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SMITH-WHELAN BILL TO PERMIT BPU TO APPROVE QUALIFIED WIND ENERGY PROJECTS HEADS TO GOVERNOR

TRENTON – Legislation sponsored by Senate Environment and Energy Committee Chair Bob Smith and Senator Jim Whelan that would permit the Board of Public Utilities to approve qualified wind energy projects located in State waters offshore Atlantic City and would require the BPU to provide a 30-day period for submission of applications received final legislative approval in the Assembly today.

“To secure a sustainable future for coming generations in our state, we need to find ways to rely less on fossil fuels and more on renewable sources of energy,” said Senator Smith (D-Middlesex, Somerset). “Atlantic City’s coast offers great opportunity for progress on the offshore wind energy course, and this legislation will allow projects that will move us forward on that front to proceed.”

In 2010, the Legislature passed a major law providing incentives to construct offshore wind energy facilities. One element of that law was a small pilot project in State waters off of Atlantic City in order to gain experience before moving forward with larger projects in federal waters. This bill, S-988, is intended to recognize the intent of the legislature in 2010 to expedite New Jersey’s entry into the offshore wind energy arena.

“New Jersey must catch up with the rest of the world in the development of wind energy farms, especially as a coastal state,” said Senator Whelan (D-Atlantic). “Ensuring that the BPU acts cooperatively to approve qualified wind energy projects off the coast of Atlantic City is essential to our environment’s and our economy’s progress.”

Senator Whelan refers to the BPU’s repeated rejection of the Fishermen’s Energy project that proposed a five-turbine wind farm off the coast of Atlantic City in compliance with the Offshore Wind Economic Development Act (OWEDA). Fishermen’s Energy met all permitting requirements and even received a federal grant to begin its project, but the BPU consistently turned down the application for an offshore wind renewable energy certificate (OREC) claiming that project would not meet the cost-benefit test of the 2010 legislation.

The bill cleared the Senate with a vote of 23-11 and the Assembly with a vote of 53-21. It now heads to the Governor’s desk.