

Construction of Fukushima floating project starts this month

- Agreement reached with fishermen after a year of negotiation -

Later this month construction will begin on the world's largest floating wind project to date, now that an essential agreement with fishermen has been reached.

A year-long negotiation process has been completed, according to Takeshi Ishihara, professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at University of Tokyo, speaking with Windpower Offshore.

Negotiations involved representatives of fishing cooperatives as well as members of the Japanese Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry (Meti), Fukushima Prefecture, and the development consortium led by Marubeni Corporation that will build the floating wind farm.

Persuading fishermen to relinquish some of their legally protected fishing rights is a major step forward for the project. "There was strong opposition at first, but we finally managed to reach an agreement," explained Ishihara. "If even one of the parties had not participated in the negotiations, we would not have achieved that agreement."

Construction of Fukushima Floating Offshore Wind Farm Demonstration Project (Forward) will begin later this month, with electricity generation due to begin in September.

As previously reported by Windpower Offshore, the project's first phase will see a 2MW turbine produced by Hitachi mounted on a floating structure created by Mitsui Engineering & Shipbuilding. Both companies are members of the consortium, alongside eight other firms and the University of Tokyo.

An electricity convertor station mounted on another floating platform will also be installed. It is not clear who will undertake construction, but Shimizu Corporation is a consortium member and one of Japan's top five general construction contractors.

The pilot plant will be located some 16-20km off the Fukushima coastline, in waters approximately 120m in depth. Work is expected to cover an area approximately 3km x 4km.

If the first phase goes well, two 7MW Sea Angel turbines being developed by Mitsubishi will be installed on floating platforms some time after April 2014.

According to Ishihara, more than 80% of Japan's offshore wind energy potential is in deep water and the Forward site could eventually host more than a hundred turbines. Port facilities at Onahama in Iwaki, Fukushima will be upgraded for the Forward project.

But there is one catch. The agreement reached with fishermen includes a clause requiring the developers to abandon further commercialisation and to remove all installed plant if any adverse impact on fishing is discovered between now and 2015.

