

Report raises questions on wind turbines, radar

By Craig Salters/ csalters@cnc.com

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A report recently issued by the Department of Defense indicates that commercial wind turbines have the potential to affect radar installations.

The same report, undertaken at the request of Congressman William Delahunt, a Quincy Democrat, calls "overly simplified and technically flawed" a 2004 U.S. Air Force analysis which found that a proposed wind farm on Nantucket Sound would have no effect on its PAVE PAWS radar installation on the Upper Cape. The report further calls for a more exhaustive study of the wind farm and its relation to PAVE PAWS.

Delahunt said Monday the issue of radar first came to his attention through Yarmouth resident Cliff Carroll, a vocal opponent of the wind farm project. Those concerns, Delahunt said, were reinforced by a short briefing on the subject by defense officials. That briefing prompted Delahunt to request a study, the findings of which were released last week.

"I just wanted to have it done," said Delahunt, who added that questions about the wind farm's possible effects on such topics as military radar, commercial air traffic, fishing and navigation should be asked by everyone regardless of their stance on the controversial project.

"This [report] is preliminary but it clearly ratchets up the concerns," said Delahunt, who also opposes the project. "We need some reassurances."

The next step, said Delahunt, is a "thorough, exhaustive review" of the issues raised in the new report.

In a statement, the project's most visible critic, the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, said the Defense Department study validates its longtime concerns about the wind farm and radar. In addition, the Alliance called for further investigation and the establishment of what it called "red zones" in the only two areas in the country with early warning radar, Cape Cod Air Force Station and Beale Air Force Base in California.

"Military concerns about radar degradation have widespread implications for our national defense, but this issue also has serious implications for marine and aviation safety, particularly in Nantucket Sound where marine and aviation traffic is significant," said Charles Vinick, president and CEO of the Alliance.

Mark Rodgers, a spokesman for the would-be developer, Cape Wind Associates, said the company is closely studying the report. He took exception to groups such as the Alliance equating the report with a conclusion that a wind farm on Nantucket Sound would necessarily hurt the work of PAVE PAWS.

"The Defense Department report, while it does criticize an Air Force analysis that found Cape Wind would have no impact on PAVE PAWS, and while it does call for a new study, does not say that Cape Wind will threaten or negatively affect PAVE PAWS," said Rodgers.

In other words, he said, the new report finds fault with the methodology of the Air Force analysis but a more exhaustive report might reach the same conclusion.

"They're not presupposing the conclusions of what a new study would find," said Rodgers. "They [Alliance members] are willing to jump to conclusions, but no one will know until the study is done."

Cape Wind Associates seeks to construct 130 wind turbines in the Sound. By company estimates, the wind farm would meet 75 percent of the Cape's electricity needs.