

REWILDING OUR WATERS IN AN ERA OF OFFSHORE WIND

PRACTITIONER BRIEF, JUNE 2026

BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH REPORT COMMISSIONED IN 2025

Offshore wind development is set to expand rapidly in coming years, with UK climate targets aiming for a fourfold increase to 50GW by 2030, and doubling to 100GW by 2050.

The scale of this expansion means decisions taken today will shape our seas for generations. If terrestrial wind mistakes are repeated, the impacts could be catastrophic for already pressured marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

While industrialising parts of our seas may be inevitable, how it happens is not. It's time for government, industry, fisheries, communities, and marine restoration practitioners to work together to co-design a new approach to offshore wind development. One where clean energy supports ecological recovery, restoration creates local jobs, and coastal communities have a genuine stake in their seas.



OFFSHORE WIND – WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

To ensure Britain’s offshore wind growth delivers benefits for people and nature from the outset, we commissioned a research report on how the sector aligns with marine rewilding. The review did a deep dive into the impacts of offshore wind farms on species, habitats, natural processes and communities – so we can identify the risks to minimise and the opportunities to seize.

ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS

The research shows that disruption varies by lifecycle stage. Construction of these turbines is highly disruptive, with strongly negative impacts on several fish species (e.g. brill, cod, dab, plaice) and some bird species (e.g. common guillemot, northern fulmar, redhead). Operational years, however, may offer chances for ecological enhancement, such as the removal of other pressures like bottom trawling from the project area. Decommissioning presents unique challenges as the area with the largest data gaps. Because environmental compensation is complex and must remain a last resort, the absolute priority is minimising impacts through strategic siting.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

It’s clear from the research that wind farms reshape coastal economies, culture, and identity by altering seascapes. It also shows that economic benefits – especially jobs and income – are currently often overstated. The construction phase is especially disruptive. It also represents the point of greatest economic leakage, with a mere 30% of expenditure staying within the UK. Meaningful planning and investment are necessary to maximise these benefits for local communities.

A VISION FOR MARINE REWILDING AND OFFSHORE WIND

So, what does good look like for offshore wind energy, and how can it help scale up marine rewilding? To see healthier, more prosperous seas, communities, practitioners and developers must unite to demand a more ambitious, consistent approach.

Our research shows that, in instances where wind energy expansion capitalises on opportunities and minimises impacts, it does have the potential to drive marine rewilding. The massive investments and public attention it brings to our seas offer a rare chance to reshape marine management and boost rewilding through increased funding, legislative change and ocean literacy. We need a whole-systems approach.

When rewilding is integrated into development plans, clean energy serves as a vital catalyst for regenerating ecosystems and communities. But to ensure this revolution delivers on all fronts, marine restoration practitioners must be part of the picture, and join us in demanding better from the sector.

“THE SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT IN OUR SEAS HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER, YET OUR ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES ARE UNDER MOUNTING PRESSURES. CAN WE AFFORD FOR OFFSHORE WIND’S OBJECTIVES TO BE SOLELY MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO?”



OUR REWILDING PRINCIPLES

- Support people and nature together
- Let nature lead
- Create resilient local economies
- Work at nature’s scale
- Secure benefits for the long term



THE CHANGES WE WANT TO SEE

1

STRATEGIC SITING

Offshore wind infrastructure must be sited on degraded or homogenous seabeds, avoiding rare or vital ecological features. By advocating for this, we can minimise the impact on rewilding projects, wildlife and habitats. Wind farms must also be managed adaptively with robust, long-term monitoring that can help guide future infrastructure.

2

STREAMLINED MARINE LICENSING

Bold targets for both offshore wind and biodiversity mean we must find solutions to well-known barriers to marine restoration. Specifically, the marine licensing process for restoration must be streamlined to enable large-scale initiatives. While some developers have already committed to net-positive biodiversity impact – and are starting to deliver on these, as seen in the Humber seascape – these pledges risk being hindered by a dated licensing framework.

3

NEW FUNDING FRAMEWORKS

For the massive investment in offshore wind power to also support the marine habitats it depends upon, we urgently need mandatory frameworks – like Marine Net Gain or Marine Net Benefit – to unlock private funds for nature recovery. This challenge has been well accepted by NGOs and industry alike; we now need governments to take action.

4

SEASCAPE-SCALE MARINE REWILDING

We must support and unlock seascape scale initiatives through direct cross-sector partnership between practitioners and industry. Even before statutory frameworks are established, partnerships can enable rewilding at an unprecedented scale while helping shape future government frameworks by piloting new approaches. Exploring opportunities for innovation or co-location can also help shape the seascapes of tomorrow.



5 MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Roughly three-quarters of UK wind farms have, or plan to introduce, community benefit funds¹. By collaborating with developers, practitioners can ensure these funds are truly transformational by supporting rewilding principles, employing local staff, prioritising meaningful in-kind benefits and remaining transparent. Beyond funding, developers should be encouraged to replicate successful terrestrial community-ownership models at sea.

6 IMPROVED OCEAN LITERACY

The expansion of offshore wind puts our seas in the spotlight, offering a unique window to build public understanding of marine ecosystems and climate solutions. This visibility is an ideal opportunity to reconnect people with our coasts through education, tourism, citizen science, and creative projects.

¹ Those in operation or under construction since 2010.

7 A COLLABORATIVE EVIDENCE BASE

To bridge scientific knowledge gaps on the impacts of offshore wind, we must convene open, transparent cross-sector stakeholder groups. Bringing together governments, developers, practitioners, NGOs, scientists, fishers, and communities will provide the data and meaningful dialogue needed to explore genuine co-location and collaborative solutions.

We all share a responsibility to demand marine rewilding alongside wind energy expansion. By coming together to act now, we can drive the bold changes required to achieve healthier seas for future generations.



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HELP US TURN THE TIDE

Rewilding Britain is inspiring a movement of rewilders across Britain's land and seas – a groundswell of hope, so that together we can ensure a wilder, nature-rich future that benefits us all.

Through the Rewilding Network we support and connect rewilders across Britain, helping amplify their voice nationally as we advocate for policy change. Membership is free.

READ THE RESEARCH REPORT



rewildingbritain.org.uk/offshore-wind

LEARN ABOUT THE REWILDING NETWORK



rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-hub