



TRANSECTS

Transitions in Energy for Coastal Communities
over Time and Space

INDUSTRIAL HUB TO ENERGY ESTUARY: MARITIME ECONOMY TRANSITIONS AND JUSTICE IN THE HUMBER ESTUARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Humber Estuary is one of the UK's most significant maritime and industrial regions, shaped by successive waves of marine-based activity. Early industries such as whaling and fishing established Hull, Grimsby and Immingham as major centres of seafaring, trade and port logistics [1]. As the industrial economy expanded, the estuary became a hub for shipping, refining, and chemicals manufacturing, with large coastal facilities and port infrastructure underpinning local employment and identity [2].

Through the 20th century, petrochemical plants, refineries and carbon-intensive manufacturing reinforced the Humber's strategic role in the UK's fossil-fuel economy. This created jobs and investment, but also deepened dependence on externally driven industrial cycles, leaving several coastal towns vulnerable to economic restructuring and long-term deprivation [3].

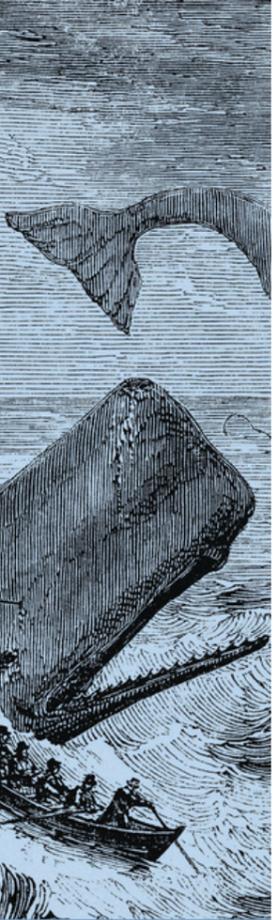
Today, national policy has repositioned the Humber at the centre of the UK's low-carbon strategy. Branded the "Energy Estuary," it now hosts major offshore wind assembly and servicing, alongside emerging hydrogen and CCUS projects. Initiatives such as the Humber Freeport and industrial cluster plans reflect its strategic importance to national decarbonisation ambitions [4].

JUSTICE THEMES IN HUMBER'S TRANSITIONS

1. Governance and Resource Access

Governance arrangements have shaped who benefits from the Humber's marine and industrial transitions. Early port- and municipality-led measures prioritised commercial expansion—using bounties and incentives to stimulate fishing—but often disrupted local markets and disadvantaged established catchers [5]. International shifts then redefined access: Icelandic limit extensions and the Cod Wars curtailed distant-water fishing, while compensation largely favoured vessel owners rather than crews, entrenching perceptions of procedural injustice [6]. Entry into the EEC and the Common Fisheries Policy added a supranational layer that further constrained local influence over quotas and access.

Today's offshore wind, hydrogen and CCUS are driven largely by national decarbonisation policy; local actors (e.g., Green Port Hull, Humber Industrial Cluster Plan) work to capture value within centralised planning/consenting structures, but fragmentation, limited transparency and a legacy of mistrust continue to shape acceptance [7].



2. Social Inequality, Work, and Identity

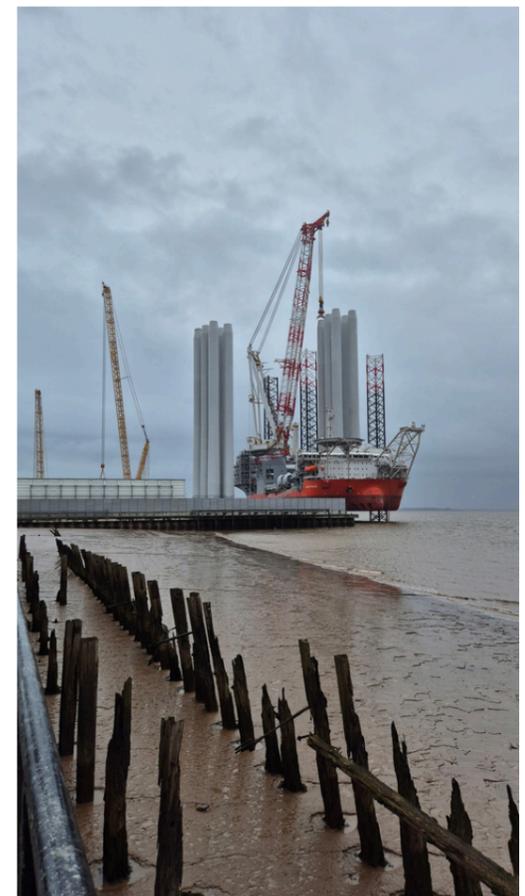
Patterns of work and identity in the Humber have been shaped by long-standing industrial volatility. Early fishing livelihoods were demanding and insecure, with families facing hardship during poor landings and rising costs, and apprentices often working in difficult or exploitative conditions.

The collapse of the distant-water fleet in the 1970s and 1980s had profound social effects, dismantling close-knit communities in places such as Hull's Hessle Road and Grimsby. Many former fishers felt abandoned, receiving little financial support despite decades at sea [8]. Subsequent restructuring in the petrochemical sector introduced new job losses and uncertainty, compounding existing inequalities.

These cumulative disruptions continue to shape how communities view current low-carbon developments. While offshore wind manufacturing—particularly the Siemens Gamesa facility—has created new jobs, apprenticeships and a renewed sense of pride, benefits remain uneven across the region.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A JUST TRANSITION IN THE HUMBER REGION

- **Strengthening locally rooted governance** in planning and consenting processes would help ensure that decisions about offshore wind, hydrogen and CCUS better reflect Humber communities' priorities, lived experience and the cumulative impacts of past industrial change. This includes clearer routes for community involvement early in project design and more transparent consultation processes.
- Improving **community benefit pathways** offers significant potential. More consistent, predictable benefit-sharing frameworks—rather than ad-hoc or voluntary arrangements—would help ensure that value created through net-zero investments remains in the region, supporting local regeneration, services and long-term resilience.
- Investing in **local capacity, workforce transition and skills development** is essential. Sustained support for training, leadership, and community anchor organisations would enable workers, local authorities and civil society to engage effectively with complex technical, regulatory and negotiation processes.
- Embedding **social, cultural and spatial considerations** directly into transition planning can help ensure that new developments align with the Humber's identity and community priorities, while addressing long-standing structural challenges such as deprivation, infrastructure pressures, and limited trust stemming from past unmanaged transitions.



[Read the full report here](#)

References

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