

Brown University Climate and Development Lab (CDL) submission to the *Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy*

Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

Dear Committee Secretariat,

On behalf of the Climate and Development Lab at Brown University (CDL), we are pleased to provide the following submission to help inform the Australian *Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy*. Note that this submission represents the views of the authors and participating lab members, and not necessarily those of Brown University.

This submission is informed by nearly three years of research on the anti-turbine movement in the Northeast of the United States. The CDL is a student-faculty think tank informing more just, equitable, and effective climate change policy. It focuses on obstruction to climate action at the state and federal levels, through policy briefs, research reports, and peer-reviewed papers. Its scholars and its published work serve as informational resources for journalists, policy professionals, litigation teams and others.

CDL research on offshore wind energy opposition is available at climatedevlab.brown.edu/anti-offshorewindnetwork. This submission draws on the following published research by CDL scholars, listed here in reverse chronological order:

- (1) Legal Entanglements: Mapping Connections of Anti-Offshore Wind Groups and their Lawyers in the Eastern United States¹
- (2) Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast²
- (3) Spinning Negativity: Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress³

¹ Climate and Development Lab. (2025, August). Legal Entanglements: Mapping Connections of Anti-Offshore Wind Groups and their Lawyers in the Eastern United States. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/legal-entanglements-mapping-connections-of-anti-offshore-wind-groups-and-their-lawyers-in-the-east>

² Slevin, I., Katstrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

³ Garo, B., and Roberts, T. (2024, February). *Spinning Negativity: Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress*. Brown University Climate and Development Lab.

(4) Against the Wind: A Map of the Anti-Offshore Wind Network in the Eastern United States⁴

(5) Discourses of Climate Delay in the Campaign Against Offshore Wind: A Case Study from Rhode Island⁵

We will be happy to provide further information to the Committee. Best wishes,

J Timmons Roberts and Isaac Slevin

<https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/new-brown-university-study-finds-pervasive-disinformation-in-congress-about-offshore-wind>

⁴ Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., & Roberts, T. (2023, December). *Against the Wind: A Map of the Anti-Offshore Wind Network in the Eastern United States*. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/services-1>

⁵ Climate and Development Lab. (2023, April). Discourses of Climate Delay in the Campaign Against Offshore Wind: A Case Study from Rhode Island. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/discourses-of-climate-delay-in-the-campaign-against-offshore-wind-a-case-study-from-rhode-island>

Brown University Climate and Development Lab (CDL) submission to the *Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy*

Introduction

Over the past few years, the Climate and Development Lab has conducted research on the resurgent movement against offshore wind industry on the East Coast of the United States. Through lawsuits, op-eds, and public testimony, this movement has likely meaningfully reduced public support for offshore wind energy and helped the second Trump Administration advance anti-turbine orders.^{6 7} Our research shows how the rhetorical and material strategies used to stall offshore wind projects are shared among community anti-turbine groups, fossil fuel interests, conservative think tanks, and fishing industry advocates. We detail known connections between these groups in our publications.

The first part of this testimony will explain how familiar anti-renewable actors are enmeshed with new political formations that disavow specific forms of renewable energy, but may not fit the profile of the “climate denialist” as they’re commonly understood. Next, we will explain how an astroturf-oriented approach to understanding climate obstruction apparently fails to classify the bulk of anti-turbine activism in the Eastern United States. The final section of this testimony will focus on how anti-turbine arguments reflect well-worn delay tropes, and how governmental bodies and others can similarly analyse anti-renewable sentiment wherever it is found.

1. Networks of obstruction to offshore wind development

The 2020s have seen a new form of renewable energy opposition rarely considered in the popular zeitgeist: community groups who vociferously fight against planned renewables projects, commonly claiming that they will negatively impact the environment. These groups have found fertile ground in places where offshore wind turbines are set to be constructed, and they have proven critical in the successful efforts to halt project construction on the U.S. East Coast. However, our research into their political strategy has revealed that while they may form spontaneously from local concerned citizens, they do not act organically, nor do they fit into the conventional logic of dark money. Rather, they operate in a political network where legal support,

⁶ Stevenson, I. M., Storrow, B. (2025, August 28). *Internal emails reveal Interior’s Empire Wind deliberations*. E&E News by Politico. <https://www.eenews.net/articles/internal-emails-reveal-interiors-empire-wind-deliberations/>

⁷ Stevenson, I. M. (2025, September 18). *Meet the New England anti-wind group aligning with Trump*. <https://www.eenews.net/articles/meet-the-new-england-anti-wind-group-aligning-with-trump-2/>

rhetorical strategies, fundraising capacity, and digital content are exchanged to build collective power.⁸

In New England, which describes the Northeastern part of the United States that stretches from Maine to Connecticut, land is relatively expensive and parcels in Southern New England are fragmented, while relatively shallow waters on the continental shelf are plentiful and winds are strong. As such, constructing commercial-scale offshore wind farms is the only viable way for Southern New England states to decarbonize their grid in the short term and meet their renewable energy targets.⁹ State agencies such as the Coastal Resources Management Council in Rhode Island and federal agencies such as the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began about 2006 lengthy research and stakeholder processes that eventually designated certain patches of ocean as available for wind farm construction.^{10 11 12} The federal government has leased these patches of land to a variety of developers, including the Danish energy giant Ørsted.¹³

As these leases were approved and construction on these projects began, anti-turbine organizations began popping up, from Maine to Virginia. Each organization claimed to represent a local constituency vociferously opposed to local offshore wind turbine construction.¹⁴ However, beyond the local level, this activism received support directly and indirectly by familiar foes of climate action: the fossil fuel industry and national-level right-wing think tanks. For example, one alliance designed to represent commercial fishing interests in offshore wind siting and development processes, had

⁸ Slevin, I., Katstrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

⁹ Veysey, J., Roberts, J.T., Traver, D., Cotler, B., Gross, B. and Kim, A. (2019). *Deeper Decarbonization in the Ocean State: The 2019 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Reduction Study*. Stockholm Environment Institute and Brown University Climate and Development Lab. Research report. <https://www.sei.org/publications/deeper-decarbonization-in-the-ocean-state/>

¹⁰ National Working Waterfront Network. (2010). *Rhode Island Ocean Special Area Management Plan, OceanSAMP Volume I* https://nationalworkingwaterfronts.com/portfolio_page/ocean-special-area-management-ecosystem-based-management-strategies-in-rhode-island/

¹¹ Farrelly, A. (n.d.) *Ocean SAMP Celebrates 5 Years, Reveals New Findings*. University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center https://www.crc.uri.edu/story_tag/ocean-samp/#:~:text=The%20Ocean%20SAMP%20project%20received,the%20resources%20of%20ocean%20waters

¹² Musial, W., Elliott, D., Fields, J., Parker, Z., Scott, G. (2013). *Analysis of Offshore Wind Energy Leasing Areas for the Rhode Island/Massachusetts Wind Energy Area*. National Renewable Energy Laboratory. <https://docs.nrel.gov/docs/fy13osti/58091.pdf>

¹³ Lennon, A. E. (2025, September 5). *Our offshore wind tracker: What's new with wind projects off Massachusetts and beyond?* The New Bedford Light. <https://newbedfordlight.org/offshore-wind-tracker-whats-happening-to-massachusetts-projects/>

¹⁴ Sources can be found in Slevin, I., Katstrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

six members represented by a climate denial think tank in a lawsuit to stop construction of the Vineyard Wind project. The think tank has, in recent years, become one of the nation's most prolific and powerful renewable energy opposition groups.¹⁵ In 2021, a libertarian think tank founded a coalition as a legal fund for organizations united in their fight against offshore wind energy. At its founding, its membership consisted of four local-level anti-turbine organizations and five libertarian think tanks affiliated with the State Policy Network, a highly ambitious network of right-wing think tanks that seek to influence policy in each of the fifty states.^{16 17 18}

These are just two examples. Our complete network analysis of the U.S. East Coast anti-turbine movement can be found in our article entitled "Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast," which was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Energy Research & Social Science* earlier this year. We have submitted this article as part of our testimony, and the main figure is below.

¹⁵ Sources available in Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

¹⁶ See sources in Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

¹⁷ Mayer, J. (2013, November 15). *Is IKEA the new model for the conservative movement?* The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/is-ikea-the-new-model-for-the-conservative-movement>

¹⁸ DeSmog. (n.d.) *State Policy Network*. <https://www.desmog.com/state-policy-network/>

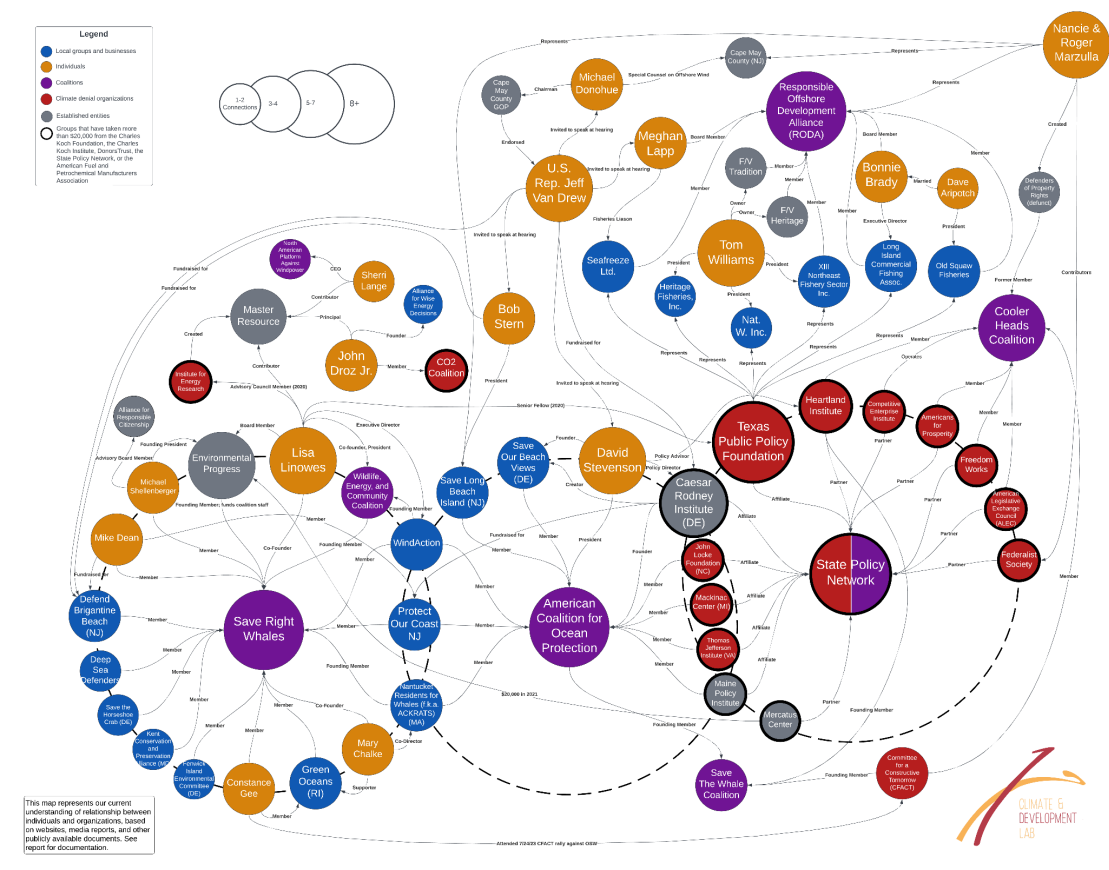


Fig. 1. The network map of Northeast U.S. grassroots anti-turbine groups, climate denial organizations, and their primary coalitions.¹⁹

In May, a doctoral student at Rutgers University reproduced many of our findings about the varied nature of coalitional support for anti-turbine activities. Her dissertation quotes at length a source who said their think tank “...has developed opposition programs. We know how to do a 501(c)(3). We know how to reach out and use social media. So we basically did training for these organizations to help them grow. The reaction we got, let’s say from the folks in (town) was ‘We’re so glad to hear from you. We felt so alone.’ This has been a very common situation with the other coalitions we’ve set up.”²⁰

This coalitional advantage extended to the content that reached anti-turbine activists up and down the East Coast. In reference to an anti-turbine group, Kwestle writes, that the group “...using the resources of [think tank] and the national anti wind

¹⁹ Sources can be found in Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

²⁰ Kwestel, M. (2025). *What We Have Here is A Failure to Collaborate: Action, Collaboration, and Misinformation in the New Jersey Anti-Wind Community*. Rutgers School of Graduate Studies <https://www.proquest.com/docview/3228629422?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&sourcetype=Dissertations%20%20Theses>

network, controlled the communication and resources of the antiwind network to the point that small organizations either decided that they didn't need to organize or felt too constrained to do so.”²¹

These communications are shared across the anti-turbine network. A participant in an anti-turbine group said that she looked to another group – one with significant ties to national-level anti turbine efforts – for “guidance.” Representatives of two other anti-turbine groups said they looked to two larger anti-turbine groups for information and website content.²²

These examples show that anti-renewables political coalitions are no accident. They make the anti-turbine cause more effective. Formal networks and informal networks (demonstrated by shared personnel, capacity, and communications) amplify the anti-turbine cause, with experienced anti-renewables fighters at the helm. In *Short Circuiting Policy*, the political scientist Leah Stokes writes about energy politics,

“The policy agenda across the country is more unified because interest groups work on the same policies in different states, crossing borders to lobby. Networks play three important roles: they help interest groups learn to anticipate policies’ consequences, they help interest groups disseminate effective political strategies, and they facilitate collective action. Overall networks help interest groups marshal their forces and reduce each individual member’s cost in contesting policy.”²³

Our most recent paper, entitled “Legal Entanglements: Mapping Connections of Anti-Offshore Wind Groups and their Lawyers in the Eastern United States,” specifically explores how the numerous legal challenges to offshore turbine construction are being litigated by familiar faces in the American conservative movement.²⁴ This reflects an under-researched part of anti-climate coordinated efforts, where individuals and their expertise are collective assets of a network and thus appear in a variety of battles on behalf of a cause.

²¹ Kwestel, M. (2025). *What We Have Here is A Failure to Collaborate: Action, Collaboration, and Misinformation in the New Jersey Anti-Wind Community*. Rutgers School of Graduate Studies

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/3228629422?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>

²² Kwestel, M. (2025). *What We Have Here is A Failure to Collaborate: Action, Collaboration, and Misinformation in the New Jersey Anti-Wind Community*. Rutgers School of Graduate Studies

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/3228629422?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>

²³ Stokes, L. (2020). *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States*, p. 6. Oxford University Press.

²⁴ Climate and Development Lab. (2025, August). Legal Entanglements: Mapping Connections of Anti-Offshore Wind GRoups and their Lawyers in the Eastern United States. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/legal-entanglements-mapping-connections-of-anti-offshore-wind-groups-and-their-lawyers-in-the-easte>

This paper reviewed five strands of legal entanglement. One firm's plaintiffs include local groups, coalitions, and municipal governments on the East Coast. Their main argument in each case is that federal agencies that approved offshore wind development failed to adhere to a variety of laws, most of them relating to conservation, such as the Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and the Endangered Species Act.²⁵ The law group's principals have decades of seeking to weaken these same environmental laws on behalf of extractive industries.

One other law firm represented a local group in a lawsuit against the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and has also represented the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow, the Heartland Institute, and the National Legal and Policy Center, some of the most prominent climate denial organizations in the country. In Australia, links between national and international networks of conservative think tanks and local opposition groups are being researched.

2. Understanding and (over)stating astroturf efforts

Climate advocates worldwide are increasingly reckoning with the fact that fossil fuel industry groups, utility companies, and their affiliated public relations and legal groups routinely design fake grassroots groups to mimic local support for those same industry's causes. These groups often have auspicious, climate-oriented names that mask their true goals, such as Floridians for Solar Choice, Californians for Balanced Energy Solutions, and most famously, the Global Climate Coalition (a network of powerful extractive corporations and trade organizations set up to defeat the Kyoto Protocol and other climate initiatives).²⁶

In "Corporate Ventriloquism: Corporate Advocacy, the Coal Industry, and the Appropriation of Voice," Bsumek et al. compellingly explain how relatively weak community actors' voices are sometimes more effective than those of comparatively strong corporations. Thus, corporate interests steal the power of community voices to advance their agendas and undermine dissenting views.²⁷ There is a large body of research on astroturf groups, misinformation, and the public square, such as Leah

²⁵ See references in Climate and Development Lab. (2025, August). Legal Entanglements: Mapping Connections of Anti-Offshore Wind GRoups and their Lawyers in the Eastern United States. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/legal-entanglements-mapping-connections-of-anti-offshore-wind-groups-and-their-lawyers-in-the-easte>

²⁶ Brulle, Robert J. "Advocating inaction: a historical analysis of the Global Climate Coalition." *Environmental Politics* 32, no. 2 (2023): 185-206.

²⁷ Bsumek, P. K., Schneider, J., Schwarze, S., & Peeples, J. (2014). Corporate Ventriloquism: Corporate Advocacy, the Coal Industry, and the Appropriation of Voice. In *Voice and Environmental Communication* (pp. 21-43). Palgrave Studies in Media and Environmental Communication. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137433749>

Stokes' *Short Circuiting Policy*, Edward T. Walker's *Grassroots for Hire*, Jane Mayer's *Dark Money*, and Jennifer Jaquet's *The Playbook*.^{28 29 30 31}

In our research, we have documented one case of an astroturf anti-turbine group, a project of a right-wing think tank. In 2019, the group sent anti-turbine letters to 35,000 homeowners in coastal communities in Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland.^{32 33}

However we believe the impact of astroturfing (as usually conceptualized, as a wholly externally created group) in the American anti-turbine movement is sometimes overstated. As journalists, politicians, and researchers are accustomed to the language of dark money and astroturfing, they sometimes incorrectly identify local anti-turbine configurations as astroturf organizations. But most groups have clear local foundations and there is often no evidence to suggest they have accepted dark money. It is important to understand why communities oppose offshore wind turbines, the range of means and motivations, and it is also important to understand the various types of support they receive from outside interests.

Our research has noted how the grassroots upswell of anti-turbine organizations features a surprising number of repeat leaders. The think tank mentioned above has provided robust and varied support to the anti-offshore wind groups, and testified repeatedly against projects and decisions. One coalition was started by a co-founder who is also in leadership of three of the coalition's eleven member organizations, and was previously a Senior Fellow at two organizations classified by Brulle et al. as climate denial organizations.^{34 35} There is no public evidence to suggest that the person was *paid* to seed anti-turbines groups on the local level, but their think tank connections reveal interest convergence among the member groups and the climate denial think tanks: both are interested in the immediate halt of offshore wind energy. Thus, they work together in ways that far surpass the simple exchange of money or creation of false grassroots groups. We detail this cooperation in the previous section.

²⁸ Stokes, L. (2020). *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States*. Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Walker, E. T. *Grassroots for Hire: Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ Mayer, J. (2016). *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. Doubleday.

³¹ Jaquet, J. (2022) *The Playbook: How to Deny Science, Sell Lies, and Make a Killing in the Corporate World*. Penguin Random House

³² References can be found in Slevin, I., Katstrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

³³ Thomas, M. (2023, January 5). *The Man Trying to Kill America's Offshore Wind Industry*. Distilled. <https://www.distilled.earth/p/the-man-trying-to-kill-americas-offshore>

³⁴ See Slevin, I., Katstrup, W., & Roberts, T. (2023, December). *Against the Wind: A Map of the Anti-Offshore Wind Network in the Eastern United States*. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/services-1>

³⁵ Brulle, R. J., Hall, G., Loy, L., & Schell-Smith, K. (2021). Obstructing action: foundation funding and US climate change counter-movement organizations. *Climatic Change*, 166(17). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03117-w>

Imprecise assumptions of astroturfed opposition may have negative consequences. In a study of offshore wind energy stakeholders in the United Kingdom published in 2014, Burningham et al. posit that the publics imagined by renewable energy stakeholders shape those stakeholders interactions with the actual publics they encounter in their work.³⁶ So, for example, if renewable energy advocates are dismissing their opponents as funded by dark money or planted by the fossil fuel industry, these attitudes will likely manifest in advocates' interactions with opponents. The consequences may be the failure of renewable energy projects.^{37 38 39}

As this Select Committee seeks to understand the prevalence and impact of astroturfing in questions of climate misinformation – as expressed in clause (c) of its Terms of Reference – we encourage its members to consider how local-level anti-renewables sentiments are *synergistic* with other interests, not *supplanted* by them. Yes, be on the look out for grassroots organizations that may be fake. They may be attempts by corporate interests to masquerade as concerned members of a community near a proposed renewable energy facility. But it is also true that genuine constituent concern is accelerated, amplified, and empowered by traditional anti-climate interests, rather than seeded by them. Their use of exaggerated claims of the downsides of renewable energy are often quite effective at stoking that local opposition.

3. Recognizing and analysing discourses of delay

Finally, our research has identified how rhetorical techniques long used by fossil fuel industry affiliates and others to stymie climate action have seeped into anti-turbine activism. Our work on this subject was first published in “Discourses of Climate Delay in the Campaign Against Offshore Wind: A Case Study from Rhode Island,” published by the CDL in 2023.⁴⁰ The peer-reviewed version of those findings can be found in

³⁶ Burningham, K., Barnett, J., & Walker, G. (2014). An Array of Deficits: Unpacking NIMBY Discourses in Wind Energy Developers' Conceptualizations of Their Local Opponents. *Society & Natural Resources*, 28(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2014.933923>

³⁷ Burningham, K., Barnett, J., & Walker, G. (2014). An Array of Deficits: Unpacking NIMBY Discourses in Wind Energy Developers' Conceptualizations of Their Local Opponents. *Society & Natural Resources*, 28(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2014.933923>

³⁸ Susskind, L., Chun, J., Gant, A., Hodgkins, C., Cohen, J., & Lohmar, S. Sources of opposition to renewable energy projects in the United States. *Energy Policy*, 165.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.112922>

³⁹ Wolsink, M. (1993). Entanglement of Interests and Motives: Assumptions behind the NIMBY-theory on facility siting. *Urban Studies*, 31(6).

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43196142>

⁴⁰ Climate and Development Lab. (2023, April). Discourses of Climate Delay in the Campaign Against Offshore Wind: A Case Study from Rhode Island. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/discourses-of-climate-delay-in-the-campaign-against-offshore-wind-a-case-study-from-rhode-island>

“Beyond Dark Money.”⁴¹ We replicated this methodology with a study of anti-turbine claims in the congressional record, published in “Spinning Negativity: Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress.”⁴² The three pieces are attached to our submission.

Climate delay is a tricky subject to pin down. It appears that once the fossil fuel industry and its allies could no longer effectively argue that climate change simply wasn’t happening, they shifted to a new suite of strategies to delay climate action.⁴³ Anti-climate actors now downplay the impacts of climate change, they promote methane gas as a “bridge fuel,” they attack renewables as intermittent or unreliable, or they support renewables in theory but not when they’re being implemented, or they slow walk (or walk back) corporate and public transitions to renewable energy.⁴⁴ These individuals or firms may pledge to support climate action or environmental conservation, but their actions do not measure up to their promises.

On the East Coast, many grassroots anti-turbine organizations simultaneously seek to block the region’s only viable path to renewable energy while self-identifying as concerned environmentalists. Their names demonstrate how they seek to position themselves as the true environmental activists in debates over offshore wind. However, our observation is that the conservation science they cite is often cherry-picked or misquoted, as are their claims about the supposed environmental harms of offshore wind. And their alternatives to renewable energy are far from viable for reducing carbon emissions in a timely way.^{45 46}

To situate anti-turbine claims among those from a history of stalled climate action, we reviewed information published by a local anti-wind organization using two academic frameworks: “Discourses of Climate Delay” by Lamb et al. and “FLICC: Five

⁴¹ Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

⁴² Garo, B., and Roberts, T. (2024, February). *Spinning Negativity: Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress*. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/new-brown-university-study-finds-pervasive-disinformation-in-congress-about-offshore-wind>

⁴³ Dunlap, Riley E., and Aaron M. McCright. "Challenging climate change." *Climate change and society: Sociological perspectives* 300 (2015).

⁴⁴ Roberts, J. T., Milani, C. R. S., Jacquet, J., Downie, C. (2025) *Climate Obstruction: A Global Assessment*, see chapters 2 and 6.

⁴⁵ Climate and Development Lab. (2023, April). Discourses of Climate Delay in the Campaign Against Offshore Wind: A Case Study from Rhode Island. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/discourses-of-climate-delay-in-the-campaign-against-offshore-wind-a-case-study-from-rhode-island>

⁴⁶ Documented in Garo, B., and Roberts, T. (2024, February). *Spinning Negativity: Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress*. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/new-brown-university-study-finds-pervasive-disinformation-in-congress-about-offshore-wind>

Techniques of Science Denial” by Cook.^{47 48} Where “Discourses of Climate Delay” focuses on the substance of claims, FLICC focuses on the rhetorical tactics used to advance them. We used both frameworks in our analysis to allow coastal stakeholders, journalists, politicians, and others to understand opposition groups’ argumentation, from the top-line claims to the logic and evidence used to back them up.

For example, we analysed the oft-repeated claim that offshore wind turbine construction will harm and kill whales. Within the Discourses of Climate Delay framework, we found that this claim is an example of the *policy perfectionism* category within the *emphasize the downsides* discourse. To encourage inaction, the claims portray offshore wind as a threat to endangered species. Yet they avoid acknowledging the role that preexisting anthropogenic impacts, including vessel strikes, entanglements in fishing gear, climate change and ocean acidification from fossil fuel use have on protected marine life.⁴⁹ These are reasons major environmental and conservation organizations assess responsibly deployed offshore wind as an important tool in fighting the myriad impacts of climate change, including on the ocean.^{50 51 52}

To support its claims, our analysis found that the anti-wind group relied in its materials on the *fake experts* tactic from the FLICC typology, citing speculative news articles and non-scientists at organizations classified as climate denial groups. Furthermore, claims about impacts to marine mammals also demonstrate the FLICC *cherry-picking tactic* of *slothful induction*: ignoring relevant evidence when coming to a conclusion. In its presentation, our case study group cited two articles which the group uses to support their claim that offshore wind turbines lead to whale strandings. One referred to damaging military sonar but says nothing of site characterization sonar, and the other was published by a think tank categorized as climate denialist. Reputable science and the body of evidence points to exposure to chronic noise from boating and shipping activities, PCB contamination, or congenital factors as causes for observed whale impairments and subsequent strandings.⁵³

⁴⁷ William F. Lamb, Giulio Mattioli, J. Sebastian Levi, Timmons Roberts, Stuart Capstick, Felix Creutzig, Jan C. Minx, Finn Müller-Hansen, Trevor Culhane, Julia K. Steinberger, Discourses of climate delay, *Global Sustainability* 3 (2020) e17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>.

⁴⁸ John Cook, A history of FLICC: the 5 techniques of science denial, *Skeptical Science* (2020). <https://skepticalscience.com/history-FLICC-5-techniques-science-denial.html>

⁴⁹ Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

⁵⁰ Audubon Society. 2025. *Birds and Offshore Wind: Developing the Offshore Wind that Birds Need*, <https://www.audubon.org/our-work/climate/clean-energy/birds-and-offshore-wind-report>

⁵¹ National Wildlife Federation. n.d. Offshore Wind Power: Building Our Clean Energy Future. Website. <https://offshorewind.nwf.org/>

⁵² The Nature Conservancy. 2025. Offshore Wind Opportunities. Website. <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/tackle-climate-change/clean-energy-transition/offshore-wind/>

⁵³ Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

Discourses of Climate Delay and FLICC can also be used to analyze anti-renewables groups' alternative solutions. In New England, anti-turbine groups often mention speculative developments in nuclear energy, such as modular reactors and nuclear fusion, as reasons to avoid constructing turbines. Claims that fusion will provide electricity in the near or medium-term and make wind obsolete includes clear language of delay, relying heavily on the *technological optimism* subcategory of the *push non-transformative solutions* discourse. As Lamb et al. write, technological optimism is deployed to argue that “technological progress will rapidly bring about emissions reductions in the future,” thus ambitious action may be delayed.⁵⁴ Here, the group positions a technology that does not yet exist as superior to one that has been successfully deployed at scale around the world and has been commercially viable for thirty years. It also does not seem as though small-scale nuclear reactors are coming soon enough to minimize short-term greenhouse gas emissions. They face substantial hurdles: funding, regulatory review, licensing, and stringent safety requirements.⁵⁵ Their siting is likely to encounter opposition as strong, or stronger, than the contested wind farms, which are thirteen miles or more offshore. Thus, the group's claim is also emblematic of the FLICC tactic of *wishful thinking* – choosing to believe something is true because one wants it to be true, instead of relying on scientific evidence.⁵⁶ The nuclear fusion argument employs the FLICC tactic of *cherry-picking*.

Having achieved proof of concept in our study of an anti-turbine group's rhetoric, we next moved to apply Discourses of Delay and FLICC to the U.S. Congressional Record. Our study found 441 claims against renewable energy in just six months of speeches, hearings and field hearings, of which 165 were specific to offshore wind. Most often, speakers *emphasized the downsides of renewable energy*; second-most often they advanced *conspiracy theories*. They also often touted *non-transformative solutions*, such as natural gas and unproven nuclear technology, rather than face the urgency of the climate crisis. Finally, this study is notable for reproducing what's become a common understanding of climate obstruction among climate social scientists: only 6 of the 441 claims signalled true *climate denial*.⁵⁷

Thus, while many of the arguments deployed against offshore wind turbines are new constructions and specific to this model of renewable energy, they fall into easily-classifiable tropes that climate action opponents of all kinds have been using for

⁵⁴ William F. Lamb, Giulio Mattioli, J. Sebastian Levi, Timmons Roberts, Stuart Capstick, Felix Creutzig, Jan C. Minx, Finn Müller-Hansen, Trevor Culhane, Julia K. Steinberger, Discourses of climate delay, *Global Sustainability* 3 (2020) e17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>.

⁵⁵ Gordon, O. (2023, September 4). *Small modular reactors: What is taking so long?* Energy Monitor. <https://www.energymonitor.ai/sectors/power/small-modular-reactors-smrns-what-is-taking-so-long/>

⁵⁶ Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., Marcil, C., & Roberts, T. (2024). Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

⁵⁷ See Garo, B., and Roberts, T. (2024, February). *Spinning Negativity: Discourses of Delay on Offshore Wind in the 118th Congress*. Brown University Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/post/new-brown-university-study-finds-pervasive-disinformation-in-congress-about-offshore-wind>

decades. The Discourses of Climate Delay and FLICC typologies are publicly available online so that others can learn to identify and classify anti-scientific claims. Furthermore, where Discourses of Climate Delay is tailored to climate delay, FLICC was designed in response to research that showed how denialists of issues such as climate change, evolution, and HIV/AIDS all used functionally the same rhetorical tactics to generate confusion.^{58 59}

Recently, researchers at the University of Exeter (UK) have built a comprehensive framework called CARDS 2.0 to categorize claims against renewable energy and climate action, and are developing automated tools to extract these from large scale collections of text.^{60 61} Much of the anti-turbine rhetoric is the latest development in this established pattern.

Conclusion: This testimony reviewed our five papers on key anti-offshore wind groups and networks in the Northeastern United States. That research has shown that what appear to be autonomous local groups often have complex ties to national organizations and networks. Some right-wing think tanks appear to have had an outsized influence on the explosion of anti-wind groups along the Northeast coast, by seeding negative information and providing organizational support, directly and through networks. More recent research shows that law firms provide major support to anti-wind groups, and themselves have ties to conservative think tanks, many of which are funded by the fossil fuel industry. Categorizations of arguments against offshore wind can be useful for recognizing discursive tactics for delaying the implementation of renewable energy sources. Slowing climate efforts like the deployment of renewables results in years of continued combustion and leakage of fossil fuels, and continued accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

⁵⁸ William F. Lamb, Giulio Mattioli, J. Sebastian Levi, Timmons Roberts, Stuart Capstick, Felix Creutzig, Jan C. Minx, Finn Müller-Hansen, Trevor Culhane, Julia K. Steinberger, Discourses of climate delay, *Global Sustainability* 3 (2020) e17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>.

⁵⁹ John Cook, A history of FLICC: the 5 techniques of science denial, *Sceptical Science* (2020). <https://skepticalscience.com/history-FLICC-5-techniques-science-denial.html>

⁶⁰ Rojas, C., Algra-Maschio, F., Andrejevic, M., Coan, T., Cook, J., Li, Y. (2024). Augmented CARDS: A machine learning approach to identifying triggers of climate change misinformation on Twitter. Working paper, online at ArXiv, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.15673>

⁶¹ Coan, T. G., Boussalis, C., Cook, J., & Nanko, M. O. (2021). Computer-assisted classification of contrarian claims about climate change. *Scientific Reports*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01714-4>