Title: The Environmental Impact Study of the Biscay Marine Energy Platform (bimep) project.

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Abstract for Poster presentation

The Biscay Marine Energy Platform (bimep) is an offshore infrastructure for the demonstration and testing of wave energy harnessing devices promoted by the Basque Entity of Energy (Ente Vasco de la Energía - EVE). Bimep is located close to Arminza town (Basque Country, Northern Spain) and it consists on an 5.3 km² sea area between 50 and 90 m depths where four static submarine cables will be placed, operating at 13kV and 5MW. According to the Royal Decree 1/2008 of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the bimep project falls into the 4.c category of projects of Annex II of this Decree. Such classification involves that the competent authority for environmental issues, that is, the General Directory for Quality and Environmental Evaluation of the Spanish Ministry of Environment, Rural and Marine Environ, has to decide whether or not the project needs to undergo the complete procedure of an EIA. On the first of June 2009, the General Council on Environmental Quality Assessment of the Ministry of Rural, Marine and Natural Environment of the Spanish Government, on the light of the Environmental Impact Study (EIS) of the bimep project undertaken by AZTI in 2008, decided not to submit the project to the whole Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. The EIS considered that the main actions associated with the project that could cause impacts were related to the installation process and the physical presence of structures (i.e. submarine cables, moorings and WECs), which could generate conflicts between different users of the area, as well as underwater noise, electromagnetic fields, reduction of marine energy, etc. The present contribution explains the main findings of the EIS: (i) description of the project; (ii) environmental characteristics of bimep area; (iii) expected impacts; (iv) mitigation measures and (iii) environmental monitoring plan.
According to the Basque Country's Energy Strategy, wave energy is one of the forms of marine energy for which a significant production is expected in the medium term. The particular geographical characteristics of the Basque Country provide suitable conditions for the production of such energy.

In this context, the Basque Energy Agency (Eneko Vasco de la Energía EDE) launched in 2008 the initiative to build the bimep (Biscay Marine Energy Project).

In 2008, according to Article 16 of Royal Decree 52/2008 of the Basque Country, the Promoter (EDE) initiated the administrative procedure in order to achieve the environmental approval of the project.

For this purpose, in 2008, AZTI developed the Environmental Impact Study (EIS) of the BIMEP project.

2. THE BIMEP PROJECT

Promoted by the Basque Entity of Energy (EVE), BIMEP represents an offshore test site for the demonstration and proving of wave energy converters (WEC).

- It consists of 8 km² sea area between 50 and 90 m depths were four static submarine cables will be placed, operating at 13kV and 5MW.
- Wave energy generation devices will be connected to these cables through dynamic submarine cables.
- Inland, bimep will provide a research centre in Amezcua town (Bilbao, Basque Country, Northern Spain) were developers will be able to control the behavior and performance of the devices.

3. PROJECT SITE ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERIZATION

3.1 Physical Environment

3.1.1 Geology, geomorphology and sedimentology

3.1.2 Tides: according to the AZTI Tides index developed by AZTI, the bathymetric charts in the samples taken in bimep (figure on the left) are representatives of a community dominated by species vulnerable to the alteration.

3.1.3 Waves: the mean energy flux of waves is 21,4 kW/m² coming from 50NNE.

3.1.4 Currents: dominated by the wind, the mean speed of currents in water surface is about 10-20 cm/s and a NE-SW direction.

3.1.5 Hydrography: according to the Water Framework Directive requirements (Directive 2000/60/CE), the physico-chemical status of the water bodies in the bimep area are in a very good status.

3.1.6 Landscape: all the shoreline near bimep is listed as an area of special interest from the point of view of marine landscape.

3.2 Biotic Environment

3.2.1 Benthos: according to the AZTI Biotic index developed by AZTI (http://www.azti.es/cti/azti/), the benthic communities in the samples taken in bimep (figure on the left) are representatives of a community dominated by species vulnerable to the alteration.

3.2.1.1 Shallowwater species: there are no specific data on the bimep area.

3.2.2 Marine birds: 3 are the main marine bird species in the bimep area: (a) European storm petrel (Hydrobates pelagicus), (b) European shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis) and (c) yellow-legged gull (Larus michahellis). Consequently, the bimep area has been proposed to be declared as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

3.2.4 Marine mammals: the short-beaked common dolphin (Delphinus delphis) is a common species in the bimep area.

3.2 Socioeconomic Environment

The main economic activity in the bimep area is the fishing activity of 11-14 small professional artifical vessels which account for more than 14,000 kg of captures of more than 12 different species of small pelagic and bottom fishes.

Also, is significant the leisure fishing activity of more than 20 vessels when meteorological conditions are suitable.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

- Very significant impact:
- Significant impact:
- Not significant impact:
- No relation:

Consequence of energy extraction and physical presence of devices. Underwater sound, light, vibration and electromagnetic fields generated by the WECs and submarine cable during operation. Wildlife entrapment, entanglement and collision. Visual and landscape impacts. The presence of devices and their mooring system has the potential to interfere with vessels and other sea users, e.g. fisheries, and also to disturbance/destruction of seabed habitats, interference with designated conservation areas and protected species of international, national and local significance.

5. IMPACT HYERARCHY

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6. PROTECTION, AMENDMENT AND COMPENSATING MEASURES

Project Modification

- Project area: 8 km², 5,1 km²
- Submarine cables route: Avoid rody bottom.
- WEC moorage: one of the moorage area has been reshaped in order to avoid the impact over some geologic structures.
- Economic compensation to the fishing sector due to the competence of bimep with the same space of activity.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING PLAN (EMP)

The Environmental Monitoring Plan focus on the monitoring of benthic communities [grab samples and visual inspections with RDS], ichthyofauna (active acoustics biosis), underwater sound and marine mammals [passive acoustic], hydrodynamics (wave and current profiler installation), anthropological resources [visual inspections with RDS], electromagnetic fields, marine birds. (Following of the results of the annual census made in the resting colonies near bimep) and coastline landscape characterisation.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- On the first of June 2009, the General Council on Environmental Quality Assessment of the Ministry of Rural, Marine and Natural Environment of the Spanish Government, on the light of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the WEC project undertaken by AZTI Tecnalia, decided to not submit the project to the whole Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure.
- In any case, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the Ministry, taking into account the great uncertainties about some predicted environmental impacts, underlined the need to implement the proposed Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP) of the EIS.

Acknowledgements

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