

Testimony of David Lewis at PUC hearing re Docket 4111 New Shoreham Wind Farm
January 5, 2010.

My name is David Lewis. I live at 1335 Cooneymus Road, Block Island. I am speaking here tonight rather than at today's earlier hearing on the island because I had to be off-island on business.

I want to call your attention to three points as you deliberate.

Point 1.

The New Shoreham Town Council has not been fully engaged in the details leading up to docket 4111. For more than a year, Deepwater Wind has aimed a public relations campaign at the public through advertising, direct mail, and public meetings providing information about the elements of the Block Island Wind Farm that are under their direct control. Additionally Deepwater has suggested information about the broader proposal that realigns Block Island's electricity resources, much of which is outside of their control. The suggestion is strong that if Block Island folks simply have faith and let the invisible benevolent hands of Deepwater, National Grid, the Rhode Island General Assembly, the Governor, the Public Utilities Commission, and BIPCO work through the details, then we will pay less for electricity and we will be better off in the end. Can we really get something for nothing?

Yet there is little information coming to the public from Town Hall beyond what we hear from Deepwater. Other than filing as an intervener on docket 4111, there is little reassurance that the council is adequately engaged on the critical financial and infrastructure issues that will play out, either to our advantage or disadvantage. There has been little public discussion of suboptimal impacts.

Point 2.

In his pre-filed testimony as posted on the PUC website on page 17, lines 2 through 5, Deepwater CEO William Moore states that “the response from Block Islanders to date has been very positive”. He cites a Roger Williams University survey, which finds that 84% of registered voters support the project.

Similarly the New Shoreham Town Council has relied on the Block Island Wind Survey, managed by Dr. Pavlides of Roger Williams University, as its primary measure of public support for the inshore wind farm. The council received a briefing on the results of this survey by Dr Pavlides in a public meeting in August, but neither the full body of statistical data nor the respondents’ written comments have been released for public scrutiny, as of October 2009. An email from Dr. Pavlides responding to a request for backup data and the written comments stated that it was ‘not appropriate to release raw data before publication’. So all anyone knows about public opinion on wind turbines is what Dr. Pavlides told the council. And based solely on this briefing, the council claims overwhelming support for the inshore wind farm without ever seeing the backup data or a published report.

Additionally concerning, and suggesting lack of clarity about the survey’s true interpretation, is that the survey only asked about the best case scenarios. It did not fully explore tradeoffs involved in real world circumstances. Suboptimal conditions do exist, must be accounted for, and do impact people’s opinions and support.

Point 3.

One could argue that the public burden of an 8 turbine inshore wind farm is a reasonable tradeoff for the public benefit of 1st mover advantage derived by Deepwater and the state for the larger, future wind farms over the horizon envisioned by Deepwater and other entrepreneurs.

I am concerned that the 8 turbine inshore wind farm opens the door to future inshore expansion and exploitation. Recent unfinished discussions among the participants about cable sizing and capacities do nothing to assure the layman that excess cable capacity would not be designed, and subsequently lead to additional inshore turbines in the future.

In October 2009, Deepwater CEO William Moore stated in a letter to the editor of The Block Island Times that Deepwater quote “will not ever build more than eight turbines in the state waters (or immediately adjacent federal waters) surrounding Block Island”, unquote. Furthermore, he welcomed an 8 turbine limit as a condition of state or federal permits.

I appreciate Mr. Moore’s commitment and good faith in this regard, but unfortunately it doesn’t carry over to other entrepreneurs, including National Grid, who might look to take advantage of excess cable capacity, were it to be so designed.

Many like me will be looking to the Public Utilities Commission to protect the public trust in this regard.