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Presentation materials
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ABSTRACT

The Butterfly Effect and Cumulative Environmental Impact Assessment in Offshore Wind

The potential cumulative environmental impacts (CEI) associated with the Australian offshore wind (OSW) industry could theoretically result in small, incremental impacts to species and ecosystems, which could then trigger larger-scale adverse impacts, especially when considered against existing activities in the maritime context. DCCEE's Guidance - Key environmental factors for offshore windfarm environmental impact assessment under the EPBC Act is a positive sign that CEI will be considered by OSW proponents and regulators alike. The Guidance applies to projects in the Australian offshore environment; it includes renewable energy projects powered by wind, waves and tides/currents; and introduces the concept of regional planning approaches. However, there appear to be some uncertainties facing offshore wind proponents such as an absence of standardised methodologies for undertaking CEI assessments, defining the boundaries of a CEI assessment, and how a CEI assessment should establish a reliable baseline. These uncertainties are considered in the situational context of the first wave of Feasibility Licences to be awarded in Australia. Further, in a temporal context, the OSW industry will introduce new assets to the marine environment in comparatively short timeframes, thereby introducing potentially unknown risks to species and ecosystems. If we overlay a new maritime industry upon existing maritime industries at a frenetic pace (in historical terms), what are the risks? Could we inadvertently introduce intolerable conditions such that a tipping point (of no return) is reached for some species? These questions are explored in more detail, including practical approaches to mitigate CEI, based on national and international examples. (PLEASE NOTE: This presentation will be given at the Australian Wind Industry Summit (September 2024), facilitated by the (Australian) Clean Energy Council. Should it be accepted in principle by EIANZ for the IA-Symposium, I can modify to avoid duplication across attendees of both conferences / make more unique for this event).

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Based in Melbourne, Damien is Practice Lead – Sustainability for Stantec Australia. He is an accomplished sustainability and environmental professional, with a career spanning over 25 years in consulting, design, construction and operational roles. Damien holds a Bachelor degree in Geography and Climate; and a Masters degree in Environmental Planning. He is Stantec's offshore wind champion, where he brings together multidisciplinary teams to support developers, government and supply chain to create a new industry for Australia. Uniquely, his initial career in the Royal Australian Navy gives him insight into the maritime aspects of offshore wind, including vessel operations, port requirements and maritime security.