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AUSTRALIA'S FIRST OFFSHORE WIND PROJECT STARTS UNDERWATER STUDIES

Underwater investigations are kicking off on Australia's first offshore wind project – the Star of the South – off the south coast of Victoria.

Seabed and marine mammal studies are part of a program of site investigations that are helping to understand the site conditions and plan for an offshore wind farm off the coast of Gippsland, connecting into the Latrobe Valley.

Specialists are deploying from Lakes Entrance today to study the seabed using the local vessel the Silver Star. Over two weeks, a crew will complete 24-hour seabed investigations including, mapping the seafloor, measuring water depths and identifying any buried infrastructure such as cables or shipwrecks.

Data collected from these studies will help determine the type of support structures needed for the wind turbines.

Acoustic monitoring is also being undertaken to understand the number and type of marine mammals in and around the project area. Equipment that is similar to a microphone is on the seabed floor recording the sounds of marine mammals such as whales and dolphins – capturing sounds up to 20 kilometres away.

To complement the acoustic monitoring, aerial surveys of the project area are underway to visually identify marine mammals.

Aerial bird surveys are also being undertaken by flying a light plane off the coast near Port Albert to identify the number and type of birds in the area seasonally. This data is being supported by migratory bird tagging to understand the flightpaths of various species.

Onshore bird surveys started last month and involve tagging and counting birds in the dunes. Soil testing is also underway to understand the local ground conditions.

Wind and wave monitoring equipment has been out at sea since November 2019, collecting data on the wind profile and wave conditions and will continue for several years to inform the wind farm design.

Like a power station out at sea, the Star of the South would involve wind turbines in the ocean generating electricity and connecting into the grid in the Latrobe Valley via underground cables and substations.

It has the potential to power up to 2000MW of electricity, providing a consistent and reliable source of energy and powering hundreds of thousands of Victorian homes.

Offshore wind is a proven driver of jobs and investment overseas including in the UK, Denmark and Germany. Australia has a unique opportunity to kick start its own booming offshore wind industry with the Star of the South, delivering economic benefits to Gippsland, Victoria and Australia.

Quotes attributable to Star of the South Chief Development Officer, Erin Coldham:

"We're undertaking underwater investigations to collect important data to help inform the wind farm design, including the number and type of wind turbines."

"Mapping the seabed and collecting baseline information on the ground conditions is an important part of understanding the site and planning for an offshore wind project off the south coast of Gippsland."

"The Star of the South would provide a reliable and consistent source of power, supplying around 18% of Victoria's electricity needs and helping to prevent against blackouts in summer."

"Offshore wind is a proven technology in Europe where there is a booming industry, we're excited about the opportunities the Star of the South could create for jobs and investment in the Gippsland region and broader economy."

