

# The winds of change

Many UK coastal sailors may not have come across a wind farm yet, but all that could change in the next decade. Rob Melotti talks to those already affected by wind farms and looks at the energy industry's plans for the future

**Turn the  
page for a  
map of UK  
wind farms**

A wind turbine at Blyth off the Northumberland coast

Pilot book author and regular PBO contributor, David Rainsbury, is pretty clear where he stands on the issue of wind farms. 'I don't like them. They frighten me,' he says. 'If you sail from Liverpool to the Menai Strait via the Rock Channel, there's two of them right on the track. You've got to stand offshore to miss them.'

By 2011 the route could get even more congested, as offshore construction starts on the Gwynt y Mor farm's 240 turbines directly north of the existing North Hoyle farm. To go round the combined area of North Hoyle, Rhyl Flats and Gwynt y Mor would be a detour of some 20 or 30 nautical miles. For South Coast sailors, imagine someone deciding to build another Portland Bill off the end of Portland Bill and you begin to get some idea of the size of the obstacle.

The most likely passage from Liverpool will be either through North Hoyle and Rhyl Flats wind farms or along the channel between them and the larger Gwynt y Mor – quite a change from how things looked 10 years ago.

By 2020, there could be 40 or more offshore wind farms comprising as many as 7,000 individual turbines off the UK's coastline. Sailing through or around wind farms could be a navigational reality for almost all cruising sailors.

## Round One and Two

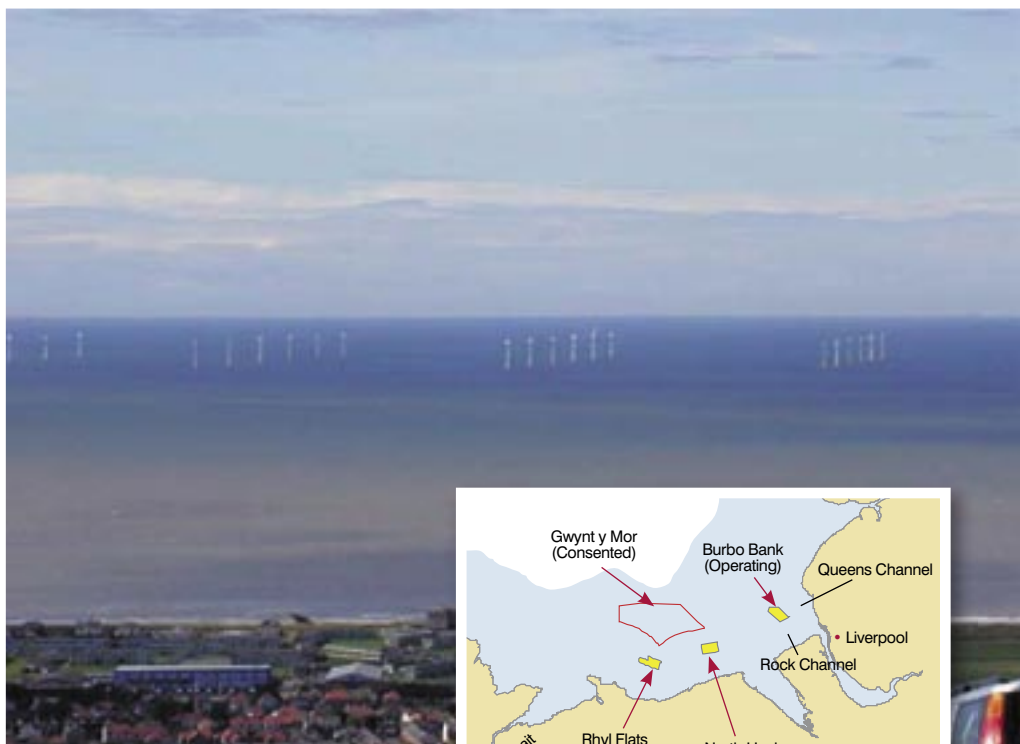
There are currently eight operational offshore farms running 228 individual turbines, and a further four farms comprising 208 turbines are in the offshore construction phase presenting hazards to navigation (numbered in yellow on the maps on page 35).

Half of the UK's operational wind farms are in the North West operating between 25 and 30 turbines each. The Thames Estuary is home to 30 turbines, as is Scroby Sands off East Anglia. Lynn and Inner Dowsing comprise 54 in total off Skegness, in an area known as The Greater Wash, and there are a further two research sites off Northumberland and the Moray Firth that contain just two turbines each.

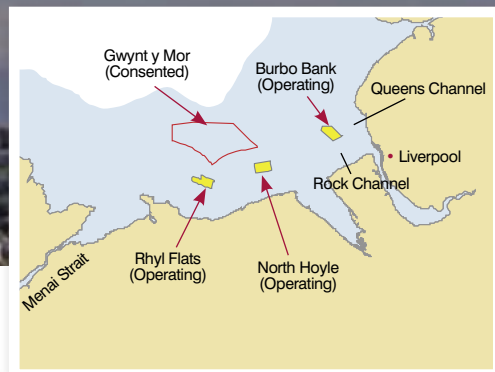
From a boat owner's point of view, a wind farm under construction is as much, if not more, of a hazard than an operational one. It is legal to sail straight through an established wind farm such as North Hoyle,



The 500m safety zone around wind farm construction sites is removed once operational



**ABOVE** The wind farm at North Hoyle  
**RIGHT** Departing Liverpool for the Menai Strait, the Rock Channel cuts safely inside Burbo Bank leaving the direct route west blocked by two operational farms and a future construction site



which has been operational since 2003, but David Rainsbury and his fellow Liverpool Bay yachtsmen will not be able to pass through Gwynt y Mor while it is being built.

Two more offshore wind farms are under construction in the Thames Estuary, plus Robin Rigg in the Solway Firth, west Scotland, and these are surrounded by 500m safety zones into which unauthorised entry is illegal.

Construction work ashore, building transformers and connections to the National Grid, has begun on another three farms including the massive London Array and Greater Gabbard sites in the Thames Estuary, plus Sheringham Shoal in the Greater Wash. These 500 turbines have offshore construction dates set for 2010 and 2011 (numbered in blue on the maps on page 35).

Beyond 2011, plans are more vague. A further three farms proposing 500 more turbines have completed Environmental Impact Assessments and are awaiting planning approval with some doubt over exact construction timetables. These are highly likely to go ahead and are numbered in blue on the maps. Numbered in red on the maps are another 10 either postponed or awaiting more favourable financial and legislative conditions.

The 24 offshore wind farms covering 1,660sq km that are either operational, in construction, or in the various stages of planning, are known collectively as the Round 1 and Round 2 developments, and would, if all completed, see around 2,500 wind turbines offshore. Proposals for Round 3 could double or triple that number by 2020.

In the last 12 months, the government finished accepting bids from companies wishing to build in portions of the nine areas set aside for Round 3 (as indicated on Map C on page 35). The proposals are expected to dwarf anything that has so far been planned or built, with the RYA estimating a further 5,000 turbines occupying an area of 10,000sq km. Initial announcements about bids will not be made until the end of this year.

## Navigation rights

Navigation within operational wind farms is not prohibited. The only legally enforceable exclusion zones, or 'safety zones' are around wind farms under construction – usually set at 500m and publicised via local Notices to Mariners.

Greater Gabbard (under construction) has been granted a 50m 'advisory zone' around each individual turbine once the farm becomes operational, but this is not a legal requirement to keep out.

The term 'safety zone' is legally enforceable, however. It is a criminal offence under the Energy Act 2004 for unauthorised vessels and individuals to enter or remain within a safety zone without permission, punishable by a £5,000 fine or in some cases imprisonment. Exceptions to this rule include vessels in distress and rescuers.

The RYA's Planning and Environmental advisor, Kate Moore, said: 'There are no safety zones in existence around operational turbines thus far and we have fought hard to stop them being implemented as we don't believe sailors should be criminalised.'

