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June 7, 2024

Via Electronic Mail

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

Re: In the Matter of The Opening Of New Jersey's Third

Solicitation For Offshore Wind Renewable Energy

Certificates (OREC) Request for Waiver

Invenergy Wind Offshore LLC BPU Docket No. QO22080481

Dear Secretary Golden:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel ("Rate Counsel") as our written comments regarding the above-referenced petition filed by Invenergy Wind Offshore LLC ("Invenergy" or "Petitioner") with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities ("Board") on April 23, 2024, seeking the following relief associated with Petitioner's 2,400 megawatt ("MW") Qualified Offshore Wind Project ("QOWP"), the Leading Light Wind Project ("LLW Project"):

- i) authorization to file unaudited financial statements on a quarterly basis,
- ii) a waiver pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:1-1.2 of the Board requirement set forth at N.J.A.C.14:8-6.5(a)(4)(v) requiring audited financial statements on a quarterly basis,

- iii) authorization to file quarterly financial statements no more than sixty days following the end of the accounting quarter,
- iv) authorization to file the first quarterly financial statement, from January 1, 2024, through March 31, 2024, no later than May 30, 2024; and
- v) authorization to file annual audited financial statements no more than ninety days following the end of the fiscal year.

Consistent with the Order issued by the Board in connection with *In the Matter of the* New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic for a Temporary Waiver of the Requirements for Certain Non-Essential Obligations, BPU Docket No. EO20030254, dated March 19, 2020, these comments are being electronically filed with the Secretary of the Board and with the LLW Project. Paper copies will not follow this submission.

Factual Background

On March 6, 2023, the Board issued its Third Offshore Wind ("OSW") Solicitation. Interested developers were encouraged to submit an Application to the Board to build an OSW facility.² The Board also released the Third Solicitation Guidance document ("Solicitation Guidelines") which included all Application requirements, guidance on the preparation of the Application, standards and assumptions to be used in preparing an Application, a schedule, and key dates.³ Specifically at issue, the Solicitation Guidelines require an "Applicant Commitment Form," which obligates the winning applicant commit to

In The Matter Of The Opening Of New Jersey's Third Solicitation For Offshore Wind Renewable Energy Certificates (OREC), BPU Docket No. QO22080481 (Mar. 6, 2023).

Ibid.

New Jersey Offshore Wind Third Solicitation, Solicitation Guidance Document (March 6, 2023)(available at https://njoffshorewind.com/third-solicitation/solicitation-documents/Final-Solicitation-Guidence-Document-withattachments.pdf).

June 7, 2024

Page 3

"file audited financial statements with the Board on a quarterly and annual basis." This

provision matches language in the Board's regulations under N.J.A.C. 14:8-6.5(a)(4)(v),

which stipulates that an application seeking approval as a qualified OSW project include

from the applicant "[a] commitment that audited financial statements shall be filed with the

Board on a quarterly and annual basis."

In response to the Third Solicitation, the Board received Applications from four

developers, Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind Project 2, LLC, Attentive Energy LLC,

Community Offshore Wind (COSW) NJ 1, LLC, and Invenergy.⁵ Invenergy's bid application

included a signed Application Commitment Form that, along with other commitments,

committed to filing audited financial statements on a quarterly and annual basis.⁶

The Board evaluated the bids against the factors that included those set forth in the

Offshore Wind Economic Development Act of 2010 ("OWEDA") and N.J.A.C. 14:8-6 et

seg. After bids were deemed to be administratively complete, the Board performed "a

detailed evaluation" of each application. Following its evaluation, the Board found that "the

LLW Project meets or exceeds all of the standards for a Qualified Offshore Wind Project

("QOWP) as set forth in N.J.S.A. 48:3-87.1 et seq. and N.J.A.C. 14:8-6.5 et seq." The

Board made its determination after a complete and thorough review of the record, which

included representations and warranties made by Invenergy in its Application and in its Best

and Final Offer ("BAFO"). 11 The Board noted several other factors guiding their decision,

Solicitation Guidance Document, 3/6/2023, Attachment 1.

I/M/O The Board of Public Utilities Offshore Wind Solicitation 3 for 1,200 to 2,400 MW - the Leading Light Wind 2,400 MW Project, BPU Docket No. OO22080481, January 24, 2024 (LLW Project Award Order) at 12-13.

⁶ Waiver Petition at Paragraph 6.

⁷ LLW Project Award Order at 13,

⁸ Id. at 15.

 $10 \overline{\text{Id}}$. at 34.

 $10 \ \overline{\text{Id}}$. at 34.

¹¹ <u>Id.</u> At 18.

June 7, 2024

Page 4

including choosing these "two projects due to their significant generation of clean energy to

combat climate change [and. . . awarding] an American OSW developer, representing a

significant step forward for OSW in the United States." 12 The Board also noted that the

application for the LLW Project demonstrates financial integrity and sufficient access to

capital to allow a reasonable expectation of completion of its construction. 13

Notwithstanding commitments made during the application process, on April 23,

2024, Invenergy filed a request for a waiver pursuant to N.J.A.C. 14:1-1.2 of the Board

requirement set forth at N.J.A.C. 14:8-6.5(a)(4)(v) requiring audited financial statements on a

quarterly basis, and requested to file unaudited financial statements on a quarterly basis. 14

In its petition, Invenergy asserts that the filing of "audited quarterly financial

statements is not an industry standard and imposes a commercially unreasonable burden and

hardship on the Petitioner." ¹⁵ Invenergy also argues that "they are not aware of other New

Jersey state agencies that require audited financial statements on a quarterly basis."16

Invenergy indicates that the "Board previously waived these requirements for the developer

of another OSW project."¹⁷ Invenergy acknowledged "the Board's interest in monitoring the

fiscal health of the LLW Project but believes the provision of unaudited quarterly financial

statements is a reasonable balancing of the Board's important oversight role with the

administrative and financial burdens placed on the LLW Project to provide timely

information." Petitioner further argued that the submission of audited quarterly financial

statements would be "materially disruptive to Petitioner's operations and provide the Board

¹² <u>Id</u>. at 33. ¹³ <u>Id</u>. at 34.

 \overline{W} waiver Petition at Paragraph 1.

15 Id. at Paragraph 14.

¹⁶ Ib<u>id</u>.

 $17 \overline{\text{Id.}}$ at Paragraph 15.

¹⁸ I<u>bid</u>.

June 7, 2024

Page 5

with little, if any, information that is not otherwise available through the quarterly unaudited

financial statements and annual audited financial statements."19

As to the waiver, Petitioner argues that it is appropriate due to "the hardship and/or

inconvenience"²⁰ strict compliance with N.J.A.C. 14:8-6.5(a)(4)(v) would impose on

Petitioner. Such hardships, according to Invenergy, include "the additional time and attention

required for the preparation of quarterly audited financial statements, as well as staff and

auditor resources, in addition to the incremental cost of such activities."21 Petitioner also

refers to the Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind Project 1²² decision and provides, "the Board

previously granted a waiver of N.J.A.C 14:8-65(a)(4)(v) to another QOWP and should do so

here.",23

The remaining issue is the timing for submission of the financial statements.

Invenergy indicates that it is "committed to transparency and accountability. . . [and] remains

committed to providing the Board with financial statements on a quarterly and annual

basis."24 Petitioner proffers that. . . "Neither the OWEDA Regulations nor the Applicant

Commitment Form are clear regarding the deadline for providing financial statements for any

given accounting period or for when such filing should commence."25 Based on these

reasons, Invenergy requests i) to file unaudited quarterly financial statements no more than

sixty days following the end of the accounting quarter; ii) to file the first quarterly financial

statement, from January 1, 2024 through March 31, 2024, no later than May 30, 2024²⁶; and

¹⁹ Id. at Paragraph 16.

²⁰ Id. at Paragraph 21.

²¹ Id. at Paragraph 22.

²² <u>I/M/O</u> the Board Of Public Utilities Offshore Wind Solicitation 2 For 1,200 To 2,400 MW – Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind

Project 1, LLC, BPU Docket No. QO21050824 (Jun. 30, 2021) ("Atlantic Shores Award Order") at 23.

²³ Waiver Petition at Paragraph 23.

²⁴ Id. at Paragraph 18.

25 <u>Ibid.</u>

²⁶ Has this occurred as the date has passed?

iii) to file annual audited financial statements no more than ninety days following the end of the fiscal year.

Comments

Preliminarily, Rate Counsel notes that in 2013, in response to comments by offshore wind developers, the Board rejected removing audited financial requirements from its rules under N.J.A.C. 14:8-6.5 because "the Board needs to have a high degree of confidence that the project will be able to obtain development and construction financing."27 The Board further provided that "[t]he financial statements will be evaluated in conjunction with the proposed method of financing the project proposed in accordance with N.J.A.C. 14:8-6.5(a)(4)."²⁸ None of the stakeholders specifically objected to the requirements under N.J.A.C. 14:8- 6.5(a)(4)(v).²⁹ When reviewing the bid application and looking at the financial strength and financial plan of Invenergy, the Board noted that "Invenergy is owned by York Bight Offshore Holdings, LLC, a joint venture comprised of five investors. The LLW Project will be developed by an Invenergy equity holder, Forward Power Offshore LLC, ("Forward Power"), an Invenergy equity holder, which is a 50/50 joint venture of two American-led companies: lead developer Invenergy Renewables LLC and co-developer energyRe LLC." 30 Referring to the financial strength of the Invenergy Project, the Board noted that the LLW Project is backed by the Forward Power joint venture and four financial investors, three American firms and one Canadian firm, all four are asset management firms which "possess the experience and financial capital needed to ensure construction of the

²⁷ 45 N.J.R. 336(a).

²⁸ Ibid.

³⁰ LLW Project Award Order at 19-20.

June 7, 2024

Page 7

LLW Project."31

In this case, it does not appear that audited financial statements of Invenergy would

add a substantive degree of confidence in the financial fitness of the Petitioner. However,

because Attentive Energy is utilizing the financial strength of its equity holder Forward

Power, and its financial investors, the Board should investigate whether audited financial

statements from those companies would satisfy the requirement under the Board's rules. Rate

Counsel also recommends that the Board establish a process for review, if Invenergy's

audited annual financial statements vary significantly from their unaudited quarterly financial

statements.

While Rate Counsel does not have any specific concerns regarding Invenergy's

ability to provide audited quarterly financial statements, nor to timely provide same, Rate

Counsel has general concerns regarding the waiver of Offshore Wind Solicitation

requirements after the bids have been submitted. Changing the bidders' requirements

following the close of bidding undermines the competitive contracting process as a whole. In

fact, we are already seeing the repercussions of the post-award waiver in the Atlantic Shores

decision, as it is being cited as authority for Invenergy's waiver application. Intentional or

not, the Atlantic Shores decision has set a precedent where the bid received is not the bid, but

merely a foot in the door to negotiate the actual deal post-award. The BPU's decision to

allow post award modifications for bids has fostered an environment where promises made

as part of a bid are not binding, which in turn is eroding the goals of a competitive

solicitation process.

Invenergy has asserted that the audited quarterly financial statements are a

³¹ <u>Id</u> at 20.

<u>10</u> at 20.

June 7, 2024

Page 8

commercially unreasonable burden, a hardship, and materially disruptive.³² Assuming this is

true for the industry as a whole, it is unknown how many bidders chose simply not to bid

based on these same conditions or other conditions. It is unknown if these potential bidders

would have proposed bids even more advantageous to New Jersey residents and the State's

electric ratepayers if these conditions were not part of the Solicitation. It is also unknown if

the bids submitted in either of the last two solicitations contained any premium due to this

allegedly burdensome requirement.

The Board previously held that "the diversity in OSW developers. . . will create robust

competition, which will drive down the cost of future solicitations."33 Post-award waiver of

bid requirements undermines that goal. Therefore, if the Board chooses to waive the audited

quarterly financial statement requirement, it should reconsider enforcing the commitment in

future solicitations or revising the regulations, because it may result in even better results in

future solicitations and more competitive bids from more bidders. The Board must also

make clear that this waiver, in this instance, is not setting a precedent by which the bid is not

the bid. Failure to establish this fact will ultimately result in underbidding with an

assumption the bid can be fixed after the award; undermining competition, and potentially

resulting in winning bidders withdrawing, further complicating New Jersey's offshore wind

goals.

The Board should review its solicitations to determine if there are additional

requirements that could serve as a burden to entry that the Board has no intentions of ever

enforcing. Continuing to require a commitment which will not be enforced undermines the

entire competitive solicitation process.

³² Waiver petition at Paragraph 14 & 16.

³³ I/M/O the Board Of Public Utilities Offshore Wind Solicitation 2 For 1,200 To 2,400 MW – Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind

Project 1, LLC at 4, BPU Docket No. QO21050824 (Jun. 30, 2021) ("Atlantic Shores Award Order") at 24.

Hon. Sherri Golden, Secretary June 7, 2024 Page 9

Rate Counsel thanks the Board for the opportunity to make these comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

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