

# WIND FARM OPPONENTS ASK: WHAT ABOUT THE WHALES?



There are plans to construct a wind farm 10km from Kingston SE, like this one offshore from Kent in the UK. Picture: Gareth Fuller

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A \$1.75BN offshore wind farm planned for near Kingston in the state's South-East threatens to harm southern right whales and birds, some environment groups say.

SA Offshore Windfarm, a subsidiary of UK-based Australis Energy, is planning the project, which would feature between 40 and 75 turbines, depending on the technology used.

They would be installed about 10km off the coast of Kingston SE.

Southern right whale advocacy group Encounter Whales has lodged a submission with the federal government on the plans.

The government has deemed the project a “controlled action” requiring an environmental impact statement spelling out how risks would be managed.

Encounter Whales spokeswoman Elizabeth Steele-Collins said the project could harm marine fauna through injury or disturbance from noise, habitat destruction and “vessel interactions”.

She said there was a “significant risk” to various threatened species, including southern right whales.

“This (risk) applies not only to the construction phase of the project and the significant impact pile driving would have but to ongoing operation and maintenance in subsequent years,” Ms Steele-Collins said.

In a separate submission, Maureen Christie, secretary of Friends of Shorebirds SE, raised worries about species including the critically endangered curlew sandpiper and eastern curlew.

She said the area was an “extremely important” and “sensitive” habitat area unsuitable for a wind farm.

Ms Christie’s submission said the area already had several operational landbased wind farms and more proposed, and if all proceeded it would create a 140km long barrier from Kongorong to Cape Jaffa.

SA Offshore Windfarm says the project could generate up to 600MW – enough to power 400,000 SA homes.

Documents the company submitted with the federal government show that while “there is a risk of bird strike” from rotor blades, the turbines would be 30km away from the Ramsar-listed Coorong and Lower Lakes wetlands.

It said there could be risks to whales and further studies are needed.