- Noise impacts on target species
- Short-term, long-term, and cumulative economic and social impacts

- Impacts on fish species, distribution, and abundance
- The impact of oil spills and other pollutants
- Navigation hazard and safety concerns
- Interaction of fishing equipment with cables
- Potential impacts of electro-magnetic fields on fish species
- Impact on recovery of Southern Bluefin Tuna fishery
- Lack of consultation with local fishers

Some recommendations provided in submissions to address challenges and concerns included:

- Cable locations to be mapped and updates provided to GPS services
- Environmental studies
- Further research on mitigation measures
- Ensuring that all windfarm proposals are subject to thorough and independent environmental impact assessment processes in accordance with the EPBC Act
- Coexistence opportunities
- In relation to gillnetting, transmission should not occur from the SE edge of the zone
- Compensation payments where coexistence cannot occur

## Recreational fishing

Similar to commercial fishing, the declared area was not identified as a significant recreational fishing location. However, the most common concerns for recreational fishers involved access to preferred areas and navigation risks. Sport fishing for tuna within a portion of the proposed area in the southwestern corner since was cited should widespread recreational access become prohibited. Some submissions linked recreational fishing to tourism, the decline of which could create broader socio-economic impacts in small coastal towns. Preserving the fishing rights and access of traditional owners was also noted among some submissions.

## Community

Concerns relating to the community were raised in 67% of the total submissions made. Concerns raised included lack of local infrastructure and impacts on cost to community, lack of local benefits and use of local supply chain, concerns on the benefit to Tasmania, loss of tourism, devaluation of land due to transmission and lack of consultation. Many of these submissions also stated that they could see benefits along with concerns.

The following sections outline the specific concerns raised by the public relating to the community.

### Tourism

There were approximately nine submissions that had concerns on the impact of offshore windfarms on the tourism industry. The main concern expressed was the visual impact on tourism and questions on the impact to the cruise ship industry. Northern Tasmania received approximately 663,000 visitors over the previous year with areas such as Bridport popular destinations.

### Local economy/business/jobs

A small number of submissions raised concerns regarding the local economy, specifically that jobs will be highly specialised and will not be available to Tasmanians.

### Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities

Five Tasmanian Aboriginal communities and one individual identifying as a Tasmanian Aboriginal 'person of interest' provided feedback on offshore renewable energy in the proposed area in submissions or at meetings. A range of cultural values and interests were raised, focused on potential environmental, cultural

and social impacts from offshore renewable energy projects and associated transmission activities on local Land and Sea Country.

Tasmanian Aboriginal communities expressed concerns about development of offshore renewable energy projects in the proposed area based on the potential impacts on undersea cultural heritage sites, aesthetic values and highly significant cultural and environmental values. While Tasmanian Aboriginal communities expressed support for the move to renewable energy, these groups noted the potential impacts on undersea cultural heritage sites, aesthetic values and highly significant cultural and environmental values from offshore wind development.

Concerns were raised about the potential impacts on culturally important species of marine mammals, short tailed shearwaters and other seabirds, as well as the cumulative impacts from multiple wind farms projects in the region. Development of offshore wind projects within potential viewpoints from Bass Strait Aboriginal Islands including, Babel, Big Dog and Titima/Trefoil Islands. The impacts on these island was raised with reference to visual impacts of windfarms and potential impacts on night skies from lighting on the turbines. Birding is one of the strongest cultural practices that continues to provide strong connection to the land and sea. Aboriginal groups also raised concern with consultation and a perceived lack of opportunity for the Aboriginal community to be involved in decisions that affect land and sea.

### Onshore impacts and transmission

Infrastructure for onshore electricity transmission was identified as a concern in approximately 30 submissions. There are plans for additional transmission lines in Northern Tasmanian that contributes to a heightened awareness and potential concern regarding onshore transmission. There was a broad understanding that any offshore wind development would require new onshore transmission to achieve connectivity and upgrading to transfer additional power.

Onshore transmission was raised in the context of visual impacts and some respondents highlighted that underground transmission was preferred as a mitigation option for visual impacts. Others raised concerns including transmission infrastructure impact on the coastal environment and land clearing.

### Local infrastructure and other community concerns

Some submissions highlighted that areas adjacent to the area may not be suitably equipped to handle an influx of workers and new infrastructure would be needed to support an offshore renewables industry. These submissions mostly referred to healthcare services, educational institutions, housing availability and public roads as the most vulnerable and as unable to service a sudden increase in population.

Cost of electricity for Tasmanians was raised in multiple submissions, specifically the concern of electricity exported to Victoria at the expense of Tasmanian taxpayers.

### Shipping /navigation

Numerous submissions identified concerns regarding shipping. These submissions identified the Bass Strait as a significant shipping route and raised concerns regarding the ability for ships and other vessels to safely navigate through and around wind turbines. Submissions commented that they believed offshore infrastructure would be a major hazard for maritime vessels. A subset of the submissions raised concerns regarding the introduction of offshore wind turbines and underwater transmission infrastructure to the area and how this would inevitably increase the collision and entanglement risk to professional and recreational fishing vessels. A portion cited concerns that offshore wind turbines and exclusion zones would force vessels to travel further into dangerous ocean conditions resulting in marine accidents.

One of the most common issues raised in submissions related to shipping was the increased risk of disaster during extreme weather events. These submissions noted that adding offshore wind turbines to this area would increase the risk of collisions with ships during periods of low visibility and extreme weather events.

## Other concerns or issues

In addition, submissions raised other concerns or issues which included:

- reliability, viability, and generational capacity of renewable energy, particularly wind power technology; and
- decommissioning of offshore renewable energy infrastructure and end of life processes, including ongoing maintenance and recycling of damaged or obsolete materials.

## Requests to enlarge the declaration area

There were seven submissions that requested additional areas be considered for declaration in the Bass Strait region. These submissions were made primarily by industry groups and clean energy/climate change consultancies. These submissions cited technology limitations around depth and expressed concerns about large areas of the proposed area being suboptimal for both fixed and floating technology. With suboptimal site conditions potentially decreasing interest in the Australian offshore wind market and investment, impacting the ability to reach final investment decision due to increased costs with potential community trust and reputational risks.