

Offshore Wind: An issue of transparency  
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*Written on behalf of Green Oceans (green-oceans.org)*

The recent pro-wind letters to the editor disparage anyone who questions offshore wind with hidden motives, deception, and disguise. Our only motive is to clarify the environmental impacts, understand the efficacy, and reveal crucial gaps in our knowledge. Instead of attacking their critics, offshore wind supporters should welcome the chance to prove detractors wrong. Unfortunately, the pro-wind faction condemns the opposition's "messaging" without refuting facts, derides the "playbook" without addressing the actual concerns, and blames opponents of fear-mongering without dispelling doubt with evidence.

Let's examine the tactics of the wind industry. Last Wednesday, the Shell Oil-backed SouthCoast Wind project (aka Mayflower Wind) held an information session in Portsmouth. When asked about donating money for influence, the company's spokesperson admitted to distributing \$115 million to various organizations. Many of the recipients, including the New England Aquarium and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, have a conflict of interest because they are the very institutions called upon to deny an association between offshore wind activity and the recent whale deaths. Few environmental groups admit to accepting company funds; yet many now refute the possible harmful impacts of offshore wind.

The audience also learned that burying high-voltage cables will disturb old sediment from 4-6 feet below the Sakonnet River bed, sediment potentially laden with heavy metals and toxic chemicals from Rhode Island's industrial past. Once resuspended in the water column, pollutants can contaminate the marine food web and accumulate in RI's fisheries. A recent complaint was filed in the US Court of Appeals against a NY project for a similar issue. When asked about such hazards, the SouthCoast Wind representative denied any risk, reassuring the audience that sediment plumes will resettle back into position almost immediately. A community member expressed disbelief, suggesting currents in the Sakonnet River might actually prevent this. The representative denied the risk again, not because the company has tested core samples or run actual experiments, but because a computer model told them so.

That same night, the issue of "host" agreements between municipalities and wind companies emerged as a hot topic. The audience learned SouthCoast Wind will financially compensate towns in exchange for cooperation. These "host agreements" usually require the town to waive the right to contest the companies in court or sue for damages at any future date. Critically, the negotiations transpire behind closed doors. Considering the projects might have unforeseen effects on water quality, seafood safety, and public health, communities may want to think twice before waiving their rights to a trial or allowing negotiations to occur without open public involvement.

The URI Sea Grant helped host this information session, the third of three. As usual, they live-streamed the meeting and recorded the proceedings. Unfortunately, when asked, they would not release the recording. They willingly circulated the video from the first two meetings, but not this one.

Other industry actions also suggest concealment. Revolution Wind submitted their request to "take" whales and other marine mammals on December 23, just before the holidays. With only 30 days for the public to respond, the company could not have chosen a more optimal date to avoid public scrutiny. Likewise, Ørsted published its draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) on the Friday before Labor Day and incorporated two long holiday weekends

into the public comment period. Few average citizens without a vested interest knew about the DEIS before the comment window closed.

If critics want to expose a lack of transparency and misleading information, they should look to the offshore wind industry. Companies with nothing to hide would welcome the chance to explain the risks and would release the recordings afterward.