

Regional Assessments: Improving Regulatory Efficiency for Future Marine Renewable Energy Developments

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The Canadian *Impact Assessment Act* includes provisions for the conduct of regional assessments (RAs) and their consideration in subsequent project impact assessments (IAs). The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada's (IAAC's) RA program has included the planning and completion of several such assessments to date - the most recent of which were focussed on future offshore wind developments in Atlantic Canada.

Experience to date suggests that there are numerous potential objectives, approaches, outcomes and uses for RAs, and often diverse views amongst participants around what an RA can be and should deliver. On the one hand, RAs can facilitate a planning approach for addressing complex regional issues that are difficult to assess and manage through project-specific IAs alone. At the same time, they are often seen as a way of streamlining and expediting project IAs and associated decision-making, including as part of “federal efforts needed to accelerate regulatory efficiency for clean growth projects” as per a recent federal Cabinet Directive (July 2024).

This presentation will describe, and present the key findings of, an RA research initiative initiated in September 2024. Using the recent Atlantic Canada offshore wind RAs as a case study, it explores how RA planning and conduct can reflect the dual but inter-related objectives of improving both IA “effectiveness” and “efficiency” for future developments in the sector. Through surveys and interviews with key regulators involved in project IA processes, the research has investigated how RAs can best be designed and completed to maximize their utility in, and influence on, subsequent project IAs, as well as how to address any associated analytical and procedural considerations. In presenting the research findings, the presentation will highlight some key principles, considerations, and lessons from practice to help inform future RA planning, conduct and use in both the Canadian and international contexts.