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(54) **Title:** MODULAR FLOATING MOUNT FOR A FLOATING SOLAR POWER PLANT

(57) **Abstract:** The invention provides a floating module for supporting a solar panel and which is configured for floating on top of a water surface, and to a modular floating mount comprising a series of interconnectable floating modules for supporting a series of solar panels in a floating solar power plant. Each module comprises two laterally spaced floating brackets and at least one floating arm extending between, and being disconnectably connected to, the two brackets to maintain the floating brackets at a pre-set lateral distance from each other. The floating brackets and arm are independently ballasted to stabilise the floating module atop a water surface.

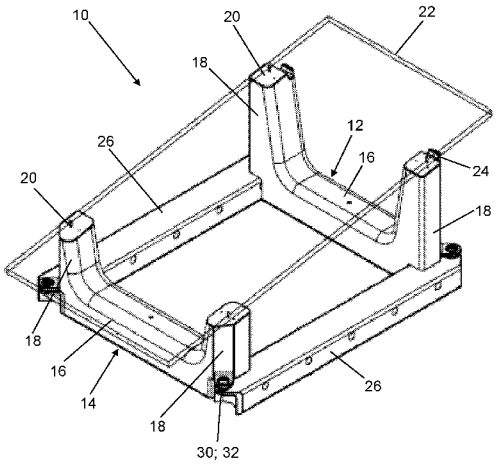

FIGURE 1

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MODULAR FLOATING MOUNT FOR A FLOATING SOLAR POWER PLANT

INTRODUCTION

The invention relates to a floating module for supporting a solar panel and which is configured for floating on top of a water surface, and to a modular floating mount comprising a series of interconnectable floating modules for supporting a series of solar panels in a floating solar power plant.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

Floating mounts for solar panels are not new per se, and have been disclosed in a number of prior documents:

a) WO 2012139998 discloses a floating sealed plastic shell to which a solar panel is attached, the shell including means for securing the solar panel to a wall of the plastic shell. The disadvantage of this disclosure is the absence of a water ballast in the floating module, with the floating module requiring a water reservoir system to increase stability in the module.

b) WO2018157704 A1 provides a floating photovoltaic system comprising a floating box floating on the water surface; a floating box protrusion fixedly arranged on the top surface of the floating box; a frameless photovoltaic assembly fixedly

arranged on the floating box protrusion; and limiting members fixedly arranged on the top surface of the floating box and being distributed along the perimeter of the photovoltaic assembly. The frameless photovoltaic assembly is secured onto the floating box protrusion using the limiting members. The disadvantage of this disclosure is again the absence of a water ballast, which would require a water reservoir system to increase stability of the floating module for use on waves or on uneven water surfaces, such as those resulting from wind.

c) US 2017/0201206 provides a supporting structure for a waterborne photovoltaic power plant, which includes a floating bracket comprising a floating platform and a plurality of supporting members provided on an upper surface of the floating platform. A ventilation space is provided between two adjacent supporting members, whereby the plurality of supporting members is configured to fix a photovoltaic cell panel thereon with a lower surface of the photovoltaic cell panel being separated from the upper surface of the floating platform. The system is quite complicated in construction.

d) WO2022010373 discloses a ballasted floating module for a photovoltaic panel comprising a hollow base and hollow panel support members located on the base, the base and support members together forming a single internal cavity which is partially filled with water and with air. The module is configured to release air through a floating module height control valve.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an alternative modular floating mount for supporting a series of solar panels in a floating solar power plant wherein the

floating mount comprises a series of interconnectable floating modules which are easy to transport and assemble onsite, which reduce material weight and resultant costs, which allow for design and dimensions adaptability in an assembled floating mount depending on site-specific requirements, and which allow for easy replacement of individual module components in the event of damage to component parts, without the need to replace an entire module.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a floating module for supporting a solar panel, the module comprising –

at least two laterally spaced floating brackets wherein each bracket comprises a base and at least one support member extending upright from the base for supporting a solar panel; and

at least one floating arm extending between, and being disconnectably connected to, the two brackets to maintain the floating brackets at a pre-set lateral distance from each other;

wherein any one or more of the floating brackets and arm are independently ballasted to stabilise the floating module atop a water surface.

Each floating bracket may be a substantially U-shaped bracket comprising an elongate base with two, axially substantially parallel support members of even height extending upright from opposite ends of the elongate base. The support members may each terminate in a panel support surface for accommodating a solar panel disposed on top of the support members. In one embodiment of the invention the support members of

one floating bracket may be of uneven height compared to the support members of the neighbouring floating bracket so that the support members of the two neighbouring floating brackets support the solar panel at an angle to the horizontal. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, the support members of neighbouring floating brackets may of even height so that the support members of the two neighbouring floating brackets support the solar panel substantially horizontally.

Each floating bracket may include connecting means for connecting the bracket to the floating arm. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, each bracket may include connecting means at each end of the floating base, the connecting means being configured to engage complimentary configured connecting means on the floating arm.

The floating base of each bracket may terminate at opposite ends thereof in a step formation configured to accommodate the floating arm in snug-fit engagement with the floating bracket.

At least one of the floating brackets may include power cable carrying formations for carrying power cables between neighbouring floating modules. The cable carrying formations may be disposed adjacent the upright support members.

The floating module may include two elongate, substantially parallel floating arms extending between the two neighbouring floating brackets, each floating arm being disconnectably connected at one end thereof to one bracket, and being disconnectably connected at an opposite end thereof to the neighbouring bracket, such that the two

floating brackets and two floating arms are disconnectably connected to each other to form a disconnectable, substantially rectangular floating frame with the support members extending upright from the corners of the rectangular frame. Lateral distance between the floating brackets may be altered by either altering the length of the floating arms, or by connecting floating arms in an end-to-end fashion to each other.

Each floating arm may terminate at its opposite free ends in connecting means that are configured to engage the complimentary configured connecting means on the floating brackets. In one embodiment of the invention, the connecting means are eyes extending from opposite ends of the floating brackets and from opposite ends of the floating arms such that the eyes on the brackets and arms respectively overlap each other, with nuts and bolts extending through the overlapping eyes to secure the floating brackets and arms to each other. It will, however, be appreciated that many other connecting means are possible without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as defined herein.

The floating brackets and floating arms may be either rotation moulded or blow moulded, each of the brackets and floating arms defining hollow internal chambers providing positive buoyancy. The floating brackets and floating arms may collectively or independently be ballasted depending in site-specific conditions to provide for use of the floating module under heavy weather conditions.

The floating module may be configured to be connected to at least one similar neighbouring floating module to form a floating mount, with at least one solar panel

disposed on each module, the solar panels being interconnected by electrical cables to form a solar power plant.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a floating mount including at least two floating modules according to the invention which are releasably connected to each other to form a floating mount, with at least one solar panel disposed on each module. Preferably, the floating mount includes a series of floating modules that are connected side-by-side such that each of two neighbouring floating modules are connected to opposite sides of the same floating arm and with the upright support members of the neighbouring floating modules abutting each other laterally, with a solar panel disposed on each of the floating modules and interconnected to each other through a network of electrical cables to form a floating solar panel power plant.

The floating mount further may include a floating walkway extending circumferentially about the series of inter-connected floating modules and being releasably connectable to the series of floating modules. The floating walkway may include a plurality of walkway floats that are interconnected in an end-to-end fashion to form a substantially continuous walkway about the series of inter-connected floating modules. Each walkway float may comprise a rotation-moulded or blow-moulded body defining a hollow internal chamber providing positive buoyancy, and connecting means extending from opposite sides of the walkway float and configured to connect to complimentary configured connecting means of a neighbouring walkway float. Each walkway float may include a non-slip upper surface. The floating walkway may be characterised therein that one or more of the walkway floats are ballasted to stabilise

the floating mount, the advantage of the design being that the walkway floats may collectively or independently be ballasted, depending on site-specific requirements.

The floating walkway further may include a number of floating walkway connectors that extend between and inter-connect the floating modules to the walkway floats. Each walkway connector comprises a rotation-moulded or blow-moulded body defining a hollow internal chamber providing positive buoyancy, and connecting means extending from opposite sides of the walkway connector and configured to connect at one end thereof to complimentary configured connecting means of a walkway float, and at an opposite end thereof to complimentary configured connecting means of a floating module, thus securing the floating walkway in laterally spaced relationship to the series of floating modules. The floating walkway may be characterised therein that one or more of the walkway connectors are ballasted to stabilise the floating mount.

SPECIFIC EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

Without wishing to be bound thereto, the invention will now further be described by way of non-limiting example only and with reference to the following drawings in which:

FIGURE 1 is an isometric view of an assembled floating module according to the invention, with a solar panel disposed on the module;

FIGURE 2 is an isometric exploded view of the floating module of Figure 1, excluding the solar panel;

FIGURE 3 is an isometric exploded view of the floating module of Figure 1, illustrating the manner in which the floating module is connected to a walkway float through an intermediate walkway connector;

FIGURE 4 is an isometric view of a floating mount according to the invention comprising a series of interconnected floating modules and a circumferentially extending floating walkway; and

FIGURE 5 is a plan view from above of the floating mount of Figure 4.

Unless otherwise defined, all the technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meanings as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which the present disclosure belongs. The terms “first,” “second,” etc., which are used in the present application for disclosure, are not intended to indicate any sequence, amount or importance, but only distinguish various components. Also, the terms such as “a,” “an,” etc., are not intended to limit the amount, but indicate the existence of at least one. The terms “comprise,” “comprising,” “include,” “including,” etc., are intended to specify that the elements or the objects stated before these terms encompass the elements or the objects and equivalents thereof listed after these terms, but do not preclude the other elements or objects. The phrases “connect”, “connected”, “connecting”, etc., are not intended only to define a physical connection or mechanical connection, but may include an electrical connection, directly or indirectly. “On,” “under,” “right,” “left”, “atop”, and the like are only used to indicate relative position relationship, and when the position of the object which is described is changed, the relative position relationship may be changed accordingly.

A floating module for supporting a solar panel according to the invention is generally designated by reference numeral (10). The floating module (10) comprises a first floating bracket (12) and a laterally spaced second floating bracket (14). Each floating bracket (12;14) is a substantially U-shaped bracket comprising an elongate floating base (16) with two, axially substantially parallel support members (18) of even height extending upright from opposite ends of the elongate base (16). The support members (18) each terminate in a panel support surface (20) for accommodating a solar panel (22) disposed on top of the support members (18). The support members (18) of the first floating bracket (12) are higher than the support members (18) of the neighbouring second floating bracket (14) so that the support members (18) of the two neighbouring floating brackets (12; 14) support the solar panel (22) at an angle to the horizontal. The angle is typically in the range of $10^0 – 15^0$ to the horizontal.

The first floating bracket (12) includes power cable carrying formations (24) disposed adjacent the upright support members (18) for carrying power cables (not shown) between neighbouring floating modules (10).

The floating module (10) further includes two elongate, substantially parallel floating arms (26) extending between, and being disconnectably connected at opposite ends of the floating arms (26) to the two neighbouring floating brackets (12; 14) respectively to maintain the floating brackets (12; 14) at a pre-set lateral distance from each other.

For this purpose, the floating base (16) of each bracket (12; 14) terminates at its opposite ends in a step formation (28) configured to accommodate the floating arm (26) in snug-fit engagement within the step formation (28) of the floating bracket (12;

14). Moreover, each floating bracket (12; 14) includes connecting means (30) for connecting the bracket (12; 14) to the floating arm (26). In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, each bracket (12; 14) includes connecting means (30) at each end of the floating base (16), the connecting means (30) being configured to engage complimentary configured connecting means (32) on the floating arm (26).

Each floating arm (26) is disconnectably connected at one end thereof to the first bracket (12), and disconnectably connected at an opposite end thereof to the neighbouring second bracket (14), such that the two floating brackets (12; 14) and two floating arms (26) are disconnectably connected to each other to form a substantially rectangular floating frame (as illustrated in Figure 1) with the support members (18) extending upright from the corners of the rectangular frame. Lateral distance between the floating brackets (12; 14) is altered either by altering the length of the floating arms (26), or by connecting a series of floating arms (26) in an end-to-end fashion to each other before connecting the series of floating arms (26) at opposite ends thereof to the respective floating brackets (12; 14).

Each floating arm (26) terminates at its opposite free ends in connecting means (32) that are configured to engage the complimentary configured connecting means (30) on the floating brackets (12; 14). In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, the connecting means (30; 32) are eyes extending from opposite ends of the floating brackets (12; 14) and from opposite ends of the floating arms (26) such that the eyes (30) on the brackets (12; 14) and the eyes (32) on the arms (26) overlap each other. Nuts and bolts (not shown) extend through the overlapping eyes (30; 32) to secure the floating brackets (12; 14) and arms (26) to each other.

The floating module is characterised therein that any one or more of the floating brackets (12; 14) and floating arms (26) are collectively or independently ballasted, depending in site-specific conditions, to stabilise the floating module (10) atop a water surface under heavy weather conditions. The floating brackets (12; 14) and floating arms (26) are rotation moulded, each of the floating brackets (12; 14) and floating arms (26) defining hollow internal chambers providing positive buoyancy.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a floating mount (34) (refer Figures 4 & 5) comprising a series of floating modules (10) that are releasably connected to each other, with at least one solar panel (22) disposed on each module (10). The series of floating modules (10) are connected side-by-side such that each of two neighbouring floating modules (10) are connected to opposite sides of the same floating arm (26) and with the upright support members (18) of the neighbouring floating modules (10) abutting each other laterally. The solar panels (22) that are disposed on the floating modules (10) are interconnected to each other through a network of electrical cables to form a floating solar panel (22) power plant.

The floating mount (34) further includes a floating walkway (36) extending circumferentially about the series of inter-connected floating modules (10) and being releasably connectable to the series of floating modules (10). The floating walkway (36) includes a plurality of walkway floats (38) that are interconnected in an end-to-end fashion to form a substantially continuous walkway about the series of inter-connected floating modules (10). Each walkway float (38) comprises a rotation-moulded body defining a hollow internal chamber providing positive buoyancy, and

connecting means (40) extending from opposite sides of the walkway float (38) and configured to connect to complimentary configured connecting means (40) of a neighbouring walkway float (38). Each walkway float (38) includes a non-slip upper surface (42). One or more of the walkway floats (38) are ballasted to stabilise the floating mount (34), the advantage of the design being that the walkway floats (38) are collectively or independently ballasted, depending on site-specific requirements.

The floating walkway (36) further includes a number of floating walkway connectors (44) that extend between and inter-connect the floating modules (10) to the walkway floats (38). Each walkway connector (44) comprises a rotation-moulded body defining a hollow internal chamber providing positive buoyancy, and connecting means (46) extending from opposite sides of the walkway connector (44) and configured to connect at one end thereof to complimentary configured connecting means (40) of a walkway float (38), and at an opposite end thereof to complimentary configured connecting means (30 & 32) of a floating module (10), thus securing the floating walkway (36) in laterally spaced relationship to the series of floating modules (10). One or more of the walkway connectors (44) are ballasted to stabilise the floating mount (34). In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, the connecting means (30; 32; 40; 46) are all complimentarily configured eyes which all overlap each other, with nuts and bolts (not shown) extending through the overlapping eyes (30; 32; 40, 46) to secure the components of the floating mount (34) to each other. It will, however, be appreciated that various other connecting means are possible.

It will be appreciated that variations to the modular floating mounts are possible without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as set out in the claims.

CLAIMS

1. A floating module (10) for supporting a solar panel (22), the floating module (10) comprising –

at least two laterally spaced floating brackets (12; 14) wherein each bracket (12; 14) comprises a base (16) and at least one support member (18) extending upright from the base (16) for supporting a solar panel (22); and

at least one floating arm (26) extending between, and being disconnectably connected to, the two floating brackets (12; 14) respectively to maintain the brackets (12; 14) at a pre-set lateral distance from each other;

wherein any one or more of the floating brackets (12; 14) and arm (26) are independently ballasted to stabilise the floating module (10) atop a water surface.

2. The floating module (10) according to claim 1 wherein each floating bracket (12; 14) is a substantially U-shaped bracket comprising an elongate base (16) with two, axially substantially parallel support members (18) of even height extending upright from opposite ends of the elongate base (16), the support members (18) each terminating in a panel support surface (20) for accommodating a solar panel (22) disposed on top of the support members (18).

3. The floating module (10) according to claim 2 wherein the support members (18) of one floating bracket (12) are of uneven height compared to the support members (18) of the neighbouring floating bracket (14) so that the support

members (18) of the two neighbouring floating brackets (12; 14) support the solar panel (22) at an angle to the horizontal.

4. The floating module (10) according to claim 2 wherein the support members (18) of neighbouring floating brackets (12; 14) are of even height so that the support members (18) of the two neighbouring floating brackets (12; 14) support the solar panel (22) substantially horizontally.

5. The floating module (10) according to claim 2 wherein each floating bracket (12; 14) includes connecting means (30) for connecting the bracket (12; 14) to the floating arm (26).

6. The floating module (10) according to claim 5 wherein each bracket (12; 14) includes connecting means (30) at each end of the floating base (16), the connecting means (30) being configured to engage complimentary configured connecting means (32) on the floating arm (26).

7. The floating module (10) according to claim 6 wherein the floating base (16) of each bracket (12; 14) terminates at opposite ends thereof in a step formation (28) configured to accommodate the floating arm (26) in snug-fit engagement with the floating bracket (12; 14).

8. The floating module (10) according to claim 7 wherein at least one of the floating brackets (12; 14) include power cable carrying formations (24) for carrying power

cables between neighbouring floating modules (10), the cable carrying formations (24) being disposed adjacent the upright support members (18).

9. The floating module (10) according to claim 8 wherein the floating module (10) includes two elongate, substantially parallel floating arms (26) extending between the two neighbouring floating brackets (12; 14), each floating arm (26) being disconnectably connected at one end thereof to one bracket (12), and being disconnectably connected at an opposite end thereof to the neighbouring bracket (14), such that the two floating brackets (12; 14) and two floating arms (26) are disconnectably connected to each other to form a disconnectable, substantially rectangular floating frame with the support members (18) extending upright from the corners of the rectangular frame, the arrangement further being such that lateral distance between the floating brackets (12; 14) is altered either by altering the length of the floating arms (26), or by connecting a series of floating arms (26) in an end-to-end fashion to each other before connecting the series of floating arms (26) at opposite ends thereof to the respective floating brackets (12; 14).

10. The floating module (10) according to claim 9 wherein each floating arm (26) terminates at its opposite free ends in connecting means (32) that are configured to engage the complimentary configured connecting means (30) on the floating brackets (12; 14).

11. The floating module (10) according to claim 10 wherein the connecting means (30; 32) are eyes extending from opposite ends of the floating brackets (12; 14)

and from opposite ends of the floating arms (26) such that the eyes (30; 32) on the brackets and arms respectively overlap each other, with nuts and bolts extending through the overlapping eyes (30; 32) to secure the floating brackets (12; 14) and arms (26) to each other.

12. The floating module (10) according to claim 10 wherein the floating brackets (12; 14) and floating arms (26) are either rotation moulded or blow moulded so that each of the brackets (12; 14) and floating arms (26) independently define hollow internal chambers providing positive buoyancy such that the floating brackets (12; 14) and floating arms (26) are collectively or independently ballasted depending on site-specific conditions and requirements.

13. The floating module (10) according to claim 12 wherein the floating module (10) is configured to be connected to at least one similar neighbouring floating module (10) to form a floating mount (34), with at least one solar panel (22) disposed on each module (10), the solar panels (22) being interconnected by electrical cables to form a solar power plant.

14. A floating mount (34) including at least two floating modules (10) according to anyone of claims 1 to 13 which are releasably connected to each other to form a floating mount (34), with at least one solar panel (22) disposed on each module (10).

15. The floating mount (34) according to claim 14 wherein the floating mount (34) includes a series of floating modules (10) according to anyone of claims 1 to 13

which are connected side-by-side such that each of two neighbouring floating modules (10) are connected to opposite sides of the same floating arm (26) and with the upright support members (18) of the neighbouring floating modules (10) abutting each other laterally, with a solar panel (22) disposed on each of the floating modules (10) and interconnected to each other through a network of electrical cables to form a floating solar panel power plant.

16. The floating mount (34) according to claim 15 wherein the floating mount (34) further includes a floating walkway (36) extending circumferentially about the series of inter-connected floating modules (10) and being releasably connectable to the series of floating modules (10), the floating walkway (36) including a plurality of walkway floats (38) that are interconnected in an end-to-end fashion to form a substantially continuous walkway about the series of inter-connected floating modules (10).

17. The floating mount (34) according to claim 16 wherein each walkway float (38) comprises a rotation-moulded or blow-moulded body defining a hollow internal chamber providing positive buoyancy; connecting means (40) extending from opposite sides of the walkway float (38) and configured to connect to complimentary configured connecting means (40) of a neighbouring walkway float (38); and a non-slip upper surface (42); the floating walkway (36) further being characterised therein that any one or more of the walkway floats (38) are either independently or collectively ballasted depending on site-specific conditions and requirements.

18. The floating mount (34) according to claim 17 wherein the floating walkway (36) further includes a number of floating walkway connectors (44) that extend between and inter-connect the floating modules (10) to the walkway floats (38), each walkway connector (44) comprising a rotation-moulded or blow-moulded body defining a hollow internal chamber providing positive buoyancy, and connecting means (46) extending from opposite sides of the walkway connector (44) and configured to connect at one end thereof to complimentary configured connecting means (40) of a walkway float (38), and at an opposite end thereof to complimentary configured connecting means (30; 32) of a floating module (10), thus securing the floating walkway (36) in laterally spaced relationship to the series of floating modules (10); the floating walkway (36) further being characterised therein that any one or more of the walkway connectors (44) are either independently or collectively ballasted to stabilise the floating mount (34).

19. A floating module (10) according to claim 1 substantially as herein illustrated and exemplified with reference to the accompanying drawings.

20. A floating mount (34) according to claim 14 substantially as herein illustrated and exemplified with reference to the accompanying drawings.

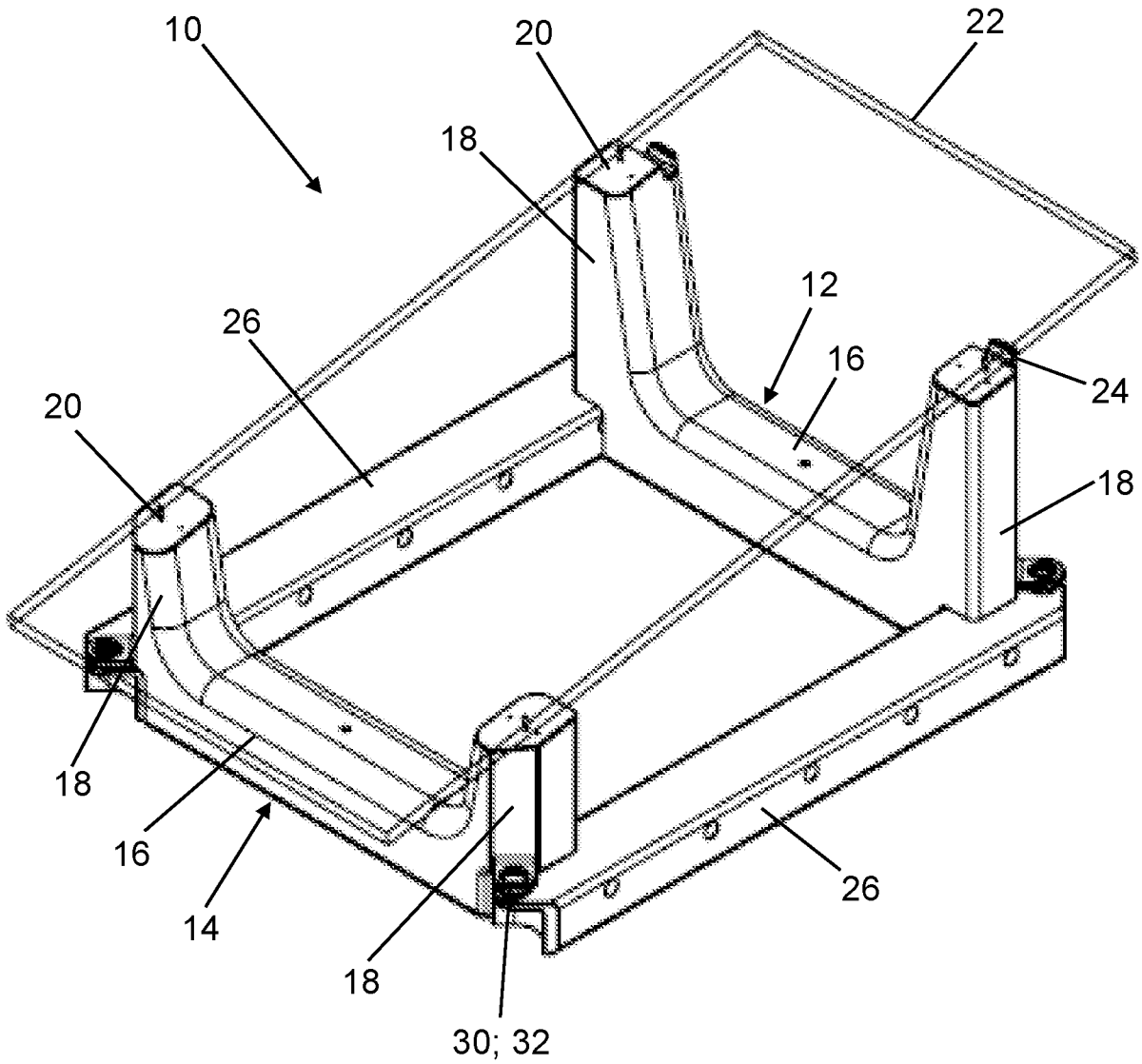

FIGURE 1

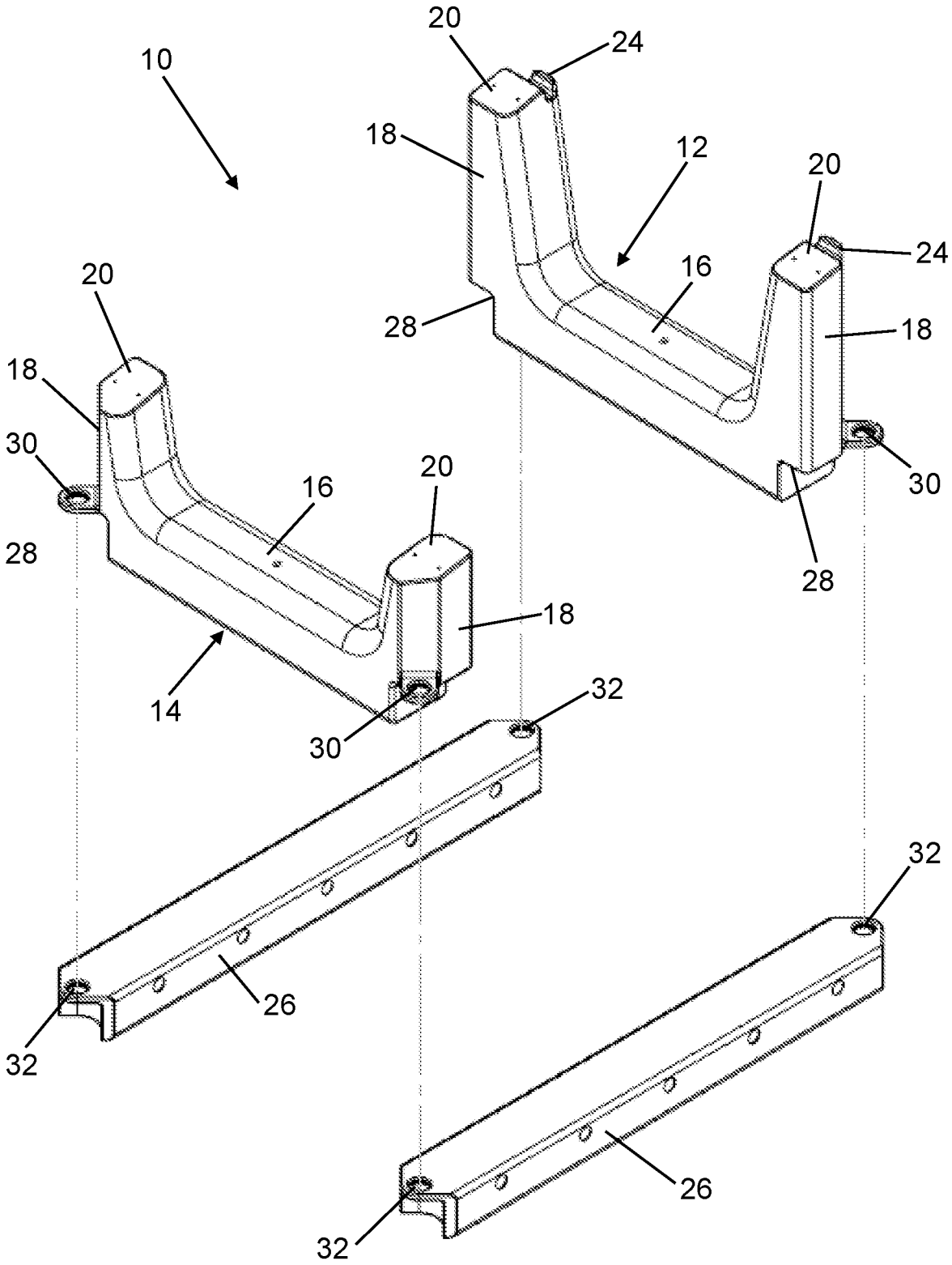
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FIGURE 2

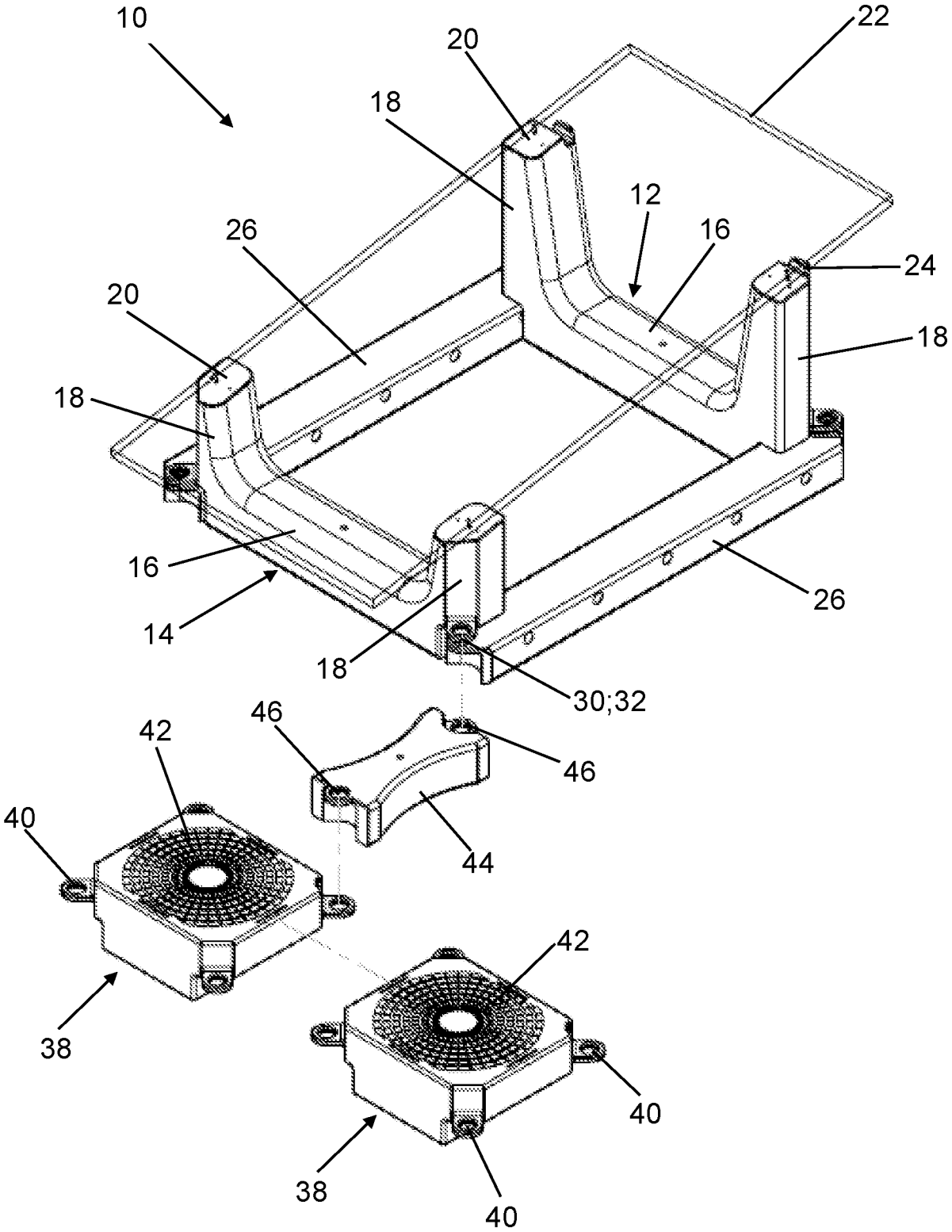
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FIGURE 3

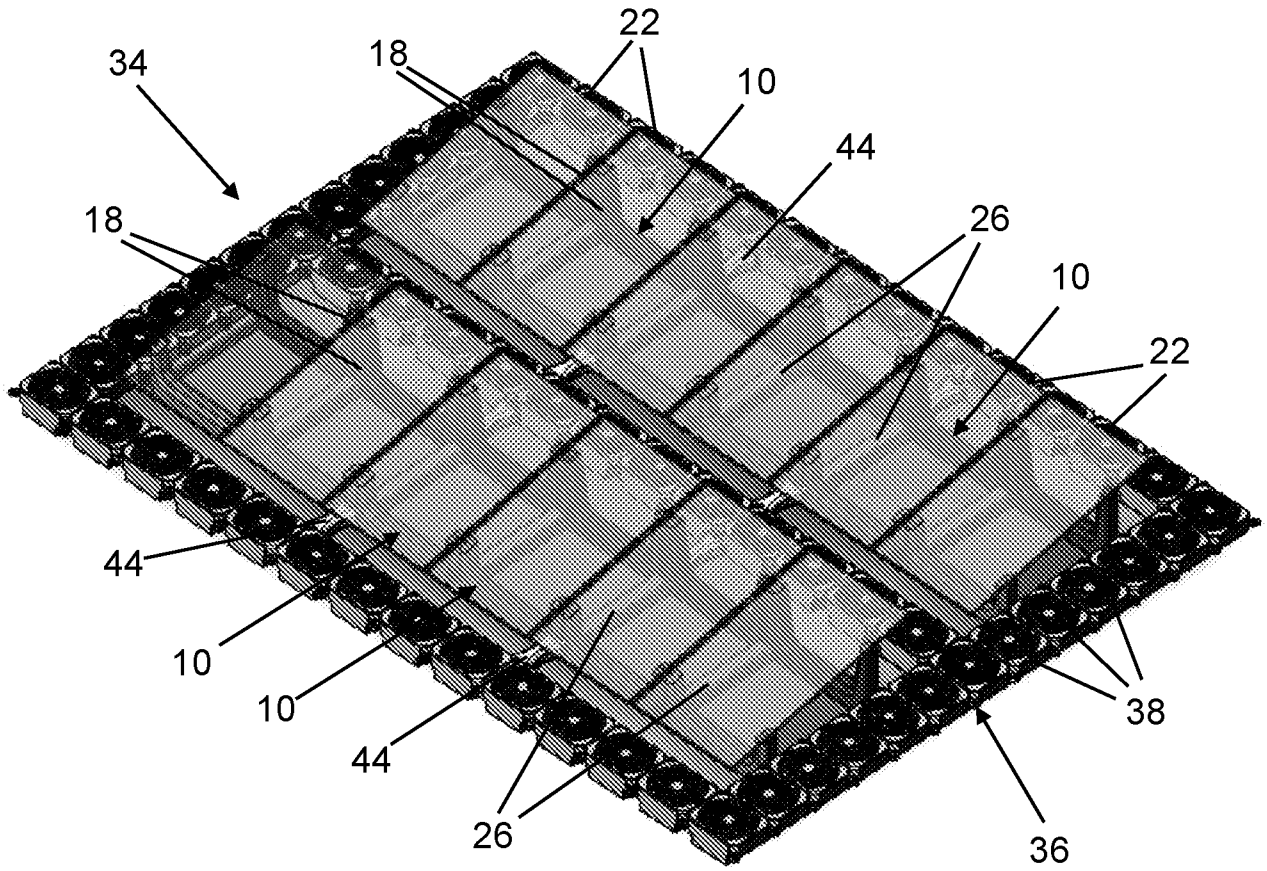

FIGURE 4

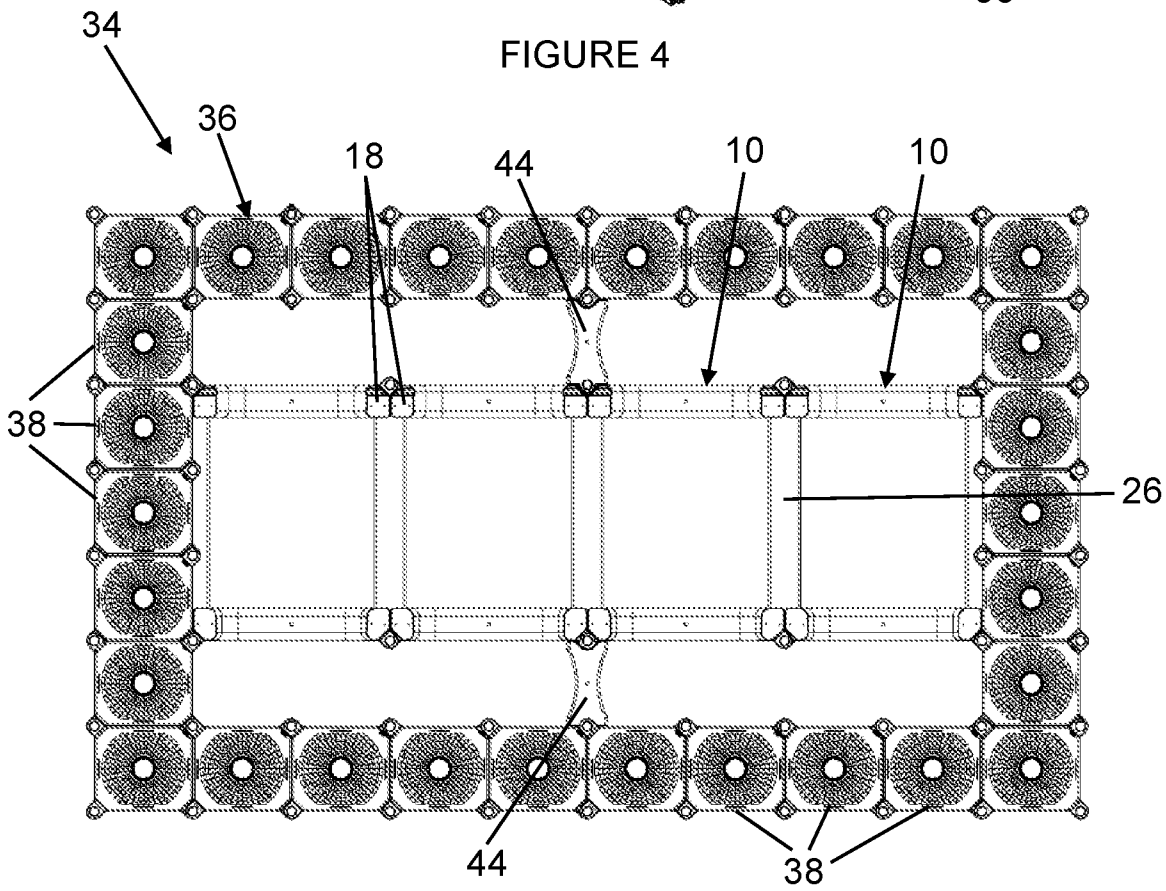

FIGURE 5