

## North Sea RAC squares up to wind farms

With the envisaged escalation of windfarm developments in the North Sea, the North Sea Regional Advisory Council has taken the first steps towards producing a set of minimum standards for how the fishing sector and the offshore windfarm industry should consult with each other.

Mis en forme : Justifié

The NSRAC's Spatial Planning Working Group invited windfarm operators and fisheries scientists to a meeting at Defra in London on 5 February to discuss conditions under which the fishing and windfarm industries can best co-exist in an increasingly crowded North Sea.

Apart from the UK, members of fishermen's organisations from the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Sweden shared experiences from the growth of windfarm developments in their own national waters. No-one challenged the need for renewable energy to combat climate change, but there was deep concern about the practicalities of setting up offshore windfarms. The meeting learned that the approach to planning varies widely between Member States, with trawl fishing, for example, excluded from Danish windfarms but not from those in UK waters.

After presentations from the science side (Stuart Rogers, CEFAS), offshore wind operators (Jesper Krarup Holst, DONG Energy) and inshore fishing sector (John Nichols and Joss Wiggins, Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee), the meeting focussed on three key areas: mitigation (compensation and funding for adapting fishing practices), communication and trust-building, and next steps.

A recurring theme from around the North Sea was that fishermen felt they were last in the queue to be consulted and were confronted with a 'done deal'. There was agreement that the fishing sector is typically consulted much too late in the planning process, often after provisional licences are issued.

Building on this meeting, the NSRAC will set up a focus group to draw up a protocol for ensuring timely and effective consultation. This will also be used to inform this critical area of Marine Spatial Planning in Europe's regional seas, highlighted in the EU's maritime policy green paper. Euan Dunn, chair of the NSRAC's Spatial Planning Working Group, said: "The North Sea RAC can play a critical role in acting as an honest broker between its stakeholders and the offshore windfarm industry'

The RAC aims to lay down some ground rules that will hopefully gain currency around North Sea member states and so head off some of the inevitable conflict between fishing space and windfarms as the demand for renewable energy grows."

For more information contact: ...  
ann.bell@Aberdeenshire.gov.uk  
0044 7770 314 678  
0044 1224 665341.