## ITEM 1 PROPOSED OFFSHORE WIND ZONE DECLARATION

On 14 August 2023, the Hon. Chris Bowen MP, Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Energy formally announced the commencement of public consultation for the Illawarra Offshore Wind Zone Declaration. Consultation closes on 16 October 2013. It is proposed that Council provides a submission as outlined in this report.

### RECOMMENDATION

1 Council prepare a submission to the Commonwealth Government on the proposed Illawarra offshore wind zone and that in its submission Council -

a Note that the proposed offshore wind zone strategically aligns with Council's efforts to respond to the climate emergency and support local employment opportunities.

b Request that consideration of visual impact from our coastline be further assessed to address community concerns and that consideration be given to extending the minimum distance from the coastline and/or restrict the size of the infrastructure to minimise visual impact.

c Note concern with the following matters and request that Commonwealth and State Government agencies collaborate to consider further and provide additional information on -

- Waste management of old blades and equipment.
- Land based requirements including any manufacturing exclusion zones and compatibility with surrounding uses.
- Transmission to the grid including impacts.
- Impact on shipping channels.
- Impact on recreational fishing.
- Impact on fauna and in particular marine life and migratory birds.

d Request that Commonwealth Government engage with State Government, local councils and relevant stakeholders to ensure future offshore wind farms provide local benefits (eg new business, upskill of local workforce, etc.).

2 Should the declaration be made, Council will continue to monitor and assess the next phases of this project and provide submissions to support positive short and long-term outcomes for the Wollongong community.

### REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Chris Stewart, Manager City Strategy
Authorised by: Mark Adamson, Director Planning + Environment - Future City + Neighbourhoods (Acting)

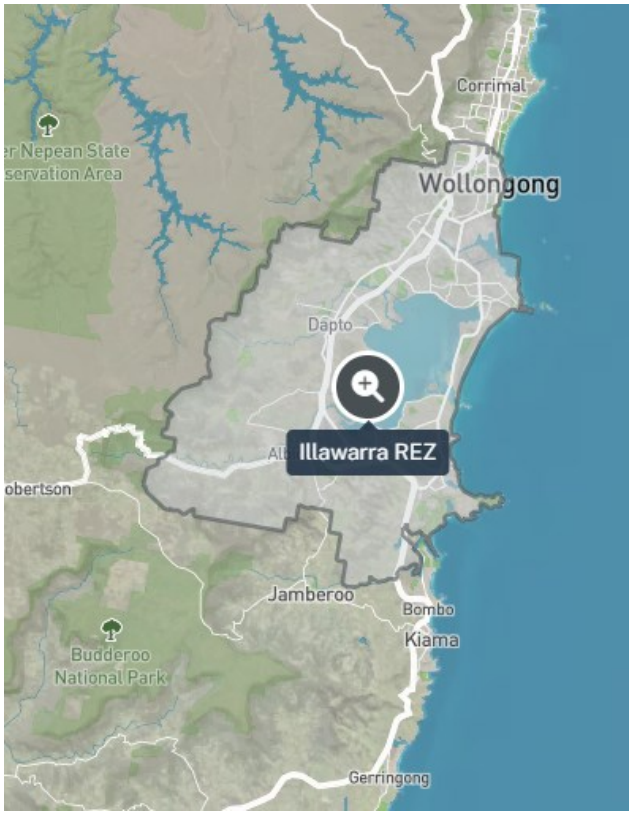
### ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments for this report.

### BACKGROUND

The Federal Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) proposed Illawarra Offshore Wind Zone will work towards reaching the Australian Government target of net zero emissions by 2050.

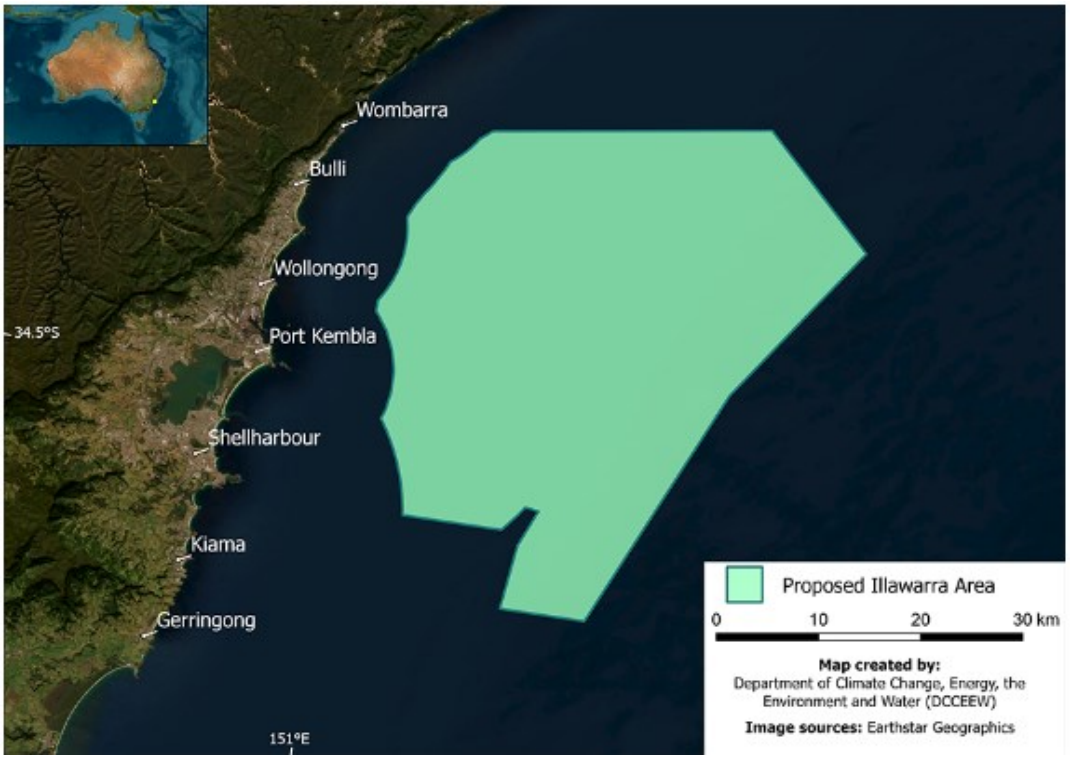
The offshore wind zone is located east of the declared Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) shown on Map 1. Whilst the two zones are different and respectively managed by Commonwealth Government (DCCEEW) and State Government (NSW Energy Corporation / EnergyCo) they will both attract and allow renewable energy projects in our region.




*Map 1: Declared Illawarra REZ*

## PROPOSAL

The proposed offshore wind area is shown on Map 2. It has an area of 1,461 square kilometres and potential to generate up to 4.2GW from offshore wind farms which is enough to power up to 3.4 million homes. The proposed zone extends from Wombarra in the north to Kiama in the south and is at least 10km from the coast at its closest point. It is estimated to deliver up to 2,500 jobs in construction and 1,250 jobs ongoing.




*Map 2: Proposed offshore wind zone (not yet declared)*

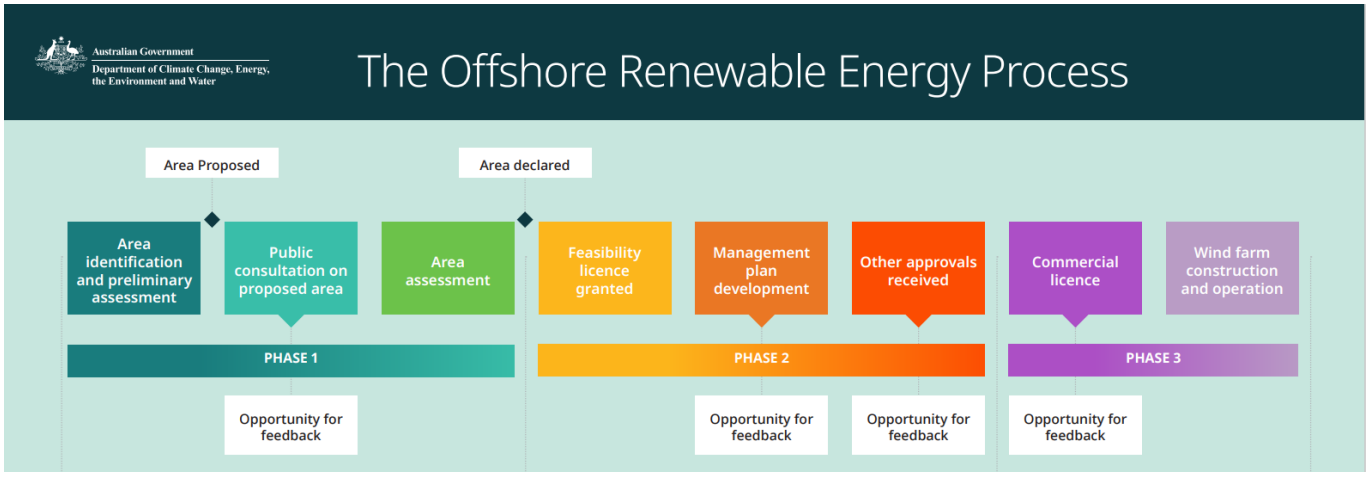
The current proposed offshore wind zone declaration is a first phase to seek public feedback on how communities and industry use coastal and ocean resources across the Illawarra region.

Offshore renewable energy projects can only be progressed in areas that have been declared by the Federal Minister. If the proposed area was declared, offshore renewable energy projects would be subject to separate application and approval process. The approval phase will provide an opportunity for further community consultation and feedback. Similarly, if the project was to receive approval, the proponent would apply for a commercial licence which would also be subject to community consultation providing a third opportunity for feedback. As the process takes place each phase provides an opportunity to provide more details and consider project specific impacts and proposed mitigations measures.

Before an offshore infrastructure activity can commence a licence holder will need to submit a management plan to the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator (the Regulator). The Regulator sits within the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA). It oversees work health and safety, infrastructure integrity, environmental management and financial security for offshore infrastructure activities. Management plans will detail how offshore infrastructure activities are proposed to be carried out and plans will vary according to the licence and type of project. Proponents will need to seek all required approvals and licences under relevant Commonwealth and State legislation before any offshore infrastructure activities can occur. The specific size, amount, location and design of the wind turbines will not be known until proponents come forward with their proposals.

The Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act (OEI Act) which come into force on 2 June 2022 sets out, in combination with supporting regulations, the requirements that apply to the construction, installation, commissioning, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of offshore renewable energy infrastructure and offshore electricity transmission infrastructure (offshore infrastructure).

Before an offshore infrastructure project can proceed, it must meet the requirements of the OEI Act and all relevant Commonwealth and State and Territory environmental requirements. Licences issued under the OEI Act are separate to approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and State and Territory requirements and approval under one Act does not guarantee approval under another. Details of the process can be found using the link - [Offshore Renewables Environmental Approvals.pdf (nopsema.gov.au)]




## CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

In defining the boundaries of the proposed area, the Australian Government has considered feedback received from Commonwealth and NSW Government agencies, as well as technical limitations identified in the Blue Economy CRC report into Offshore Wind in Australia. Further work is being done with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and the Port Authority of New South Wales to understand the vessel traffic in the area, and any requirements for the safe management of shipping to and from Port Kembla.

The needs of existing recreational boating will also be considered in the consultation process, and if an area is declared, boating will need to be considered by individual developers during the licensing phase.

The proposed zoning for offshore wind in the Illawarra is on public exhibition from 14 August 2023 to 16 October 2023. The following Information sessions were organised by DCCEEW -

- Bulli, 4pm to 7pm, Monday 18 September 2023, Bulli Senior Citizens Centre
- Port Kembla, 10am to 12pm, Tuesday 19 September 2023, Port Kembla Senior Citizens Centre
- Wollongong, 4pm to 7pm, Tuesday 19 September 2023, Wollongong Art Gallery

A Councillors briefing session was also provided by DCCEEW on Monday 4 September 2023

It is understood from the feedback received by our community that they are most concerned with the visual and environmental impacts of this proposal.

## PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan: Goal 1 'We value and protect our environment' and Goal 2 'We have an innovative and sustainable economy'. It specifically delivers on the following –

Objective - We will work together to reduce emissions and the effects of a changing climate.

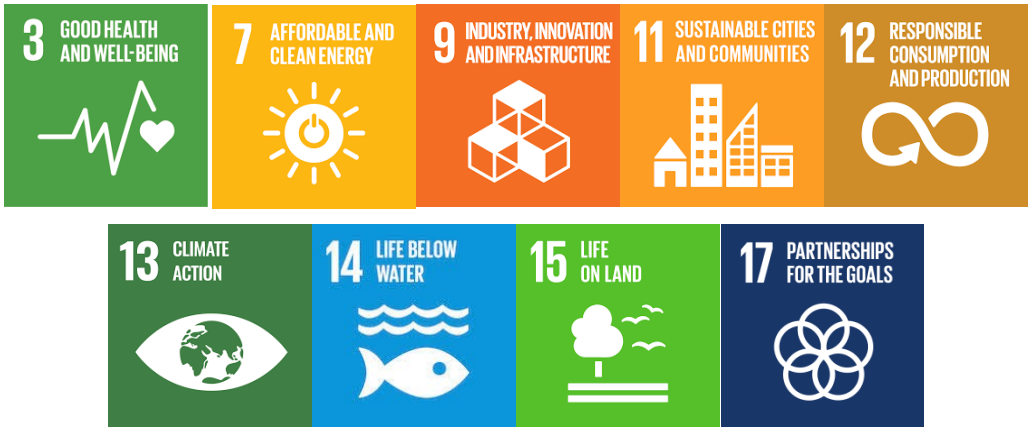
Objective - Development is well planned and sustainable and we protect our heritage.

Objective - The region's industry base continues to diversify and local employment opportunities increase.

Objective - We are leaders in innovative and sustainable and green industries.

| Community Strategic Plan 2032 | | Delivery Program 2022-2026 |
|---|---|---|
| Strategy | | Service |
| 1.4 | Work together to achieve net zero carbon emissions and reduce waste going to landfill. | Land Use Planning |
| 1.3 | Increase our resilience to natural disasters and changing climate to protect life, property and the environment. | |
| 2.5 | Work with partners to facilitate sustainable and green industries. | |

Offshore wind farms with relevant environmental safeguards generally support the achievement of the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals –




## SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The impacts of climate change will significantly affect vulnerable communities, infrastructure and asset viability and management, biodiversity and water availability.

Offshore wind farming contributes to reducing emissions and contribute to avert and reduce the impacts of climate change.

The proposed area excludes areas with environmental significance including the marine parks (Royal National Park located north and the Jervis Bay Marine Park located south), Shelf Rocky Reef Key Ecological Feature (KEF) and Biologically Important Areas for breeding for the Little Penguin (Eudyptula minor). Key ecological features define areas of ecological importance in the Commonwealth marine environment that are of regional importance for either biodiversity or ecosystem function and integrity.

There are Matters of National Environmental Significance, under the EPBC Act, in and near the proposed area. These include biologically important areas for -

- Sea birds (Wedge Tailed Shearwater, White-Faced Storm-Petrel, Great Winged-Petrel, Northern Giant-Petrel, Albatross sp.)
- Cetaceans (whales and dolphins)
- Sharks, rays and turtles

Future offshore wind project proposals in Commonwealth waters must not be -

- Inconsistent with recovery plans for relevant Matters of National Environmental Significance
- Be likely to interfere with the long-term conservation of threatened or migratory seabird species
- Be inconsistent with the requirements of migratory species treaties

Future proposed offshore renewable energy infrastructure activities will be subject to requirements for environmental approval under environment legislation, including the EPBC Act administered by DCCEEW. An application under the EPBC requires an assessment of the relevant impacts and proposed avoidance, management, mitigation and, where appropriate, offset measures, to demonstrate appropriate environmental outcomes can be achieved.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

Given the nature of the proposal relates to an offshore zone matter (generally associated with high level strategic assessments) and considering that the ‘onshore’ transmission connection approval pathway is largely governed by the NSW Government, the information package provided does not include details on a number of matters including -

- Waste/management of old blades and equipment.

  There are concerns that there is currently no technology available in Australia to recycle old blades. However, it is noted that there is emerging recycling industry located overseas. As the demand to recycle old blades increase (as the wind farms are aging), there is likely to be a response from industry (as was the case for solar panels). It is also understood that the licensing requirements will require whole of life management with heavy recycling component. Of note is that the majority of wind farm structure is mainly made of steel and copper for which there are recycling options.

- Land based manufacturing requirements including any exclusion zones and compatibility with surrounding uses.

- Reticulation to the grid including impacts.

  It is understood that there will be a requirement for additional substation(s) as well as increase into the transmission infrastructure so that the renewable energy produced can be transferred where the demand is. It is understood this is a matter that is under the purview of the State Government and Energy-Co. There is a lack of detail on this aspect and Council should be advocating for more information to be provided.

- Impact on shipping channels.

- Impact on recreational fishing.

  It is understood that DCCEEW has consulted with the Ports Authority on potential impact on shipping channels. Considering the importance of the Ports to the Australian economy it can be expected that this matter will be appropriately considered. However, it would be prudent for DCCEEW and the Ports authority to confirm this.

- Impact on fauna and in particular marine life and migratory birds.

It is expected that there will be environmental impacts from wind farms. However, it is noted that not rapidly transitioning to renewable energy would also have significant environmental impacts. From overseas experience it is noted that offshore wind farm infrastructure can create new habitats (eg marine growth on the infrastructure), and offshore wind farms can co-exist with aquaculture farming.

Of interest is current research being undertaken by the Blue Economy CRC on how offshore wind farms could be associated to blue carbon sink. Blue Economy CRC | Underpinning the Growth of the Blue Economy

The Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS) has compiled valuable research on environmental impacts of offshore wind farms and is planning to provide an FAQ prior to the end of the exhibition period.

Should the area be declared, it is recommended that Council continues to monitor and assess the next phases of this project and provide submissions to support positive short and long-term outcomes for the environment and Wollongong community.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This proposal does not have direct impact on Council's budget. However, the potential benefits to our local economy and community are noted.

## CONCLUSION

Offshore wind technology in Australia has the capacity to support our transition from coal to renewable energy.

Whilst other technologies such as onshore wind and solar are important and appropriate to address local energy demand, they generally generate less energy and are subject to elements such as variable winds and natural disasters. Extensive transmission infrastructure is also required.

Offshore wind farms have the advantage of reliable and consistent winds and can be located close to where most of the demand is generated along our coastline.

It is recommended that Council make a submission in response to the proposed offshore wind zone declaration and advocate for rigorous environmental assessment and local community benefit being relevant considerations for any future proposals.