

Offshore turbine freeze hailed

By Sharon Hill, The Windsor Star February 12, 2011

A moratorium on offshore wind turbines announced Friday by the province puts the brakes on 715 turbines proposed for lakes Erie and St. Clair.

And it has raised hopes among opponents that a permanent ban will be imposed.

"It's like a time machine. We're back in 2006," Gord Meuser of Citizens Against Lake Erie Wind Turbines said Friday. "It's a moratorium so there's nothing definite."

The citizens' group opposed to SouthPoint Wind's initial proposal to put 15 turbines in Lake Erie off Kingsville and Leamington thought it had won the fight against turbines in 2006 when the provincial government put a ban on offshore wind developments. The ban was lifted in 2008.

Opposition grew a year ago when SouthPoint Wind proposed 700 offshore wind turbines in lakes Erie and St. Clair with a 1,400-megawatt project of 13 wind farms that could have 55 turbines each.

Meuser said the good part of Friday's announcement is that the province is saying research will be conducted before any installations are allowed.

The provincial government said Ontario "is not proceeding with proposed offshore wind projects while further scientific research is conducted."

The province will monitor a freshwater offshore project in Lake Vanern in Sweden, the only operational offshore project in the world, and one proposed in Ohio.

In Ontario, current applications for offshore wind projects are suspended and new applications for offshore wind farms will no longer be accepted.

In a statement, SouthPoint Wind president Jim Liovas said the company remains committed to offshore wind development. When the moratorium was lifted in 2008, SouthPoint thought the appropriate due diligence had been done which allowed the company to continue with the approval process, he said.

"As an Ontario businessman I applaud the government's steadfastness in protecting our environment. However, we feel that today's decision from the Premier's office creates an unneeded hurdle in Ontario's bid to become a green energy leader," Liovas said.

"Regardless, SouthPoint Wind's commitment towards offshore wind energy development in the Great Lakes remains unwavered."

The announcement from the office of Premier Dalton McGuinty said the government remains committed to renewable energy.

Environment Minister John Wilkinson said offshore wind on freshwater lakes is a "recent concept that requires a cautious approach until the science of environmental impact is clear."

Essex County Warden Tom Bain, the mayor of Lakeshore, said he hopes the moratorium becomes permanent.

"That's good news then that they're going to put some research into it because we certainly have a lot of concerns about them going into our lakes."

One of the main concerns was drinking water and that turbine construction near the intake pipes of water treatment plants would stir up sediment and perhaps toxins. Bain said there would be more harm than good putting turbines in lakes.

Leamington Mayor John Paterson said for now a moratorium is excellent news.

Paterson said he doesn't see where any kind of scientific research that will make it acceptable to put turbines in the lake.

"Obviously, we have to keep up the fight against them," Paterson said.

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