

# Enough ocean for everyone?

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Part 3 of 3: OCZMA director talks about the future of wave energy for the coast

It sounds like science fiction when Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association (OCZMA) director Onno Husing talks about the "speculative use of the ocean" - whether it's developing the coast's wave energy potential, or the prospect of marine reserves, and the complications and conflicts associated with each.

But Husing is talking about a reality that's happening now inside a system still facing the past - and putting interest and opportunity into a feasible framework in order to move forward. And part of that is bringing a diversity of stakeholders to the table.

"Current regulations deal with known facilities with known impacts, but over the large expanse of ocean off the whole coast, the impacts aren't known," said Husing. "You need an impact analysis. You can't ask the fishing industry to say yes or no until it's known what other parks would be coming to the coast.

"How can you know the impact if there's no overall coordination of everything that's going on? You have to lock in some knowns."

Husing said he thought a large part of that coordination should be developing a "comprehensive framework" at the state level. How many wave parks should be allowed, and how extensive should they be?

"If there is a state plan in place for an overall approach to wave energy, then the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has to honor that," said Husing. "You need a comprehensive framework for how to go about doing this."

The state, and Gov. Ted Kulongoski, have prioritized wave energy as an as yet untapped renewable resource.

The Oregon Department of Energy listed benefits of a public/private partnership on a web site about renewable energy.

"Oregon has the opportunity to lead the nation in ocean renewable energy development," said the ODE.

But there is no comprehensive plan in place for the whole coast.

Husing said you can't talk about coordination at the state level without the involvement of local groups.

"Local communities have a big role in helping determine that planning process," said Husing.

That's already happening up and down the coast in informal ways, he said. In Reedsport, the Oregon Solutions process has brought together a variety of local stakeholders - environmental groups, fishing

groups, government entities. Fishing committees are organizing in Newport and Reedsport on a broad level, on cross-industry lines.

The last time a similar level of inter-coastal collaboration happened inside the fishing industry, said Husing, was during the Brand Oregon campaign of 2003-04, a cooperative state-of-origin seafood marketing program that OCZMA helped organize.

The other "dilemma" facing the coast and wave energy, said Husing, is the difficulty of working within a statutory framework that hasn't adapted to evolving future needs.

Something like the Federal Power Act, which oversees federal regulation and development of power, but doesn't talk about hydroelectric facilities in the ocean, said Husing - and is more limited to mostly relicensing options for facilities such as dams in rivers.

"You really need a comprehensive analysis," said Husing.

He said that can't happen without including in that analysis the possibilities and potential impacts of marine reserves, or marine protected areas, which would happen in offshore areas, the first zero to three miles of seabed.

"It's not going to be easy," said Husing. "People look at that ocean and they say, 'Wow, it's big. There must be enough space for everyone.' But the question is how do we share that space?"

Wave energy has the potential to be a multi-billion dollar industry, he said. It has the potential to benefit from public/private partnerships. It has a lot of potential on a variety of planes.

"We're conflicted on some levels. It sounds like a great idea," said Husing. "The potential is enormous."

Husing likes the idea of creating jobs for the coast. He supports the concept of reducing industry's carbon footprint and developing independent sources of energy.

"But how's it going to happen, and at what cost, to the fishing industry and to the environment?" said Husing. "It's about trying to create a win-win."

And it's about an industry that's facing a historical transition period. It's about recognizing that crabbing is a vital part of Oregon's coastal economy. And it's about acknowledging the successes of an industry that's reviving itself and looking to the future in uncertain times, he said.

"I have an image of a plane crash victim emerging from burning fuselage - and now additional things are thrown at [the fishing industry] even though there's a transition toward a sustainable industry going on," said Husing.

Sustainability is about selective gear and regulations, and bringing back what once was nearly lost through careful control.

"The real big untold story in Oregon is that the fishing industry has completely changed," said Husing. "It's a much smaller, more sustainable industry."

The ocean is not dying, Husing said. The ocean is thriving. But it's a fragile future. And that should be a factor, he said.

"It's going to be a matter of striking a balance," said Husing. "...It's all about protecting yourself for the future."

He said it's still early in the process for the wave energy industry. It's about 10 to 15 years behind wind and solar technology, so it's still an expensive undertaking.

"It's a daunting prospect," said Husing.

And it is something not undertaken lightly by companies looking to break into the potential, he said.

"We're entering a period where there's an early rush to say this is a great thing for Oregon, and there's no doubt that's been the signal to the wave industry," said Husing.

What's coming for Florence is baseline environmental reviews, environmental impact statements, a pilot project, studies, research and public meetings.

"It's only a matter of time before Oceanlinx is serious," said Husing.

"We're going to learn a lot. If anybody tells you they know how these things are going to play out, they're not telling the truth.

"I'm encouraged that the Port of Siuslaw and the city of Florence and the county commissioners are being proactive here. That's the kind of leadership we need so that entities in Western Lane County can sit at the table, helping to shape how this goes forward."

He said Florence may not be a key fishing ground on the coast, but it plays a part in the overall future the coast faces - whether it's maintaining a sustainable fishing industry, or renewable energy.

"The fishing industry needs to be at the table in broad discussions," said Husing. "The state of Oregon needs to be understanding of the fishing industry's concerns."

Overall, Husing said he remains optimistic about the future. He sees movement already happening in a positive direction.

"We're all keeping our fingers crossed and hoping this can become a true win-win," said Husing. "A lot of work needs to be done to articulate a framework where that kind of win-win can happen."

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