

Press release:

Translate offshore wind energy and biodiversity targets into concrete actions

Over 150 participants from politics, industry, NGOs and academia gathered today to align EU offshore wind targets with biodiversity goals at the “*Strong Winds, Thriving Seas - Turning Ambition into Action for Nature-Friendly Offshore Wind and Grids*” conference.

Brussels, 30 October 2024 – At today’s “*Strong Winds, Thriving Seas*” conference, participants identified actionable and innovative strategies to help align the EU’s offshore wind targets with crucial biodiversity goals.

Participants highlighted the importance of scaling up examples of sustainable project planning and implementation to speed up wind and grid development. They discussed how offshore wind and grids can be deployed in a timely manner while minimising impacts on nature, restoring biodiversity, and involving coastal communities.

Members of the Offshore Coalition for Environment and Nature (OCEaN) called upon the incoming European Commission and EU Member States to ensure robust maritime spatial planning and make better use of ecological and social non-price criteria in offshore wind auctions. In their joint statement ([available here](#)), OCEaN Members further outlined how the EU’s biodiversity protection and restoration targets can go hand in hand with the further expansion of offshore wind and grid infrastructure.

OCEaN also **launched a report** on ‘*Avoidance and minimisation of environmental impacts from offshore wind & grid*’ ([available here](#)). The report offers an overview of existing measures to reduce impacts, highlights knowledge gaps and provides recommendations to improve the deployment of offshore wind and grids to achieve even better outcomes for nature. Additionally, OCEaN launched an [Energy and Nature database](#) to inspire project developers, governments and permitting authorities.

The conference also featured an *Energy & Nature Fair*, showcasing 20 projects pioneering innovative approaches to maritime spatial planning, nature restoration, multi-use and the measurement of environmental impacts.

The insights gained from the “*Strong Winds, Thriving Seas*” conference will be vital in shaping policies and practices that harness wind energy while protecting Europe’s precious marine and coastal ecosystems. As we move forward, the collective effort from stakeholders, such as OCEaN, will continue to be crucial in achieving a truly nature-and-people positive energy transition in Europe.

Voices from the event:

Tinne Van der Straeten, Belgium’s Minister for Energy: “In a world where we always build alongside nature and communities, nature protection and citizen participation are essential to make the energy transition an inclusive reality that benefits all. In the upcoming tender for the Belgian offshore zone, public participation has been set as a mandatory criterion. Meanwhile, we are building Princess Elisabeth Island, a pioneering project designed with ‘nature inclusive’ principles to protect and enhance marine biodiversity. These two examples show that Belgium is fully committed to advancing sustainable offshore wind and grid solutions, while prioritising biodiversity and keeping these critical issues high on the EU and regional agendas.”

Antonella Battaglini, CEO of RGI: “Offshore wind, together with an interconnected grid and grid reinforcement on land to reach consumption centres, is pivotal for European energy security and economic development. Offshore and grids are also essential for the decarbonisation of Europe’s energy systems. Promising examples of nature-friendly, community-centred planning are already emerging, and it’s time to scale up these efforts. We are all called to support this essential transition, and RGI is committed to driving this progress through its initiatives, OCEaN and GINGR.”

Giles Dickson, CEO of WindEurope, “Collaboration is key to ensure the expansion of wind energy and the restoration of Europe’s seas. Europe wants the North Seas to become a green energy powerhouse and is increasingly taking a sea basin approach to offshore wind planning. It must also take a sea-basin approach to biodiversity mitigation and restoration. Mitigate and restore wherever in the sea basin you can have the most impact. And if the wind industry, environmental groups and relevant national authorities think the best mitigation is to ban a certain type of fishing in a certain area, then don’t let a few other national fishing industries get in the way. EU law now says renewables are a matter of “overriding public interest.”

Ariel Brunner, Director of BirdLife Europe: “With the adoption of milestone legislations on both renewable energy and nature restoration, we have a unique opportunity to coordinate two of the most important things we need to do for the survival of our society. We can and must allocate space both to renewable energy and grid installations, and to protected areas for biodiversity. And we must rapidly invest in both types of infrastructures, the artificial and the natural.”

More information on ...

...the [Strong Winds, Thriving Seas Conference](#)

The “Strong Winds, Thriving Seas” event was organised by RGI and WindEurope, who work collaboratively through the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN), which includes over 50 organisations from across EU sea basins.

...the [Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature \(OCEaN\)](#)

OCEaN brings together NGOs, TSOs and wind industry organisations from across Europe to work towards a sustainable deployment of offshore energy and grid infrastructure, while ensuring alignment with nature protection and healthy marine ecosystems.

...the [Renewables Grid Initiative \(RGI\)](#)

RGI is a unique collaboration of NGOs and TSOs from across Europe engaging in an ‘energy transition ecosystem-of-actors’. We promote sustainable grid development to enable renewables’ growth to achieve decarbonisation in line with the Paris Agreement.

...[WindEurope](#)

WindEurope is the voice of the wind industry, actively promoting wind energy across Europe. We have over 600 members from across the whole value chain of wind energy: wind turbine manufacturers, component suppliers, power utilities and wind developers, financial institutions, research institutes and national wind energy associations.

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