



## **Transcript of Keynote Address by Jennifer Downing, Executive Director of the New Bedford Ocean Cluster at 2024 Women on the Water Conference**

Good afternoon! It's truly an honor to have the opportunity to join you today as you wrap up your time at the Women on the Water Conference. I want to thank Massachusetts Maritime Academy for inviting me to be a part of this special event that celebrates the remarkable achievements of women in the maritime industry.

This morning you had the chance to experience the Port of New Bedford, America's #1 commercial fishing port and a leading hub for the U.S. offshore wind industry. During your time at the conference, you also had the chance to hear from impressive women leaders like Jennifer Cullen of Vineyard Wind and Jeannie Houde from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center who are working in offshore wind development and operations. Jen, Jeannie and so many other women right here in Massachusetts are paving the way for this new and exciting industry and it's amazing to watch and be a part of.

While I don't categorize myself as a "Woman on the Water," I am a woman working to advance the maritime economy. For most of my career, I've had the good fortune to lead nonprofit organizations here on the SouthCoast that have worked to strengthen economic development and advance environmental sustainability. A consistent thread running through all of this has been a passion for collaborative leadership and strengthening my ability to successfully work across sectors and interests to collectively tackle complex problems impacting our community.

Today, I am the executive director of the New Bedford Ocean Cluster, a nonprofit marine industry association launched two years ago to leverage New Bedford's strategic coastal position and extensive ocean industry experience to attract investment, support the formation and growth of maritime businesses, and foster initiatives that can create economic and community impact from the sustainable use of our ocean's resources. The

NBOC works collaboratively with the private sector, public sector, and academic institutions to establish New Bedford and the region as a leading ocean economy through the advancement of four, interrelated marine pillars:

- Aquaculture
- Commercial Fishing & Processing
- Innovation & Technology, and
- Offshore Renewable Energy

When the opportunity presented itself to become the NBOC's first Executive Director, I admit that I had little confidence that I would actually get the job. After all, I didn't have a background in aquaculture or commercial fishing, and I knew little about ocean technology at the time. While I've always been passionate about the potential for offshore wind as a clean energy source to mitigate climate change, I knew little about the supply chain or how the industry worked. However, I found the NBOC's mission very unique, and it really appealed to me. I was drawn to the organization's potential and how its four pillar industries were complimentary yet opposing. Better integration of ocean industries like commercial fishing with offshore wind could not only address the sustainability of our oceans, but also produce new economic and business opportunities to bring more jobs and wealth to the community.

I started to imagine the possibilities of the NBOC and realized that it would take a lot of coordination, relationship building, and collective problem solving to succeed in its mission. The organization needed a collaborative leader with the drive to learn and the ability to listen and consider many different perspectives and sides. I began to see that there was indeed a place for me in the organization and within the maritime industry.

As you saw today on the water, and from the video, offshore wind has arrived in the U.S. and New Bedford. New Bedford's position in offshore wind didn't happen by chance. The City of New Bedford, supported by its economic development agencies, local academic institutions, private industry leaders, and other partners have worked aggressively and with purpose for well over a decade to develop an offshore wind industry in the port as a way to foster new growth for New Bedford's centuries long maritime-based economy and these

efforts were built on the Port's national leadership in commercial fishing and seafood processing.

The Port's strengths and advantages have put it in a highly advantageous position to be at the center of the industry for years to come. The Port of New Bedford is the closest deep water industrial port to the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Wind Energy Areas, the largest cluster of wind energy areas on the East Coast with the acreage to support development of 14 GW of offshore wind power.

With nearly five hundred active fishing vessels in port, New Bedford arguably has America's best maritime workforce that with training can pivot easily into ocean renewable energy jobs.

As you saw on the ferry today, the Port is also equipped with impressive offshore wind staging and support facilities (in operation and development) like the New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal, New Bedford Foss Marine Terminal, Shoreline Marine Terminals North & South, and Leonard's Wharf critical to developing offshore wind projects at scale.

And New Bedford is also home to world-class educational and training facilities like UMass Dartmouth's School for Marine Science & Technology and Bristol Community College's first-of-its-kind National Offshore Wind Institute and will be the future location of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's Ocean Renewable Energy (ORE) Innovation Center, a place where new technologies can be tested and brought to market.

Today, the Port of New Bedford is the primary marshalling base for the nation's first utility-scale offshore wind project, Vineyard Wind 1 and other developers are making commitments to use the Port of New Bedford to support their projects in the pipeline. With the Commonwealth of Massachusetts dedicated to developing more offshore wind projects to meet its clean energy targets through the next decade, coupled with projects being developed down the East Coast, New Bedford will no doubt be a leading contributor to the industry, its supply chain, and associated innovation and technology.

One way the NBOC is supporting the development of offshore wind in greater New Bedford is through our Act Local supply chain development program,

which was launched in partnership with Vineyard Wind in 2021. The goal of Act Local is to maximize the positive economic impacts of the Vineyard Wind 1 project by encouraging local people and businesses to participate in the offshore wind industry. Ultimately, we want to help create an equitable and diverse offshore wind supply chain in New Bedford and the SouthCoast region, and we're working now on expanding the project to support future offshore wind projects.

It's no surprise to anyone here in this room that offshore careers have been, and continue to be, dominated by men. While all of you are evidence that the tide is turning and more women are entering offshore industries, we still have a way to go. In a recent report by Energy Voice on offshore wind, it was noted that women account for as little as 5% of the offshore workforce in the wind sector. Speaking from experience, I am often the only woman in the room.

Fortunately, promoting gender and inclusion in offshore wind and its supply chain is a priority for the industry. Offshore wind industry leaders know that harnessing the energy, creativity, and common attributes of women in the workforce like resilience, effective communication skills, strong emotional intelligence, and the ability to collaborate is essential for the success and growth of the industry. Simply put, less women in offshore wind means the industry is missing out.

The National Renewal Energy Lab estimated that from 2024 to 2030, the offshore wind energy industry could need an annual average of between 15,000 and 58,000 full-time workers. And as you can see from my slide and the supply chain wheel, the job opportunities in offshore wind are wide and diverse. Whether you want to work offshore or on, support project planning or construction, there's something for everyone in wind. And fortunately, here in Massachusetts, there are an abundance of organizations and resources available to help you get started toward a career in wind.

Offshore wind is a young industry here in the U.S., so the time is now to get rid of old stereotypes and support and empower more women to enter offshore wind careers. With more women in wind, we will no doubt move towards a more sustainable and equitable energy future.

Women tend to follow different paths to their careers —some paths are direct and focused, while others can be more winding. Whatever the path you take, curiosity and passion will be key drivers to finding your way to success. It's what got me to discover the incredible industry of offshore wind. I hope that if you find yourself curious and passionate too, you'll lean in.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I wish you all the best of luck as you continue your professional development and enter maritime careers. Please reach out if I can be helpful to your journey.