

Is Massachusetts set to block offshore wind development?

State official says that new planning rules will require changes to proposed Buzzard's Bay offshore wind farm.

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The state of Massachusetts could be poised to block current proposals for a major offshore wind farm in its waters after the state government released a new development plan designed to strictly define what can be built in its oceans

A senior official said the new rules would prohibit a proposed offshore wind farm in its current form.

Mandated by the State's Oceans Act of 2008, the plan would require developers of ocean-based projects to avoid areas that are considered ecologically important. The Act required a plan to be put in place by the end of this year.

The draft plan would introduce new environmental considerations for those wishing to construct projects in the 75 per cent of state waters that are under general management. Projects would have to get the approval of local coastal towns, and of the relevant regional planning agency, before they could go ahead.

The introduction of the plan is likely to require a revamp of existing proposals for wind farms in the Buzzard's Bay area off the Massachusetts coast, according to an interview given by state energy and environmental affairs secretary Ian Bowles.

"The big wind farm for Buzzard's Bay will not be able to go forward as it was proposed," he warned, adding that liquid natural gas projects built off the coast would also have to be careful about where they constructed pipelines. " We've got about 12 different categories of special, sensitive, unique resources and those vary area to area and depend on where that species or resource might appear."

The move comes at a crucial time for offshore wind power in the US. The Obama has signalled its support for the development of offshore wind resources and last month the Department of the Interior issued five leases for offshore wind project exploration in New Jersey and Delaware, opening the door for offshore wind farms on the eastern seaboard.