



June 12, 2024

Secretary Sherri L. Golden
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities
44 South Clinton Avenue, 1st Floor
P.O. Box 350, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0350.

RE: Docket Number QO24020126

Via email: board.secretary@bpu.nj.gov

Introduction

The Southern New Jersey Development Council (SNJDC), a non-profit economic development organization representing over 300 mid to large-sized businesses across the eight southern counties of New Jersey, appreciates the opportunity to submit written comments to the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) as part of the State's 2024 Energy Master Plan (EMP) update.

Our mission is to promote responsible economic development in these counties through hands-on efforts, support business retention and expansion, and advocate on pertinent issues. Much of our mission is to provide access to good information for business leaders to make decisions that spur sustainable economic development and maintain businesses that lead to better jobs, higher wages, and tax revenues in southern New Jersey.

Over the past several years, the SNJDC hosted workshops and seminars on clean energy and energy infrastructure that featured policymakers and project developers with the goal of educating our membership on resiliency and reliability, emerging technologies, investments in infrastructure, and opportunities to increase efficiency and lower energy costs.

In providing that content, and through collaboration with our membership, we are pleased to offer these comments for consideration. We commend the state's goals in furthering a net zero carbon emission policy that includes more investments in renewable sources and newer technologies to further those investments and policies.

Energy Generation and Diversification

In 2018, the US Energy Information Administration found that natural gas and nuclear power together provided 94% of New Jersey's utility-scale electricity net generation. Currently, about 75% to 80% of New Jersey households rely on natural gas as their primary heating fuel. The affordability of natural gas has significantly reduced both energy and heating costs for consumers across the state. In 2021, natural gas prices were about 19% lower than the

national average, which translates to substantial savings for New Jersey households and businesses.

Given these statistics, New Jersey needs to focus on energy diversification as a sustainable solution to the state's energy needs. We should view energy diversification as a jigsaw puzzle with nuclear and natural gas each being a piece, as well as renewable energies including solar and offshore wind also being important pieces to solving the puzzle.

The SNJDC has concerns about any policy consideration which would contemplate a shift away from cheap natural gas, which has been a boon to consumers and the state's manufacturing community in recent years. As we progress into a net zero commitment, we should consider the value of these important resources to mitigate cost impact on consumers and transition into a future that will make use of cost-effective technologies that support clean energy policies.

Offshore Wind Development

New Jersey's shift towards renewable energy sources, such as offshore wind, is a crucial step in mitigating the effects of climate change and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come. SNJDC's dedication to fostering the growth of the offshore wind industry aligns perfectly with these objectives.

In considering support of the development of offshore wind in New Jersey, the SNJDC weighed the cost shared by private investment, federal tax-investment credits, and ratepayers against the potential economic development benefits of the three current proposed projects, and New Jersey's goal of 11,00 MW by 2040.

The creation of thousands of good, local new jobs; the research conducted at our universities; the job training provided to non-college, continuing education, and career transitioning students; modernizing an aging power grid; and the creation of a new, forward-looking industrial sector located in South Jersey, coupled with the environmental benefits, warrant our support.

New Jersey maintains a unique opportunity for much-needed public and private investment in the burgeoning industry of offshore wind energy. South Jersey is uniquely situated to facilitate a net-export industry to service offshore wind development from New York to Maryland. The SNJDC supports investment in the establishment of the Offshore Wind Supply Chain in South Jersey.

Southern New Jersey's trade unions are best positioned to assist in the advancement of New Jersey's future as a leader in the offshore wind industry. With the ability to provide skilled tradespeople and train workers through union apprenticeship programs, South Jersey's labor unions will contribute the needed highly skilled, cutting-edge workforce that will help to construct the offshore wind turbines from start to finish.

Academic and Workforce Development

The SNJDC supports investment for academic research and development through the establishment of an Offshore Wind Institute to provide the necessary workforce to drive the industry. The network of local academic institutions (Rowan University, Stockton University, Rutgers University-Camden, Atlantic Cape Community College, Camden County College, Rowan College of South Jersey, Salem Community College and our Vocational and Trades Schools and Institutes of Technology) is well situated to address the burgeoning needs of this emerging sector and support expansion of offshore wind power projects to exceed the 11,000 MW target.

We envision a whole new workforce of construction and maintenance jobs, work for engineers of all types, computer and telecommunications, transportation, professional and financial services. To achieve this goal, it is imperative that support is given to our local communities, the residents of which often lack the crucial resources necessary to take advantage of the opportunities available in this burgeoning new industry and ensure equitable access.

Economic Impact and Future Outlook

There is little doubt that wind power will play a crucial role in Southern New Jersey's economic growth and economic diversity over the coming years. The projected economic benefits include the creation of thousands of jobs, significant private investments, and advancements in research and development that will position New Jersey as a leader in clean energy.

Its attendant supply chain needs such as tier 2 and 3 component manufacturing, surveying, design and engineering, foundation, turbine and substation construction, onshore transmission and cable installation, will require contracting services and purchasing products from hundreds of local companies, all of which will expand and increase potential career opportunities.

Conclusion

Once again, the SNJDC appreciates the opportunity to participate in the 2024 Energy Master Plan Update process. We look forward to continued participation and collaboration with the Board of Public Utilities to support the creation of a strong, resilient, and equitable clean energy infrastructure to benefit all New Jerseyans—consumers and manufacturers alike.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marlene Z. Asselta
President, Southern New Jersey Development Council

