UMass Dartmouth scientists to help guide regional offshore wind development

The Baker-Polito Administration announced UMass Dartmouth as one of four institutions selected as part of a Southern New England pilot regional fisheries studies project worth $1.1 million.

Scientists at UMass Dartmouth's School for Marine Science & Technology (SMAST) have been awarded $278,592 to conduct fisheries surveys as part of the Bureau of Ocean Science Energy Management's (BOEM's) Regional Fisheries Studies to Guide Offshore Wind Development.

The Baker-Polito Administration, in partnership with the State of Rhode Island and the BOEM, announced grants worth $1.1 million to four institutions to support regional fisheries studies that will collect data vital to the ongoing development of the offshore wind industry in North America, according to the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs press release.

"Collaborating with our state and federal partners to support these studies will help us better manage fisheries and natural habitats while positioning the offshore wind industry to stimulate economic development and deliver clean, affordable energy to Massachusetts," said Governor Charlie Baker.

"The data collected through these regional studies will help inform offshore wind development, protect fisheries and marine wildlife, and ensure our fishing industry continues to thrive," said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito.

The first-in-the-nation studies will conduct important research on recreational and commercial fisheries, seabed

habitat, and comparable offshore wind policies in Europe. SMAST scientists will conduct towed net surveys for larval lobster and fish neuston (small fish organisms) throughout the wind energy areas. This 18-month study, led by Professor Kevin Stokesbury, will provide baseline information on the spatial and temporal distribution of species at their earliest life stage, during which they are transported by tides and currents.

“This project is an example of how our dedicated School for Marine Science and Technology faculty, staff and students are working hand-in-hand with the fishing industry and federal and state agencies to gather critical data necessary to advance the development of offshore wind in a manner that ensures the sustainability of important fisheries resources,” said SMAST Dean Steven Lohrenz.

INSPIRE Environmental, the University of Rhode Island, and the New Bedford Port Authority have also been awarded contracts as part of the project.

The initiative is sponsored and funded by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.

Read full press release here