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BLOG

U.S. Government Reports on Vessels Needed for U.S. Offshore Wind Projects

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On December 8, 2020, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, an independent research arm of the U.S. Congress, issued a report on vessels needed for U.S. offshore wind projects. The report entitled – *Offshore Wind Energy – Planned Projects May Lead to Construction of New Vessels in the U.S., but Industry Has Made Few Decisions amid Uncertainties* – captures the amorphous nature of the task GAO was given.

Congress requested the Report in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 enacted in December 2019 seeking to get an understanding of the market for Jones Act qualified U.S.-flag vessels for the offshore wind market. GAO examined industry sources and interviewed a range of private industry professionals and related U.S. Government personnel. The Report contains substantial current information regarding world-wide available wind turbine installation vessels (WTIVs) – but no information regarding survey, directed scour protection, foundation installation or other vessels needed for offshore wind projects.

GAO notes obliquely that the issue of offshore federal jurisdiction applying the U.S. Jones Act to offshore renewable projects remains open – an issue which may be resolved soon in this year's National Defense Authorization Act as noted in a prior post.

GAO confirms that offshore wind turbines in U.S. waters will be installed for the foreseeable future by non-U.S.-flag WTIVs because there are no existing U.S.-flag vessels "with sufficient capacity to function as a WTIV to install the larger turbines that offshore developers plan to use." GAO indicates that the nacelle weight of the current generation 12 megawatt turbine is about 660 tons to be installed at a height of about 500 feet whereas the five turbines installed off the coast of Block Island, Rhode Island were about 440 tons installed at a height of about 330 feet.

GAO reports that the utility of Jones Act-qualified WTIVs to be constructed in the United States may be limited by port access restrictions such as bridge heights. GAO also noted there has been at least one private study to the effect that Jones Act-qualified feeder vessels working in tandem with a foreign WTIV maybe more efficient than a Jones Act WTIV working without feeder vessels.

Finally, GAO reports that Jones Act-qualified jack up feeder vessels will have to be constructed because of the limited utility of deck barges which might be used in their place and that "there may not be any existing Jones Act-compliant jack-up vessels that can carry all the components of a current generation turbine."

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