Fishing for Space in the New Blue Economy: Shoreside Competition and Conflict between the Fishing and Wind Industries in a Northeast US Working Waterfront

ABSTRACT

Working waterfront space is limited, leading to competition for coastal space among different waterfront dependent industries such as fisheries as well as with non-waterfront dependent users. The emergence of offshore wind power in the northeast US is squeezing already scarce port resources, exacerbating competition for these spaces, and generating conflicts. The recent focus on wind generation has augmented demand for port space to serve as staging areas for this offshore development. Although the development of wind power will occur offshore, Connecticut ports are anticipating port use by wind companies with winning bids. This paper focuses on the competition for waterfront space on the Thames River of Connecticut. Emerging wind power in the new Blue Economy looks to reshape port usage in the Thames River, generating both winners and losers: two fishing companies losing port access and at the same time, new potential opportunities may be opening for fishing businesses to work servicing the wind industry's needs. This paper explores the processes by which port space has been (re)allocated and contested and examines the nature of the ensuing conflicts and impacts involving the local fishing industry. Comparative information from other ports will be assessed as well.

INTRODUCTION

Working waterfronts are assets of the Blue Economy: areas of land-based water access critical to operations of water-dependent enterprises supporting a variety of water dependent uses and water enhanced businesses as well as non-water dependent. The threat of climate change has focused mitigation efforts on reducing fossil fuel consumption and given more impetus to wind-based power. In the US Northeast this deployment has focused offshore of the Atlantic coast. Wind energy provides coastal communities with potential opportunities but also potential challenges. Offshore wind energy desires ports with minimum water depths of at least 24', multiple berths of at least 450', minimum horizontal channel clearance of 130', navigation to open waters unobstructed by bridges and other overhead infrastructure, heavy-lift cranes and other shoreside infrastructure to facilitate assembly and transport turbines and other materials on and off of rail and ships on their route to offshore deployment areas, 10 or more acres available to be used for staging associated with delivery, storage, and assembly of turbines (Urban Harbors Institute, 2013). These requirements intersect or overlap with port characteristics desired by commercial, charter/head-boat and recreational fisheries.

OBJECTIVES

This paper seeks to examine the shoreside impacts associated with the emerging offshore wind industry respect to the Port of New London, particularly related to the fishing industry in the Port of New London, Connecticut. Specifically, we explore the governance of the Port of New London facility and the distributional consequences of those decisions, with reference to the fishing industry and focus on process and outcome: what is the nature of the processes by which port space has been (re)allocated and contested and the conflicts that have been generated; who benefits and how; who is left out and why.

CASE STUDY

In May 2018, Connecticut selected Deepwater Wind to supply the state's first energy produced from an offshore wind farm: 200 MW of energy from their proposed 25 turbine Revolution Wind development located in federal waters off Martha's Vineyard. Deepwater Wind was acquired by Ørsted and then sold half their interest in Deepwater wind to Eversource, New England's largest energy company, creating the North East Offshore partnership. In January 2019, the CT Port authority (CPA) announced Gateway as the new operator of the New London State Pier. Weeks later Gateway gave all state pier tenants notice to vacate the pier within 60 days. This included two fishing companies, the salt company DRVN and 45 longshoremen. Ørsted/Eversource's announced their intention to designate the New London State Pier the Northeast Hub for all Wind Turbine Generator activity for all their northeast projects and to make a capital investment of at least $57 million plus $30 million in lease fees towards their use of the State Pier over a decade. A permit request for the construction was submitted to the Army Corps of Engineers and CT Dept of Energy and Environmental Protection in 2020 but as of Nov. 2021 has not been permitted.

METHODS

We attended virtual meetings of the CPA, reviewed relevant documents and the analysis of submitted public responses to US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding the proposed plans for the New London State Pier improvements and transition to a staging area for the wind energy joint venture by Ørsted and Eversource and conducted content analysis of the public comments in order to map out and to some extent, quantify the discursive landscape surrounding the State Pier project, what comprises public benefit in this case and who is or should receive it.

RESULTS

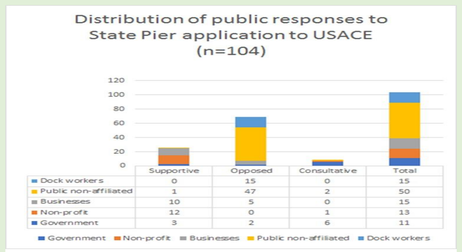

Figure 2. USACE public comments regarding State Pier redevelopment.

OPPOSED	SUPPORTIVE	CONSULTATIVE, QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, RECOMMENDATIONS
• prefer multiple use (22) • desire public hearing (24) • believes monopoly to be illegal/unfair (6) • removes public benefit/access (8) • environmental concerns (1) • more study required (4) • lack of public participation/lack of transparency (1) • electrical rate impact (1) • negative economic impacts/ to existing small businesses (13) • loss of jobs (20)	• small business enhancement/vitalized (19) • supply chain growth (13) • infrastructure upgrade/modernization (11) • transportation benefit/intermodal (5) • economic benefit/maritime/blue (22) • more jobs (12) • green technology (1) • environmental benefits (1) • future benefits (5)	• regulatory requirements – stormwater (4) • historic preservation (1) • resilience/diversity/flexibility (1) • compliance with CT Coastal Management Act (1) • navigational safety (1)

Table 1. Content analysis of USACE comments (n=104).

Figure 1. Source: Nathaniel Trumbull

Source: CT Port Authority

Port/Facility Name/ Place Name	City/Town	County, State	Fabrication, Assembly, Deployment	Crew Transfer, Logistics, Storage	SFEC Site	Commercial Fishing	For-Hire Recreational Fishing
Port of New London	New London	New London, CT	X	X		X	
Stonington	Stonington	New London, CT				X	X
New Bedford Marine Terminal	New Bedford	Bristol, MA	X	X		X	
Westport	Westport	Bristol, MA				X	
Sparrow's Point	Edgemere	Baltimore, MD	X				
Paulsboro Marine Terminal	Paulsboro	Gloucester, NJ	X				
East Hampton	East Hampton	Suffolk, NY			X		
Port of Montauk	Montauk	Suffolk, NY		X	X	X	X
Shinnecock Fishing Dock	Hampton Bays	Suffolk, NY		X			X
Greenport Harbor	Greenport	Suffolk, NY		X			X
Port of Providence	Providence	Providence, RI	X				
Port of Galilee/Point Judith	Narragansett	Washington, RI		X		X	X
Old and New Harbor	New Shoreham	Washington, RI		X			X
Port of Davisville and Quonset Point	North Kingstown	Washington, RI	X	X			X
Newport	Newport	Newport, RI				X	X
Tiverton	Tiverton	Newport, RI				X	X
Little Compton	Little Compton	Newport, RI				X	X
Norfolk International Terminal	Norfolk	Norfolk City, VA	X				

Note: CT = Connecticut, MA = Massachusetts, MD = Maryland, NJ = New Jersey, NY = New York, RI = Rhode Island, VA = Virginia.
Figure 3. Eastern US port characteristics needed by wind and assessment of fishing industry use. Source: US Dept. of Interior Draft EIS

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DISCUSSION

New London State Pier provides a revealing example of conflicts over waterfront use and space. Conflict has emerged between existing port users and the Connecticut Port Authority as the use of the entire port area has apparently given to offshore wind energy (OWE) developer Ørsted-Eversource, displacing all existing users of the facilities, with no opportunities for public deliberation or input on the project prior to the submission of permits (Ebbin and Trumbull, 2021). The redesign has also impacted other businesses within New London's working waterfront. Concern on the part of Cross Sound Ferry about navigation of its ferries around the newly configured pier led to design changes reported to have added an additional $50-$60 million to project costs. No public hearings were held by the CPA until 2021, when the CT Dept of Energy and Environmental Protection held during their environmental permitting process, which they granted.

CPA decision-making has:

- been top down
- less than transparent
- dominated by powerful commercial interests
- excluded the public
- excluded existing State Pier-based businesses from being at the table
- excluded the local municipality, which does not have a seat on the CPA although there are open positions available
- excluded relevant agencies from deliberations such as the regional public agency SCCOG that is charged with transportation planning and oversight

At this time, eight of the longshoremen have been offered work with Carpenters Local 326 and recently the two commercial fishing companies, Montville-based Donna May Fisheries and Waterford-based Out of Our Shell Enterprises, who utilize the State Pier have been relocated to another part of the State Pier and allowed to retain operations there. Thus, for the moment New London's State Pier plans seem to be able to accommodate both the needs of the offshore wind and fisheries sectors. However, New London's situation is not typical of other Northeast ports with more fisheries investments.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The needs of the emerging Northeast wind energy industry exceed the space available in any one port. Multiple ports are being considered for their shoreside needs. The New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal, managed by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, has demonstrated that offshore wind assembly infrastructure can co-exist within the same harbor as a very large and active fishing fleet. A future North Terminal expansion project in New Bedford will increase dockage capacity, expand direct access to the port's offloading and seafood processing facilities, and potentially provide additional capacity for offshore wind assembly and related operations. Co-existence of wind and fisheries will depend on sufficient port space, which New Bedford has and other ports may lack.

Multi-use ports that integrate multiple activities such as recreational and commercial fishing, eco/tourism (whale watching, dive boats), marine transport, aquaculture production, offshore wind energy or other activities may provide fisherman with alternative livelihoods during off seasons, closures or resource declines and also provide new uses for fishing vessels. In New London, Connecticut, a new company, Sea Services North America, just began operations and a collaboration with Ørsted/Eversource. According to their website, the company provides marine services "for offshore asset management, powered by a collective of experienced and knowledgeable fishermen with a deep understanding of our shared marine environment" and seeks to take advantage of new opportunities created by the offshore wind industry by allowing fishermen to diversify and keep working during closures. Ørsted claims "this is the first time an offshore wind developer and a commercial fishing consortium have signed a substantial commercial contract in the history of US offshore wind" (Smith, 2021: B1). The company, formed by an attorney and the owner of a Seafood Distribution company, has hired a local fisherman as their manager of operations. To date the company has provided scouting and monitoring services for the preconstruction phase of Revolution Wind.

Although some conflicts between the commercial fishing and for-hire recreational sectors may be unavoidable, especially at sea, it may be that the fishing fleet of New London and more broadly the Northeast may be able to co-exist in ports with offshore wind staging or assembly footprints. Northeast working waterfronts are numerous and diverse; each has varying levels of engagement with commercial, for-hire and recreational fisheries. Small ports with the little fisheries investment may be able to create mutually beneficial outcomes which rely on seasonal differences in work schedules, allowing harbored fishing fleets may be able to provide demand for labor and other shoreside businesses. One of the longer-term unknowns is the extent to which specific U.S. ports will create specialized niches to thrive in one or more of the various roles required for offshore wind energy deployment, operation, and maintenance. Without such specialization or cooperation among the relatively limited number of Northeast ports with the characteristics required by the wind industry, the need for shoreside space during the phases of turbine assembly, deployment, maintenance and future decommissioning may outstrip the existing port space and infrastructure in the Northeast.

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