

Memo / Meòrachan

To / Gu	Moray Firth RAG – Marine mammal sub group
cc	Name
From / Bho	Erica Knott
Date / Latha	16 th September 2021
Subject / Cuspair	Marine mammal monitoring –NatureScot / Marine Scotland discussions - Action point

Dear All

Following on from our last MFRAG marine mammal meeting on the 25th August 2021, we were tasked with setting out the outcome of the discussions NatureScot and MS had prior to this meeting to identify requirements for pre, during and post construction monitoring for the 3 consented offshore wind farms in the Moray Firth:

- Beatrice (operational)
- Moray East (under construction) and
- Moray West (pre-construction)

As outlined at the meeting on 25th August, we identified that the following were the key species of concern identified during the application / determination stages:

- Bottlenose dolphin and harbour seal – Beatrice, Moray East and Moray West
- Minke Whale – Moray West only (due to export cable route crossing the Southern Trench MPA)

Harbour porpoise are ubiquitous to the offshore wind industry and whilst a lot of the monitoring to date has helped to inform behavioural changes due to disturbance, we see this as a strategic industry species of interest. We therefore wish to see further discussion regarding the setting up of a strategic research fund, to include existing and new offshore wind project proposals in Scottish waters.

As indicated at the meeting, to date the monitoring has been linked into the cycle of Site Condition Monitoring (6 yearly cycle for the Moray Firth SAC for Bottlenose dolphins, and the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC for harbour seals), and progressed through the joint discussions in this group as well as the individual development consent conditions. Both the Universities of Aberdeen (Lighthouse Station) and St Andrews are carrying out the monitoring. Given likely future changes in personnel and the soon to end existing memoranda of agreements between the various parties, NatureScot has asked that both universities provide the following:

Bottlenose Dolphin

For both Universities to provide fully costed proposals to continue the next phase of monitoring, to include costs for staff time and what may help them in terms of future planning. To discuss how the monitoring is carried out and if they have any desire for one institute to be lead in terms of staff time for analysis, and options for monitoring the change in distribution (i.e. shift southward). Lastly what ideas they might have for consideration of inclusion of analysis from the East Coast Marine Mammal Acoustic Study (ECOMMAS) array in the future.

NatureScot took an action to discuss further with colleagues in Natural England and DEFRA / BEIS on the potential to set up further monitoring of this population as evidence grows on their southerly movements in English waters.

Harbour Seal

For the Lighthouse Station to provide fully costed proposals for the monitoring of the harbour seals. With the provision of indicative costings including full cost of monitoring and staff time, also when funding would be required. This should also include costings to monitor the population using novel techniques, such as drones. If using drones, further information should be included on whether collection of additional demographic parameters can be included and the analysis this will require.

Once costs / plans are available, we would be in a position to have a further discussion on this at the end of the year with MFRAG MM.

Moray West - construction monitoring

NatureScot and MS to review the proposals brought forward from Moray West when received. However, we advise we are expecting the following:

- u/water noise monitoring during construction – monopile installation being different to other installation campaigns.
- Also that we would then wish to see the consequences of noise on HP from the monopile installation.

With regard to minke whale – we advise that NatureScot currently have a project with CREEM considering MPA monitoring for a number of species. This report will be shared once available.

In terms of strategic monitoring and questions, we are considering a wider strategic programme to cover all ScotWind areas with CPODs / Broadband receivers etc. Marine Scotland will consider this further, with the potential for all new developers to contribute to, and with the options for existing developments to contribute.

Key questions we wish to see answered:

- How porpoise react to differing foundations?
- How do they forage and for what around structures?
- How will they react during decommissioning?

We are aware that there are several issues to resolve around monitoring and wish to continue working collaboratively with the developers and Universities to address issues such as who and how this strategic programme (central fund) will be managed, supply chain, changes in staffing, procurement issues and keeping track of other campaigns including fisheries management and research programmes.

We look forward to discussing this further in detail at our next meeting.