



“The Social Life of MRE”

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***Community-based renewable energy and its link to improved social license:
Options for marine renewables in NS***

Across many jurisdictions researchers have found that a collaborative approach to renewable energy development has often resulted in increased levels of social license being afforded to project proponents/developers. This is believed to be due to increased opportunity to discuss project elements that are the source of resistance and thereby mitigated by integrating the values and insights of applicable stakeholders. This kind of collaborative approach has more typically been observed as a characteristic of *community-based* renewable energy development, where the potential *community (or regional) benefit* underpins the motivation to engage in the project. Recently, research was undertaken to better understand the benefits and barriers to community-based renewable energy development as one strategy for supporting widespread transition to a secure, low-carbon energy future. What emerged was a number of potential lessons learned that could be applied to renewable energy development at any scale for any technology – particularly centered around the need to redefine the relationship between developers and the communities surrounding their projects. Transitioning from a ‘public consultation’ process to one that specifically encourages the granting of social license by communities in proximity to energy developments requires a fundamental shift in thinking on the part of all stakeholders. Specifically, shifts in how the various parties interact, the allocation of roles and responsibilities across the different actors, and a redistribution of the ‘power dynamics’ are all necessary. As a burgeoning industry, the marine renewables sector in NS is in a position to incorporate the lessons emerging from this research to incorporate strategies linked to improved social license and thereby minimizing the risk of widespread opposition to the deployment of its innovations.

Efforts to mitigate climate change have led to evolving energy systems worldwide that include an increasing proportion of renewable energy (IEA, 2012). The “hyper-scalability” of most renewable energy technologies means that they can be adapted to projects appropriate for small (often rural) communities (Walker & Cass, 2007). Thus alongside the commercial-scale developments that have been historically pursued by large energy companies, community-

based renewable energy (CBRE) projects have become a part of this evolution. Community-based initiatives have an important role to play in how individuals interact with and ultimately shape the energy system in which they live (Hoffman & High-Pippert, 2010). Supporters of CBRE have noted that community involvement with energy production yields not only a wide range of social, economic, and environmental benefits (Walker et al., 2007), but also that decentralized, bottom-up energy initiatives may be a “crucial success condition” to realize a broad acceptance of some renewable energy technologies (Reiche & Bechberger, 2004, p. 848-849; Haggett, 2011).