



New breeze: floating offshore wind

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- 🕒 **Introduction**
- 🕒 **Background**
- 🕒 **Assessment**
- 🕒 **Comment**

Introduction

On 27 December 2019 the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) designated an area off the coast of Goto City, Nagasaki, as the first zone dedicated to the promotion of offshore wind projects under the Act Promoting the Use of Marine Areas for the Development of Marine Renewable Energy Generation Facilities.

The act came into effect in April 2019, empowering METI and the MLIT to identify and designate promotion zones and providing for a public tender system to identify and nominate developers. The act further provides that prior to designating a promotion zone, METI and the MLIT must engage in a formal consultation process with local stakeholders via the establishment of what the act refers as a 'council'. The council will comprise members of METI and the MLIT, local government officials, academics, technical experts and other interested parties, such as members of local fishery associations.

The decision to designate Goto City as the first promotion zone followed:

- a two-week public comment period regarding the proposal to designate a promotion zone;
- a consultation with the relevant governmental agencies; and
- a hearing with the prefectural governor of Nagasaki and other local stakeholders.

The first public offering for the development of this promotion zone is expected to take place in 2020.

Background

On 8 February 2019 METI and the MLIT announced that they had started collecting information from local governments regarding potential promotion zones. Based on the proposals from local governments, on 30 July 2019 METI and the MLIT selected 11 areas that had commenced preparations to become a designated promotion zone. Of these 11 areas, Goto City, two areas in Akita Prefecture and one area in Chiba Prefecture were selected as potential areas. Detailed investigations, such as wind and geological surveys, were subsequently conducted in these four areas.

Assessment

Under the Act Promoting the Use of Marine Areas for the Development of Marine Renewable Energy Generation Facilities, when assessing whether a particular area should be designated as a promotion zone, METI and the MLIT will consider factors such as:

- the site's environment and climate and potential power output;
- any potential negative impact on sea routes and ports;
- whether the sea area can be used as a package with the adjacent port and harbour in terms of the transport of personnel and supplies;
- the probability of a secure interconnection to the electrical grid;
- any interference with, or impact on, fisheries; and
- whether the site extends into any port area or other area outside the general waters.

Comment

Goto City's designation as the promotion zone is unique in that, of the 11 areas that were initially considered, it was the only sea area where floating wind power generation was proposed. It will be one of the first full-scale projects to implement offshore floating wind turbines at a commercial level. While Japan has been a pioneer of floating wind turbine technology, to date, floating wind projects have largely remained at an experimental level, carried out as government-funded demonstration projects. Given Japan's robust offshore capacity (it is the world's sixth-largest exclusive economic zone) and strong maritime industry, as well as the government incentives to harness offshore wind power, offshore floating wind is a promising and commercially competitive area of renewable energy development. The designation of the promotion zone off the coast of Goto City is expected to further demonstrate that floating wind power generation is both a technical and commercially viable method of wind power generation in Japan.

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