



Audubon



NRDC



Addressing Misinformation and Protecting Marine Life in Offshore Wind Development

False claims about offshore wind and marine mammals have been circulating that are originating from organizations that receive financial backing from the oil and gas industry, including “astroturf” groups such as Save Right Whales, Protect Our Coast New Jersey and Save Our Beach View. ([Lutz & Rowland-Shea, 2023](#), [Slevin et al., 2023](#)) Multiple analyses have proven these fake grassroots groups receive funding from the national anti-offshore wind network, that includes groups like the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, the American Energy Alliance, Caesar Rodney Institute, the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and the American Coalition for Ocean Protection. ([Lutz & Rowland-Shea, 2023](#), [Slevin et al., 2023](#)) This document corrects the most common false claims with science-based research.

Anti-offshore Wind False Claim #1: Offshore wind farms have caused the recent spike in whale deaths.

FACTS

A large range of experts and scientists state **there is no evidence linking off-shore wind development to recent whale deaths.** ([Axelrod, 2024](#), [Thorne & Wiley 2024](#)) Some of these experts include:

- [Marine Mammal Commission](#)
- [Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution](#)
- [Cornell University](#)
- [NOAA Fisheries](#)
- [Duke University](#)
- [Department of Energy](#)
- [Yale University](#)

Researchers have found definitive evidence that the two factors that account for the majority of whale deaths are vessel strikes and fishing gear. ([IWC, 2024](#))

- **Vessel Strikes:** Vessel strikes are a major threat to whales, especially mothers and calves, with data showing they cause 55% of identifiable North Atlantic right whale deaths since 2017. ([NOAA, 2024](#))
- **Entanglement in Fishing Gear:** Entanglement in fishing gear is a significant threat to whales, causing injuries, many of which will ultimately be fatal, hindering movement and feeding, and negatively impacting reproduction. Data shows that since 2017, entanglement has been responsible for 37% of identifiable North Atlantic right whale deaths and the vast majority of their injuries. ([NOAA, 2024](#))
- **Climate Change:** Also notable, climate change is affecting whale populations by altering their food sources and migration patterns, forcing them into busy areas where the risk of vessel strikes and entanglement is higher. ([Cooley et al., 2022](#); [Meyer-Gutbrod et al., 2023](#))

Anti-offshore Wind False Claim #2: Sounds produced by offshore wind have caused recent whale deaths.

FACTS

Whales **rely on sound to navigate, find prey, avoid predators, and communicate with each other.** Excessive underwater noise can disrupt a whale’s communication, navigation abilities, and feeding behavior. Loud noise can cause auditory injuries when experienced at close range. ([NOAA, 2022](#))

Many industries make noise in the ocean, including **shipping, the military, bridge and pier construction, the oil and gas industry, and offshore wind development.** The use of best practices and evolving technologies, reflecting years of research on underwater noise, helps mitigate these noise disturbances to protect marine mammals. ([Weilgart, 2023](#))

There is no evidence linking HRG surveys used in offshore wind development to recent marine mammal deaths. ([Thorne & Wiley, 2024](#); [MMC, 2023](#))

- **Offshore wind construction** does produce temporary underwater noise through High Resolution Geophysical (HRG) surveys and through pile driving to install turbine foundations. ([BOEM, 2023](#))
- **HRG survey sounds** are lower in energy than seismic airgun arrays used in the oil and gas industry and are mostly mitigatable through proven safety measures. **Seismic airgun arrays are not used in renewable energy development.** ([Baker & Howson, 2021](#))

Offshore wind developers are required to use a number of proven safety measures to protect whales and other marine mammals during surveying and pile driving activities. These include:

- **Protected Species Observers (PSOs):** PSOs are required by NOAA and BOEM for offshore wind projects to monitor and safeguard marine mammals through visual observation. These trained third-party professionals help prevent harm by reducing vessel contact and noise disturbances, as well as monitoring behavioral effects. ([NOAA, 2023](#); [A.I.S. Inc., 2020](#); [BOEM, 2023](#))
- **Seasonal/Time of Day Restrictions:** To minimize risk, construction activities like pile driving are restricted to periods outside peak migration or foraging seasons for North Atlantic right whales and limited to times when detection at large distances is possible. These seasonal and time-of-day restrictions are incorporated into all federal permits thus far for offshore wind farms. ([SLR Consulting, 2024](#); [SEER, 2022](#); [Federal Register, 2023](#))
- **Speed Restrictions:** Lower vessel speeds significantly reduce the risk of fatal collisions with whales—by up to 90% for vessels traveling at 10 knots or less. Offshore wind permits issued to date mandate speeds of 10 knots or less for almost all project vessels year-round. ([NOAA, 2024](#), [BOEM, 2024](#))
- **Noise Abatement Systems:** Offshore wind developers are required to use noise abatement technologies, like bubble curtains, to reduce the impact of construction noise on marine mammals. The industry is also actively testing new noise reduction methods to further minimize noise pollution. ([Oladimeji Bello, 2024](#); [Davis, 2018](#); [AdBm Technologies, 2020](#))
- **Acoustic Monitoring:** Passive acoustic monitoring uses underwater microphones to detect marine mammal sounds, informing developers when marine mammals are near so as to stop noisy activities or make vessel adjustments to avoid disturbance. This technology is being used in conjunction with visual observers (PSOs) for comprehensive monitoring during the installation of turbine foundations. ([NOAA, 2021](#); [NYSERDA, 2021](#))

KEY REASONS TO SUPPORT OFFSHORE WIND:

Clean, Reliable Energy

- Offshore wind represents a viable alternative to fossil fuels, contributing to a cleaner energy future, which protects the ocean and planet from climate change. Offshore wind's vast potential, with a capacity to generate over five times the annual US electricity consumption, can enhance grid stability, especially during peak demand periods. ([R. Zuckerman et al., 2023](#))

Local Energy Security

- With a significant portion of the U.S. population residing near the coast, offshore wind offers strong local energy security, reducing reliance on distant energy sources and enhancing resilience against global market disruptions. ([NOAA, 2024](#))

Broad Support by Americans

- Two-thirds of coastal residents support offshore wind development and favor the government supporting offshore wind. ([Turn Forward & Climate Nexus, 2024](#))

Economic Benefits

- Offshore wind development stimulates economic growth by creating well-paying jobs, particularly in coastal communities. Additionally, it supports various industries nationwide, such as steel manufacturing and shipbuilding, due to the demand for materials and expertise. ([Stefek et al., 2022](#))