

Submission on “Developing a Regulatory Framework for Offshore Renewable Energy”, Second Discussion Document, August 2023

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this document. The document focuses on options for the design of regulation for construction, operation and decommissioning of offshore windfarms. I wish to highlight some points which are necessary to consider before the regulation framework is developed further. Some of these points arose from consultation on the first discussion document in December 2022 “Enabling Investment in Offshore Renewable Energy”, and are subsequently acknowledged in the second discussion document.

New Zealand is a world hotspot for diversity and abundance of seabirds and marine mammals. However, many areas of the New Zealand territorial sea and EEZ have low levels of baseline environmental data (p.11).

Impacts of offshore wind developments on seabirds and marine mammals have been demonstrated overseas. It is unclear what these impacts will be in New Zealand (p.44). A precautionary approach to the development of offshore wind farms is therefore warranted.

I support the conclusion from the December 2022 discussion document that baseline monitoring of proposed wind farm sites should be done collaboratively (p.12). This will be more effective and more efficient than a piecemeal process in which each developer conducts separate monitoring. The process should be inclusive and transparent, as suggested by some submitters (p.12).

I support the conclusion from the December 2022 discussion document about the benefits of a government-led spatially-planned approach to the development of offshore wind (p.12). A government-led approach will facilitate collaboration, inclusivity and transparency, and is better suited to considering multiple uses and cumulative impacts. I disagree with the government’s preferred option stated in the second discussion document to follow a developer-led process in the near-term in order to “not delay a first wave of development” (p.12). These are highly impactful decisions and should not be made in haste. Much is at stake, and there will be serious consequences of getting it wrong. Starting with a developer-led approach may compromise the success of a government-led spatially-planned approach.

I therefore urge the government to carefully consider the timeline for development of the offshore wind industry. A government-led baseline biodiversity monitoring programme should be implemented as soon as is feasible. This will provide the information required to guide decisions on where it is appropriate to locate offshore wind developments, while considering the other uses of New Zealand’s territorial waters and EEZ. Robust baseline surveys will also provide the data required to assess the impacts of subsequent developments and design effective mitigation. With looming targets for renewable generation of electricity, there are other options that could be considered in the interim. There is still a lot of potential for onshore windfarms, for which the likely benefits and impacts are much better understood.

I am very happy to discuss these issues in more detail