



Offshore wind farms feature three-bladed turbines that convert the wind's kinetic energy into mechanical energy for electric power. (Contributed photo)



By [Jurgen Boerema](#)

## Wind energy panel picks up steam

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Wind energy development continues to be a relevant issue for North Carolina.

Gov. Bev Perdue's offshore wind energy advisory panel concluded its third and final public outreach session at the Dare County Administrative Building in Manteo on Thursday. The panel had previously met in Wilmington and Morehead City.

"The meeting in Morehead City was the second of three outreach hearings so the agenda for the Manteo meeting is exactly the same," said Seth Effron, Communications Director for the North Carolina Energy Office. "It is just part of the scientific panel's effort to reach out to people in the communities to hear

what their concerns are and make that a part of their information gathering as they go about their work. Members of the panel that can make the Manteo meeting will definitely be there. Willis Whichard, the chairman of the panel, will attend. Jennifer Baumgartner, who is the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Energy and the lead staff person for the panel, will be there as well. Other members of the panel will attend as it depends on their schedules.”

Effron noted positive developments from the Morehead City meeting.

“Any comment is on behalf of Chairman Whichard, who felt that it was a good turnout and that there were a variety of opinions on several issues that will all be very, very helpful as the panel goes about its deliberations in developing a report to the Governor.”

Effron mentioned that the panel has an estimated September deadline for submitting a report to the Governor. The panel is working to get all their information gathered by the end of the spring so they can work on putting a report together during the summer.

Effron elaborated on the purpose of the panel.

“The reason that the panel wanted to have the outreach sessions in three different communities along the coast is that they do represent different areas of the coast and the people of those areas do have different concerns and wanted to make sure that everybody in the coastal area that wanted to express themselves had that opportunity.”

Lee Lilley, legislative assistant to U.S. Rep. G.K. Butterfield, noted that Butterfield is in support of wind energy.

“The Congressman favors a broad base of renewable energy including wind. In previous Congresses, we have supported the ongoing production tax credit for renewable energy, which is a major driver of utility-scale wind projects. We have also supported in previous years a broad-base renewable portfolio standard which would require a certain percentage of utility-scale energy come from renewable sources. But this included everything from wind to solar and, probably more importantly to North Carolina, biomass-based renewable energy.

Lilley spoke about several ongoing projects in North Carolina.

“Looking at wind, it has got some possibilities. That is evidenced by the pilot project that Duke is doing and the big Iberdrola Project in the Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, area that is going to be a utility-scale three hundred megawatt project. We certainly think that is a good investment, it is a positive investment. They are doing it without any government funding which is even better. It shows that there is a private-sector interest. They believe it is a viable project and that is certainly where we think wind should be. We believe in wind. We believe in solar. We believe in all of the above that will make us an energy-independent country. That includes our current mix in the state of North Carolina of coal, natural gas, and nuclear energy. But certainly we would prefer to get to a cleaner burning, reducing fuel. Whether that is wind, natural gas, or clean coal if that is possible. At this point, he has been generally supportive of wind and other options as well.”

Lilley said that clean energy is a concern of Butterfield’s district.

“We’ve got many constituents who are interested in more renewable forms of energy. They tend to be more environmentally friendly, more sustainable over the long-term as our energy needs grow. We have

a lot of people who are interested in that. I think the main thing he is concerned about and has always been concerned about is balancing the need to get more sustainable energy with the cost to the consumer. Because any increase in cost will be passed along to the consumer in the utilities market. We have a district that does not react well to major shocks to things like energy costs. He has always made that a priority.”

U.S. Rep. Walter Jones offered a unique perspective on the issue.

“A lot of decisions that are going to be made by the state I don’t influence or even try to influence. I have always been a states’ rights person. Ever since I’ve been in Congress, I’ve always said this. Because you know they say there’s a large finding of natural gas pockets on the coast of North Carolina. My position has always been, as a member of Congress, let the state of North Carolina decide whether they want exploration or not. So that in a way does impact the issue of wind energy. I think that this country has to look at every possibility that can help us reduce our dependence on foreign governments for oil. We need to use any option that we might have that makes this feasible. We can’t just do things frivolously. Whatever makes potential sense if I can phrase it that way. I am for the governor of our state, the legislature of our state, to look at alternatives that could help with the energy crisis that is facing our nation. Any option that we have, whether it is wind energy or natural gas, or whatever it might be. We are at a point in the history of this country where we have to look at other options to provide the energy sources that this country needs.

Jones commented on how his constituents have expressed their thoughts on the issue.

“I’ve had a couple of visits in Washington from groups in Washington that have wanted to make an investment in wind energy. But they know that I am not in a policy-making position as far as the state or as far as permitting. I’ve had some constituents who communicate, but just a very few. I’d say truthfully as of this phone call I don’t imagine in the last three or four years there have been more than 20 people that have said they have either liked the idea of wind energy or they don’t. But the majority of people I don’t think they see this at this point as an issue that Congress is going to be involved in. If they thought Congress was involved in making decisions, I’d be hearing from a lot of people. But at this point, they know we are not there yet.”

Samuel Lau, Deputy Press Secretary for Sen. Kay Hagan, released a statement from the Senator that echoed the thoughts of the other elected officials.

“I am a strong supporter of renewable energy. When I was in the North Carolina state senate, I helped make North Carolina the first and only state in the Southeast to require utilities to utilize renewable energy. Our country must continue to become more energy independent, and I support investments in domestic clean energy production as a part of a comprehensive energy strategy. Where appropriate, wind power a both onshore and offshore a is certainly a part of that strategy. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate this year on a bipartisan, American energy policy.”

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