

# San Luis Obispo Tribune

February 18, 2024

## Former SLO Mayor Heidi Harmon urges community to ‘rally behind’ offshore wind | Opinion

Offshore wind turbines used to produce electrical power. Turbines like these are envisioned to go miles offshore of Morro Bay and Humboldt County in Northern California. *Environment America*



By **HEIDI HARMON** *Special to the San Luis Obispo Tribune*

I recently had the privilege of participating in a gathering that brought together community members, elected officials and non-profit organizations to deliberate on offshore wind power, mainly focusing on the development in Morro Bay. As the former mayor of San Luis Obispo, I understand the significance of engaging in conversations about the impact of a burgeoning industry on our community, region and state. I take gratification in witnessing our picturesque community embrace a more environmentally conscious approach through innovative climate policies.

Establishing a new industry brings inevitable challenges, and individuals must voice their concerns. I have consistently done so, and I urge you to follow suit. This signifies a substantial shift — a revolutionary transformation that will usher in a clean energy economy. We must advance offshore wind to guarantee benefits for workers, habitats, Indigenous tribes and the community at large while adhering to labor and environmental protections.

California is laying the foundation to supply clean electricity to 25 million homes through 25 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2045. The project off the coast of Morro Bay will generate 2 gigawatts of power as part of this ambitious initiative.

In the past year, the state implemented significant legislation to advance a cohesive strategy for development, accompanied by robust environmental safeguards. A pivotal environmental regulation mandates the [Ocean Protection Council](#) to establish a non-profit West Coast Offshore Wind Science Entity.

This entity is tasked with continually monitoring the ocean ecosystem and ensuring that targeted research informs state and federal decisions. Moreover, at the federal level, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) evaluates environmental impact statements, mitigation strategies and methods for detecting marine life. BOEM is dedicated to close collaboration with commercial fishermen to guarantee that offshore wind development proceeds in environmentally sound and responsible ways.

Although offshore wind is a new venture for California, the technology has been refined for over 30 years in northern Europe. The accumulated evidence demonstrates that offshore wind can be developed to safeguard wildlife, support fishing families and offer a sustainable energy source for future generations.

The [Offshore Wind and Jobs Act](#) outlines a comprehensive strategy to enhance our ports for developing offshore wind energy and ensure seaport readiness for its infrastructure. The legislation includes provisions for a feasibility study to assess the viability of manufacturing and constructing 70%-85% of the projects within the state. This initiative promises to create jobs for our local community and contribute to the employment opportunities within our state.

The [Offshore Wind Expediting Act](#) introduces a streamlined permitting approach for offshore wind projects within coastal zones. These areas are subject to multiple overlapping jurisdictions, agencies and regulations, and the new legislation aims to establish a consolidated process for expediting the permitting of such projects.

The California Department of Water Resources will implement a central buyer mechanism to streamline power procurement from large-scale, long-lead-time projects such as offshore wind, battery storage and geothermal. This legislation empowers the state to directly engage in contracts with offshore wind developers, offering market assurance to developers and cost-effective advancement of the energy transition for ratepayers. Labor advocates have lauded this law as the inception of a new era in California’s clean energy economy.

The California Energy Commission has introduced a preliminary [Offshore Wind Strategic Plan](#). This comprehensive document comprises evaluations and suggestions concerning marine resources, sea-space planning, tribal and fishery relations, permitting, workforce development, port expansion and transmission.

Representing the extensively researched roadmap for the state, this plan underscores offshore wind as the focal point for eliminating fossil fuels from the retail electric supply.

Capitalizing on the constant strength of offshore winds in deep waters — where floating turbine platforms will be positioned along our coast — combined with battery storage, offshore wind emerges as a reliable source of uninterrupted electrical power.

The Floating Offshore Wind Energy Shot initiative by the federal government aims to achieve a reduction of over 70% in the cost of floating offshore wind energy, especially for deep water sites far from the shore. The anticipated outcome is a decrease in electricity bills for consumers. While acknowledging that this transformation will require time, prioritizing a secure and cleaner future with reduced environmental risks over the inheritance of dirty fossil fuels is a conscious choice, and one that ensures a healthier environment for our children.

Offshore wind clean energy is a crucial solution to mitigate the climate crisis. Our coastal communities have witnessed storms with massive waves that wreak havoc, and the proximity of oil rigs continues to pose health risks, sending children to hospitals for respiratory issues. Embracing offshore wind energy is paramount to achieving our state's clean energy objectives and moving toward independence from fossil fuels.

Supporting this sustainable energy source is a choice that aligns with securing our future. A responsible build-out of offshore wind has the potential to generate thousands of well-paying union jobs, accompanied by opportunities for job training that could be provided locally. While change can be challenging, the constant shifts in our weather patterns due to the climate crisis remind us of the urgency for transformation.

Welcoming an industry that promotes clean energy is a step toward a healthier environment and a path to achieving 100% fossil-free independence. For our community to thrive, let's rally behind an initiative that ushers in sustainable energy and propels us toward a future free from fossil fuel dependence.

*Heidi Harmon served as mayor of San Luis Obispo from 2016 to 2021.*