



Let's Not Rush Building Windmills

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The coastal and ocean waters of New Jersey are an irreplaceable resource. They provide recreational opportunities, support a vital commercial fishing industry, are home to a rich wildlife community, and are the foundation of one of the state's largest tourism industries. The coast and ocean are the underpinning of efforts to revitalize coastal cities such as Asbury Park and Atlantic City.

Our ocean and beaches are the largest public trust in the state. We have learned through hard lessons how fragile and vulnerable this resource, and the economies that depend on it, can be—pollution and a failure of stewardship for the ocean led to the beach closures, massive fish kills and economic crashes in the late 1980s. We have come to understand that questions about using the ocean must be approached carefully, with full knowledge of the impacts and consequences.

Today, New Jersey faces an increasing number of proposals to use our ocean for a new industrial purpose—energy development. There are proposals for more than a thousand industrial windmills off New Jersey's coast. Private developers, most with no record on these types of projects, are seeking state and federal approvals, absent of any evaluation of the environmental impacts, economic impacts on existing commercial fishing operations or recreational fishing activities, and no evaluation of the impacts to recreational beach goers, shoreline residential property values or tourism-based economies and, by extension, of local tax revenues.

The adequacy of state and federal regulatory programs to protect the public's interests is questionable. Significant unanswered questions regarding compensation for use of public trust lands, decommissioning requirements, and how to ensure windmills are not simply "feeding the grid"—responding to

increasing energy consumption – but rather are linked to, and result in, improved air quality needs to be addressed.

These are important public policy concerns that cannot simply be left unexamined—the potential consequences are too great, affecting too many varied interests across the state. Given the increasing demand for such projects, it is critical that New Jersey develop a responsible policy, based on a thorough understanding of the costs and potential benefits of offshore industrial wind farms.

Acting Gov. Richard Codey has put in place a blue ribbon panel to examine these questions, and to develop reasonable answers as to whether windmills off New Jersey's coast are a good idea. While the panel does its work, the state will put any approvals or funding on hold. This is a prudent action to safeguard the public and allow a thoughtful policy to be developed. It does no harm to credible initiatives to promote renewable energy.

While industrial windmill farms may present an opportunity to advance renewable energy generation, the current situation raises serious questions about how adequately possible environmental impacts and use conflicts are being anticipated and addressed.

Codey's initiative is an act of responsible stewardship for New Jersey's coast and provides a national model for assessing proposed industrial uses of our ocean. New Jersey's ocean and coast are among our most precious natural resources. The governor is treating it with the respect it deserves.

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