Fishes wish say on future of wind energy

Offshore plans discussed at packed hearing in Wildwood

By Bill Barlow Special to the STAR AND WAVE

WILDWOOD — For the most part, the fishing industry representatives spoke in favor of offshore wind farms while some environmental representatives voiced concern over the impact on the ecosystem. The issue of offshore wind energy was discussed Thursday at the Harriet Tubman Museum as part of the first offshore hearing held in Wildwood. The meeting was one of a number of hearings held across the state to allow stakeholders to give their input.

The crowd overflowed the meeting room at the Harriet Tubman Center for the hearing on the scientific and technical challenges facing New Jersey’s commercial fishing industry. Many of the folks in the crowd were commercial fishermen, and representatives of the fishing and tourism industry also testified at the hearing, which was led by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. More than 90 people were on hand for the meeting, and the audience overflowed into the museum’s lobby, where about 200 more people attended.

The hearing included discussions about the potential impacts of offshore wind on commercial fishing, tourism, recreation and the environment. The hearing included representatives from the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, the Boat Owners Association of America, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, the New Jersey Board of Fishermen, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the New Jersey Division of Marine Fisheries and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The hearing was one of several being held across the state to allow stakeholders to give their input on offshore wind energy. The Department of Environmental Protection is in the process of developing regulations for offshore wind development.

The meeting was led by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, which is responsible for overseeing the development of offshore wind farms. The board is scheduled to hold a series of hearings across the state to hear from stakeholders on the potential impacts of offshore wind on commercial fishing, tourism, recreation and the environment.

Many spoke of the history and importance of fishing in New Jersey, including those of fishing returning to the table when wind projects are built.

"There is no doubt that wind power is an essential part of the future of commercial fishing in the Northeast," said a speaker at the hearing. "But it is important that we ensure that wind projects are designed in a way that minimizes the impact on commercial fishing and other uses of the ocean."