

## Report I October 2022

### Wind Farms

#### Background

It is becoming increasingly apparent that prohibited zones in wind farms can have a serious impact on recreational sailing craft safety. Wind farm policy has developed over recent years, with different countries taking different approaches to controlling access to wind farm zones. In some countries' wind farm zones there is a total ban on vessel traffic, and in some the rules vary according to visibility, nature of operations being undertaken, size of craft, etc. Within UK waters sailing craft may enter wind farm zones in any weather conditions.

The assessed safety issues are as follows:-

1. Where there are wind farms in which entry to recreational sailing craft is prohibited, or only permitted under certain conditions, it is difficult to plan a passage when the situation might change according to the boundaries that might be crossed.
2. Where recreational craft are prohibited from sailing within wind farms, they are being forced closer to routes taken by commercial traffic.
3. The cumulative effect of having to sail around wind farm zones can significantly lengthen passage times, thus potentially exposing sailing vessels to adverse weather conditions.
4. There could be difficulties if sailing craft are not permitted to transit wind farm zones when seeking refuge in a safe harbour during adverse weather conditions.

Yet recreational sailing vessels do not generally cause problems to wind turbines.

In most cases the top of the masthead of a recreational sailing vessel would be below the lowest position of a wind turbine blade. For example, offshore wind turbines located around the UK are required to have the lowest point of the rotor sweep at least 22 metres above Mean High Water Springs, and this clearance should be sufficient for the majority of small craft. If a yacht should come into contact with a wind turbine mast structure there would be insufficient kinetic energy from the yacht to significantly damage the wind turbine mast structure. The distance between wind turbines in offshore wind farms is such that, generally speaking, navigating between them presents no challenge to recreational sailing vessels. Furthermore, given that sailing craft can navigate safely around the coast and avoid both above-water and underwater obstructions, it seems perverse to think that yachts have to be excluded from wind farms because they might hit something that is in plain view, both day and night.

#### Developments involving the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

At the Navigation, Communications Search and Rescue (NCSR) subcommittee earlier this year a wind farm information paper from Belgium NCSR 9/Inf.3 studied the effects of changing the status of wind farms on the Belgian Continental shelf from 'Precautionary Areas' to 'Areas to be Avoided' (ATBA)

It is notable that the intention is for windfarms to become ATBAs for all vessels under Belgian law, subject to the usual exceptions, such as warships, SAR vessels, windfarm servicing vessels etc. Vessels under 24m are also allowed to enter the Borssele wind farm zone. However the overall trend appears to be for stricter control of access to waters within windfarms for the access and navigation of sailing craft.

An informal discussion was held with the chairman of the IMO Navigation Working Group, Mr. Joris Brouwers, Senior Adviser, Directorate Maritime Affairs, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Netherlands.

As a result of that discussion:

World Sailing's approach was welcomed. There was a lengthy discussion on the issues relating to recreational sailing vessels in wind farms. Mr. Brouwers fully understood World Sailing concerns.

Mr. Brouwers was concerned that in general there was no formal IMO policy relating to wind farms. As stated above policy has developed on an ad hoc basis by national authorities of littoral states, as a result of which there is no consistency and some issues when a country or a number of countries have adjacent wind farms and different routing criteria between them. He suggested that it would be possible for the IMO Navigation Working Group to consider the issues relating to yachts if World Sailing submitted an "any other business" paper at NCSR 10. He also suggested that it would be preferable to gain the support of the European Commission as this would influence any approach taken by national authorities with current or planned wind farms in the North Sea.

#### Action Required

Find out contact details for the appropriate personnel involved with the Navigation Working Group and wind farms in the EC and those countries planning wind farms in the English Channel and North Sea.

Draft a paper prior to NCSR10 and submit for the NCSR 10 agenda.

Seek support from EC and other countries involved with planning wind farms.

