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Offshore wind is coming to San Luis Obispo County. That's a good thing



The sun sets over Burbo Bank Offshore Wind Farm on the River Mersey behind Fort Perch Roick and New Brighton Lighthouse, in Liverpool, England. PETER BYRNE AP

By **HEIDI HARMON**

When the city of San Luis Obispo committed to the most ambitious targets in the nation for carbon neutrality, I thought of my children. They have grown up watching elected officials across the country kick the can down the road on tackling climate change again and again — gambling their futures to protect fossil fuel profits.

When I was elected mayor, I vowed to move ambitious climate policies forward so that I could look my children in the eyes and tell them that here in San Luis Obispo, we are taking a stand against the climate crisis. With that vote, I felt I could.

Now, the Central Coast has an opportunity to build on our city's strong legacy of climate leadership by becoming the first region in California to invest in offshore wind — a clean energy resource critical to achieving a 100% clean and reliable energy grid. By harnessing the power of the strong winds that blow off our coast, we can generate abundant pollution-free electricity to power our homes, cars and industry.

Morro Bay is one of just two offshore wind sites along the coast of California selected for the first-ever offshore wind lease sale in Pacific waters. We are still quite a few years off from the day when these turbines will deliver the first surge of electricity to California's grid, but the lease sale marks a monumental milestone in our path toward development.

Offshore wind is good for California, and it's good for the Central Coast. As development projects move along, we can expect millions of dollars in economic benefits to flow into our communities, along with hundreds of good-paying jobs. According to estimates from USC's Schwarzenegger Institute, developing 10 gigawatts of offshore wind energy statewide will create 65,000 jobs during the construction phase and 4,500 long-term maintenance and operation jobs to support working Central Coast families. These are high-quality career opportunities that community members can be proud of.

Investing in offshore wind energy will also help our state keep the lights on, even as climate change fuels more intense heat waves that challenge our state's electricity grid. Offshore wind is the perfect complement to solar because it peaks in the evening hours, when electricity generation begins to drop off. With every offshore wind turbine California installs, we will have a new line of defense against droughts, wildfires and threats of blackouts.

Offshore wind is also key to unlocking more affordable energy bills as high fossil gas prices push up utility bills across the board. A report from Energy and Environmental Economics (E3), projected savings of up to \$2 billion from offshore wind for electric customers in California. That adds up to more money in our pockets to provide for our families.

As offshore wind projects in our communities move forward, community members will have questions. That's a good thing. We will explore the benefits of this new clean-energy resource together. But those who seek to delay and even kill critical clean energy investments fundamentally misunderstand our collective dedication to climate leadership. We have bravely faced down fossil fuel-driven opposition to local climate policy in the past, and we've won. We can do it again. We can't let those who ran for office on a campaign of fear-mongering and lies turn the tide on this unprecedented opportunity. We must let facts and the historic challenge of the climate crisis lead the way.

Our climate leadership here in San Luis Obispo makes me proud of our city, and it's a pride my children share. I want my children to know that our community has done everything we can to create a world where they — and all children — can thrive.

Heidi Harmon served as the mayor of San Luis Obispo from 2016 to 2021. She is now a senior public affairs director at the Romero Institute.