

# Pentland floating offshore wind farm

## Volume 3: Appendix A.16.2

Assessment of Effects on the Special Landscape Qualities of Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Area

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## OFFSHORE EIAR (VOLUME 3): TECHNICAL APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 16.2: ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS ON THE SPECIAL

### LANDSCAPE QUALITIES OF KYLE OF TONGUE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

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## APPENDIX 16.2: ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS ON THE SPECIAL LANDSCAPE QUALITIES OF KYLE OF TONGUE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

### 1.1 Introduction

This Appendix contains the assessment of effects on the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Area (NSA). It follows guidance set out in NatureScot's Working Draft 11 entitled 'Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities' (SLQs) (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2018). The guidance is aimed specifically at landscape professionals undertaking Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) for developments or land use changes with potential to impact on the SLQs of a NSA or a National Park (NP).

The following figures are of particular relevance to the assessment of effects on the NSA and have been used in the assessment process. All SLVIA figures are presented in Offshore EIA (Volume 3): Appendix 16.9: SLVIA Figures.

- > Figure 16.4: Landscape Designations and Wild Land Area;
- > Figure 16.11: Landscape Designations and Wild Land Area with Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV);
- > Figure 16.42 and 16.58: Viewpoint 12: Ben Loyal; and
- > Figure 16.43 and 16.59: Viewpoint 13: A Mhoine.

The draft guidance presents an approach that is intended to be "*proportionate to the scale and stage of the development, be clear and transparent so that the reasoning that informs judgements can be tracked and convey the complexity of effects*". It sets out a four-step approach presented in the associated Pro Forma under the following four headings;

- > Step 1: The Proposal – gain as full an understanding of the proposal as possible.
- > Step 2: Definition of the Study Area and Scope of the Assessment - identifying the area likely to be affected.
- > Step 3: The Analysis of Impacts and Effects on SLQs.
- > Step 4: Summary of Impacts on the SLQs, implications for the NSA/NP and possible future effects on SLQs and recommendations for mitigation.

### 1.2 Role of NSAs

NSA is a conservation designation used in Scotland and administered by NatureScot (previously Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)). The designation's purpose is to identify areas of exceptional scenery and to protect them from inappropriate development. NSAs were first established in 1980, under planning legislation, by order of the Secretary of State. Part 10 of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 gave NSAs a statutory basis. The Town and Country Planning (National Scenic Areas) (Scotland) Designation Directions 2010 then brought this into force. In December 2010, NSAs were designated under this new legislation.

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (Scottish Government, 2020) is a statement of Scottish Government policy on how nationally important land use planning matters should be addressed. With regard to National Designations, Paragraph 212 of SPP states that:

*"Development that affects a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Nature Reserve should only be permitted where:*

- > *the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or*
- > *any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance."*

The role of this assessment is to provide an appropriate level of information to enable decision makers and consultees to reach a conclusion regarding the potential effects on the SLQs of the Kyle of Tongue NSA. In accordance with the EIA Regulations, the assessment determines whether the effects on the SLQs and the overall effects on the NSA as a whole, are assessed to be either significant or not significant.

This assessment is carried out with specific reference to the effect that the Offshore Development may have on the SLQs of the NSA. In ‘Guidance for Identifying the Special Qualities of Scotland’s National Scenic Areas’ (SNH, 2008), SLQs are defined as *“the characteristics that individually, or when combined together, make an NSA special in terms of landscape and scenery.”* The SLQs of the Kyle of Tongue NSA are documented in two reports: ‘Scotland’s Scenic Heritage’ (Countryside Commission for Scotland, 1978), and ‘Special Qualities of the Kyle of Tongue NSA’ (SNH, 2010), which supersedes the 1978 report.

The following concise description of the NSA is taken from ‘Scotland’s Scenic Heritage’ (Countryside Commission for Scotland, 1978).

*“Ben Hope (927m) and Ben Loyal (764m) are well known as two of the finest mountains in the north of Scotland. Their isolation in the landscape emphasises on the one hand the massive asymmetric cone of Ben Hope which dominates the northern seaboard, and on the other the stately succession of granite peaks of Ben Loyal which form a compelling skyline at the head of the Kyle of Tongue. The Kyle of Tongue itself exhibits a constantly changing character with the ebb and flow of the tide, and the varied woodlands and pattern of crofting settlements along its shores add landscape diversity to the scenic relationship it enjoys with the two bays. The coastline at the mouth of the Kyle, with its islands, cliffs and indented bays with sandy beaches and crofting settlements, forms a visually related coastal extension to the inner part of the Kyle. This character extends in undiminished quality to the mouth of the Naver in Torrisdale Bay.”*

### 1.3 Step 1: The Proposal

The aim of Step 1 is to *“gain as full an understanding of the proposal as possible”* by setting out the key aspects of the proposal that have potential to affect the SLQs.

The Offshore Development will comprise offshore wind turbine generators (WTGs) installed on floating substructures, which will be wholly located within the extent of the array development area. The Offshore Development is represented by a design envelope and within this an indicative development is shown which is designed to constitute the worst-case scenario in terms of dimensions and layout. In respect of the SLVIA, the worst-case scenario comprises seven WTGs, each with a blade tip height of up to a maximum of 300 m above Highest Astronomical Tide (HAT) and set on floating substructures which will be up to 30 m in height above HAT.

The Kyle of Tongue NSA is located approximately 23 km to the south-west of the closest WTG of the Offshore Development. The NSA centres on the Kyle of Tongue which extends from the mountainous hinterland marked by Ben Loyal and Ben Hope to meet with the Atlantic Ocean on the northern coastline of Sutherland. The ZTV in Figure 16.11 shows theoretical visibility to occur in patches across the seascape and around Tongue Bay in the northern part of the NSA and in patches across the north-east facing slopes of the hills in the southern part of the NSA.

The Offshore Development could potentially affect the SLQs of the Kyle of Tongue NSA owing principally to visibility of the WTGs on floating substructures. These components will be located in the Pentland Firth and be seen against the backdrop of either the open seascape or the Orkney Islands or seen set behind the intervening landform of the northern coastline. Although there are currently no operational offshore wind farms in the Pentland Firth there are future proposals for wind farm development in this area and a number of operational and proposed onshore wind farms on the Mainland of Scotland, although visibility of operational onshore wind farms is generally limited from the NSA.

### 1.4 Step 2: Definition of the Study Area and Scope of the Assessment

The aim of Step 2 is to identify the extent of the area likely to be affected through consideration of the location of the NSA relative to the Offshore Development, the extent to which the Offshore Development will alter the NSA, in this case as a result of its visibility only, and how it will affect people’s experience of the NSA from, both, within and beyond the boundaries.

### 1.4.1 Location of the NSA Relative to the Offshore Development

The Kyle of Tongue NSA extends from the east shore of Torrisdale Bay in the east, westwards along the coast of Sutherland including Neave Island, Eilean nan Ron and the Rabbit Islands to Port Vasgo in the west and including the sea around these areas. South of the coastline, the NSA boundaries follow the western and eastern sides of the Kyle of Tongue, and then extend to wrap around the Ben Hope (927 m AOD) and Ben Loyal (764 m AOD) which mark the southern extent of the area.

In terms of Landscape Character Types (LCTs), Ben Hope and Ben Loyal are classified as Lone Mountains LCT, while the remainder of the NSA is classified as Rocky Hills and Moorland LCT with smaller areas of Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT around the shorelines. The Regional Coastal Character Area (RCCA) of Kyles and Sea Lochs RCCA occurs inland from the coastal edge, while the Remote High Cliffs RCCA lines the coastal edge. There is a strong association between the mountains to the south, in combination with the kyle and the coast in the centre and north. The seascape of the Pentland Firth forms an important part of the wider setting to the NSA.

The Offshore Development lies a minimum distance of approximately 23 km from the closest north-eastern edge of the NSA. The Offshore Development will, therefore, have no direct effects on the NSA. The ZTV in Figure 16.11 shows theoretical visibility to occur in intermittent patches along the coastal edge, and patches across the north-eastern facing slopes of the mountains, hills and open moorlands.

The Kyle of Tongue follows a well-defined alignment towards the north-north-east, where the coastal edge opens out onto the North Atlantic. The western and eastern side of the Kyle of Tongue is enclosed by upland landform, with steep and craggy slopes rising to form small hills on the eastern side and gentler slopes rounding off into broader moorland hills on the western side. The kyle gradually broadens from south to north, such that the southern section is well enclosed with a close association occurring internally from one side to the other. In contrast, in the northern section, the alignment of the landform opens out, such that an association with the seascape and the islands to the north, occurs. While the NSA extends to cover Torrisdale Bay to the east, the coastline further east extends further northwards to the northerly point at Strathy. This intervening coastal section reduces the extent of open views towards the Offshore Development although there may be opportunities for visibility of it over the low-lying landform.

Ben Hope and Ben Loyal form the key features in the southern part of the NSA. Classified as part of the Lone Mountains LCT, these hills are prominent within the wider upland and moorland landscape and form a focus in views from the Kyle of Tongue. Conversely, an important aspect from these hills, is the view north along the Kyle of Tongue to the northern coastline and the North Atlantic beyond, with the open seascape forming part of the wider background setting. There is no strong association, however, with the part of the seascape to the north-east, where the Offshore Development will be located, as it is offset from the main orientation of these hills, where the ridgelines are orientated north-south with views opening up east-west.

### 1.4.2 General Visibility of the Development from the NSA

The extent to which the Offshore Development will be visible from the NSA will be limited, with only 23% of the total area gaining theoretical visibility. The ZTV in Figure 16.11 shows that theoretical visibility across the eastern and central parts of the NSA will be very limited. There will be practically no theoretical visibility along the eastern side of the Kyle of Tongue and no visibility from the Kyle of Tongue. On the northern coastal edge, there will be small patches of theoretical around Skerryay, across the north-east facing sides of the islands and surrounding seascape from a minimum distance of approximately 25 km, but no visibility from Torrisdale Bay. Further south on the eastern side, there will be theoretical visibility across the north-east facing slopes and ridgeline of Ben Loyal from a minimum distance of approximately 27 km, occurring in fairly localised extents.

On the western side of the NSA there will be patches of visibility from the northern coastal edge, between Midtown and Portvasgo, and from a minimum distance of approximately 32 km. There will be no theoretical visibility on the western side of the Kyle of Bute to the south of Midtown, with visibility only picking up in the central and southern sections across the north-east facing slopes of the lower moorland hills and the higher Ben Hope, from minimum distances of approximately 38 to 48 km.



### 1.4.3 People's Experience of the NSA

The Kyle of Tongue NSA is experienced by local people who live and work in the NSA, as well as by visitors to the area. While there is the nucleated settlement of Tongue on the eastern side of the Kyle of Tongue, much of the settlement occurs in a dispersed pattern along the coast. Tongue is an important service centre for the wider rural area, with facilities including a school, police station, post office and shops.

The settlements provide accommodation for visitors in the form of hotels, Bed and Breakfast facilities, and a caravan and campsite. There are coastal walks and beaches, as well as the higher hills to the south, with Ben Loyal known as 'Queen of the Mountains' and being particularly popular with walkers. While minor roads and tracks access the coastal parts of the NSA, the main roads through the NSA include the A838 which connects to the west and the A836 which connects to the east and south, with the town of Tongue acting as the intersection between these routes.

This NSA is both settled and farmed. The principal land cover is moorland and the principal land use is hill sheep farming. This relatively low intensity farming practice means that there are very few people working on the land. While there are also small areas of deciduous woodland and coniferous plantations, these also involve very little labour. The settlement in the NSA is typically small in scale and rural in character. As described previously, properties tend to be strung along the minor coastal roads, such that their influence is widespread. There are very few larger scale developments, the most notable examples including the mast on Ben Tongue (302 m AOD) and mast to the west of Talmine, the single turbine near Skerray on the north coast and the causeway which spans the kyle and over which the A838 is routed.

### 1.4.4 Potential for Cumulative Effects

The potential for cumulative effects to arise relates principally to the interactions of the Offshore Development with the operational, under construction, consented and application stage onshore developments, as well as the future proposed offshore West Orkney Offshore Wind Farm. The locations of the onshore cumulative wind farms and Space Hub are shown in Figure 16.16. Those closest to the NSA include the consented Space Hub, approximately 2 km to the west of the western NSA boundary, operational Bettyhill Wind Farm, a minimum of approximately 14 km to the north-east, and operational Strathy North Wind Farm, a minimum of approximately 18 km to the east.

In light of these, and other proposed developments, there is the potential for a significant cumulative effect to arise across various parts of the NSA, and for that reason the whole of the NSA has been considered in the assessment in Section 1.5.4.

### 1.4.5 Potential for Night-time Effects

The potential for night-time effects relating to the aviation and maritime navigational lighting on the WTGs will be limited owing to the minimum distance of 23 km between the Offshore Development and the closest boundary of the NSA and with visibility arising from a minimum distance of approximately 25 km and out to 50 km. The Night-time Assessment is presented in Appendix 16.6 which includes the methodology applied and the scope of the assessment in terms of the lighting requirements. The maximum design scenario considers aviation lighting set on the hubs of the seven WTGs at a height of 170 m, and with a blade tip height of 300 m. The lights will emit a flashing red light of medium intensity, measured as 2,000 candelas (cd). The lights will carry a detection system responding to atmospheric conditions, such that when visibility is greater than 5 km the intensity of the lights will be reduced to 10% of their maximum intensity, which equates to 200 cd. Met office data recorded at Wick (see Appendix 16.8) suggests that visibility of >5 km occurs 94% of the time around the north coast of Scotland although this may be slightly less frequent out over the sea due to higher moisture content. However, when visibility is less than 5 km the weather conditions will also act to reduce the intensity of the lights when viewed from the more distant areas. Although the intensity of the lighting will be reduced to 200 cd for 94% or more of the time, both 2000 cd and 200 cd are considered in the assessment to ensure the worst case scenario is covered.

The Hub Lighting ZTV in Figure 16.30 shows the limited extents of the NSA from which the aviation lighting associated with the Offshore Development would be visible, with patches of visibility occurring around the settled coastline of Talmine and with small patches around Portvasgo at the end of the headland, both at a minimum of approximately 32 to 33 km. There is also visibility shown across the seaward areas included within

the NSA boundary, from a minimum distance of 23 km and from where people in boats may experience the lights. Other small patches of visibility occur within rural parts of the NSA where there are likely to be a very limited number of people experiencing the lights, for example on the coastal hills to the west of the Kyle and across the north-east facing slopes of Ben Hope and Ben Loyal from a minimum of more than 40 km.

While there is potential for night-time lighting to be visible from the NSA, the intensity of the lights as experienced over such distances, even considering the 2,000 cd intensity, combined with the limited extents from which they will be visible and the lighting that occurs as part of the baseline in coastal areas, will limit their influence on the NSA. The effects of the night-time lighting on the SLQs are, therefore, not considered further in the assessment.

#### 1.4.6 Summary of Step 2

The Kyle of Tongue NSA covers a relatively small area and despite the distant nature and limited extents of visibility, the spread of theoretical visibility across various parts of the NSA means that the whole of the NSA has been considered in the assessment in Section 1.5.4. The NSA covers a settled and farmed landscape, where human influences occur, albeit typically small in scale and rural in character within the NSA and with larger scale existing and proposed developments occurring beyond its boundary. The scope of the assessment considers the cumulative effects with other large-scale developments.

### 1.5 Step 3: Analysis of Effects on the Special Landscape Qualities

Step 3 sets out the assessment of effects on the NSA that will potentially arise as a result of the Offshore Development. Within Step 3, the following four key considerations are made;

- > Identify those SLQs with potential to be affected;
- > Establish the key landscape characteristic that underpin the SLQs;
- > Assess the effects of the Development on the relevant SLQs; and
- > Consider the potential for mitigation and determine the level of effect.

Table 1.5-1 sets out a preliminary assessment to identify those SLQs with potential to be affected by the Development. Table 1.5-2 then establishes the key characteristics that underpin the SLQs with reference to NatureScot's NSA citation and Landscape Character Assessment, with information supplemented with the experiences of the assessor gained through site work. Table 1.5-2 also sets out the effects that all relevant SLQs will undergo as a result of the Offshore Development and determines the potential level of effect.

NatureScot's 'Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities' (2018) requests mention of mitigation measures. The likely visual effects of different layout scenarios have been investigated in the absence of mitigation measures as part of the review of the worst case scenario layout for the Offshore Development. The iterative design process for the Offshore Development has led to the Array Area being reduced from 20 km<sup>2</sup> to 10 km<sup>2</sup> with the extent of the Array Area facing the north Caithness coast being reduced. This has had the effect of notably reducing the horizontal extent of the offshore WTGs from certain sections of the coast, with the layout being contained in a much more compact area. The location of the Array Area has also changed such that it would be located a minimum of 7.5 km from the north Caithness coast, whilst previously it would have been located a minimum of 6.7 km. The final design and layout will be required to take into account other stakeholder requirements such as navigation, commercial fisheries and search and rescue (SAR); and other technical and environmental factors within the PFOWF Array Area.

#### 1.5.1 Sensitivity of the Kyle of Tongue NSA

The value of the Kyle of Tongue NSA is high. This is because it is a national designation, applied in this area to signify the national importance of the scenic landscape.

The susceptibility of the NSA to the effects of the Offshore Development is medium-high and prevented from being rated high by the following factors. Firstly, the SLQs of the NSA relate principally to inherent features and characteristics associated with the Kyle and the mountains, which will not be directly affected by the Offshore Development. Secondly, while there is a strong association between the NSA and the seascape to

the north with which it aligns, there is no strong association with the seascape to the north-east where the Offshore Development will be located. Thirdly, the Offshore Development will be located a minimum distance of 23 km from the closest boundary of the Kyle of Tongue NSA and as shown in the ZTV in Figure 6.11, visibility of the Offshore Development will be limited in extent, such that only localised patches will be affected. Fourthly, while there are no operational offshore wind farms visible from the NSA, there are operational onshore wind farms visible which have an existing influence in localised patches of the NSA, as shown in the cumulative ZTVs in Figures 16.17 to 16.22.

The combination of the value of this NSA and its susceptibility to the effects of the Development results in an overall **high** sensitivity.

### 1.5.2 Identify those SLQs with Potential to be Affected

In respect of the Kyle of Tongue NSA, there are six SLQs listed in 'The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas' (SNH, 2010). Three of the six SLQs will not be affected, largely owing to the fact that the Offshore Development will be located beyond the NSA boundary, at a distance greater than 23 km. Moreover, these three SLQs are not susceptible to indirect effects or effects arising in respect of the wider setting. The three SLQs assessed in detail, have potential to be indirectly affected either from within the NSA, or from beyond the NSA, whereby the setting of the NSA, as seen within the wider landscape and seascape context, could be affected. Table 1.5-1 below presents the six SLQs attributed to the Kyle of Tongue NSA, highlighting in grey the three which have potential to be significantly affected and which, therefore, require a detailed assessment.

Table 1.5-1 SLQs of the Kyle of Tongue NSA

Special Landscape Quality	Susceptibility to the Offshore Development
<b>An ever-present backdrop of mountains</b>	Indirect effects comprising visibility of the Offshore Development will potentially have an effect on this SLQ of ' <i>an ever-present backdrop of mountains</i> ' as it will provide a new background feature in views of the mountains, albeit mostly in the opposite direction.
<b>The Kyle – a link from an inhabited coast to a wild, moorland</b>	Indirect effects comprising visibility of the Offshore Development will not affect this SLQ of ' <i>The Kyle – a link from an inhabited coast to a wild, moorland</i> ' as the Offshore Development is too distant and limited in visibility to affect the wild character of the moorland
<b>Scale, from domestic to monumental</b>	Indirect effects comprising visibility of the Offshore Development will potentially have an effect on this SLQ of ' <i>scale, from domestic to monumental</i> ' as it will provide a new, large scale background feature in views out towards the sea.
<b>The constantly changing character of the Kyle</b>	Indirect effects comprising visibility of the Offshore Development will not affect this SLQ of ' <i>the constantly changing character of the Kyle</i> ' as this SLQ is not susceptible to changes within the wider setting.
<b>Rich variety of coastal scenery</b>	Indirect effects comprising visibility of the Offshore Development will potentially have an effect on this SLQ of ' <i>rich variety of coastal scenery</i> ' as it will provide a new background feature in views from the coast.
<b>Distinct pattern of settlement</b>	Indirect effects comprising visibility of the Offshore Development will not affect this SLQ of ' <i>distinct patterns of settlement</i> ' as this SLQ is not susceptible to changes within the wider setting.

### 1.5.3 Assess the Effects of the Development on the Relevant SLQs

The three SLQs with potential to be significantly affected by the Offshore Development are assessed in detail in Table 1.5-2 below. In the left-hand column, the descriptions of the SLQs are presented in bold text, while 'further information' is not in bold text.



Table 1.5-2 Effects of the Offshore Development on the relevant SLQs

Underpinning landscape characteristics to inform detailed SLQ descriptions	Impacts of the proposal on underpinning key characteristics and the effects on SLQs
<b>SLQ: An ever-present backdrop of mountains</b>	
<p><b><i>“Ben Hope and Ben Loyal, standing isolated above the open moorland, are well known as two of the finest mountains in the north. Both hills rise above their eponymous lochs and each has its own distinct profile. Ben Hope appears as a large asymmetric cone whereas Ben Loyal, ‘The Queen of Scottish Mountains’, forms a stately succession of granite peaks. They have a timeless and lofty presence, forming an ever-present backdrop and acting as landmarks over a wide area.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>They provide the whole locality with a sense of place and symbolise the boundary between the populated coast and the wild and generally uninhabited interior.”</i></b></p> <p><b><i>“Ben Loyal (764m) forms a compelling skyline at the head of the Kyle of Tongue, while Ben Hope (927m) dominates the northern seaboard. These isolated mountains are distinctive and their individual shapes make them easily recognisable. Ben Loyal is known as the ‘Queen of Scottish Mountains’ for its aesthetically pleasing profile. Its vegetated summit ridge has four prominent, granitic tors, and there are impressive corries on its northwest side. Ben Hope (Hill of the Bay), the most northerly Munro, is asymmetric in shape and generally less complex. Its western slopes form a very steep, forbidding foil to the head of Loch Hope and Strath More. This edge is formed by two tiers of crags, the highest one forming the edge of the main north-south ridge. The east side of the mountain has three fine, remote corries. Although there is a wide variety of landform within the NSA, the mountains are a link that contributes to the coherence of this NSA, even though at times they are shrouded in cloud, or wreathed in mist.”</i></b></p>	<p>The Offshore Development will be located in the Pentland Firth to the north-east of the NSA, while Ben Hope and Ben Loyal are located in the southern part of the NSA. This means that the Offshore Development will be seen in the opposite direction to the mountains and will not be seen as a feature in their setting in views from within the NSA. The exception occurs when viewed from beyond the NSA and beyond the Offshore Development, for example from the Orkney Islands, or the Scrabster to Stromness Ferry looking south-west, albeit with the mountains at a minimum distance of 70 km from these locations. The only other way in which the Offshore Development could, therefore, have an influence on the NSA, will, therefore, be by appearing in the 360-degree views experienced from within the NSA, where the Offshore Development forms a feature within the wider setting to the mountains.</p> <p>The magnitude of change on this SLQ that will arise as a result of the Offshore Development will be <b>low</b>. Those factors which moderate the magnitude of change include the location of the Offshore Development in the opposite direction to the mountains (relative to the NSA), the minimum separation distance of over 23 km from the closest NSA boundary, and the limited horizontal extent of the Offshore Development as shown on the Horizontal Angle ZTV (Figure 6.8) to be between 1 and 5 degrees. Despite the tall vertical scale of the WTGs, the notable addition they will make in the context of an undeveloped seascape, and the competing focus they will introduce relative to Ben Loyal and Ben Hope, they will have a <b>not significant</b> effect on this SLQ which is largely based around the relationship between the mountains and other parts of the NSA and not specifically including the part of the seascape offset to the north-east.</p>
<b>SLQ: Scale, from domestic to monumental</b>	
<p><b><i>“The small domestic scale of crofting and other activity around</i></b></p>	<p>The Offshore Development will be located in the ‘open ocean’ to the north, and, therefore, will have an influence on this part of the ‘outer landscape’.</p>

Underpinning landscape characteristics to inform detailed SLQ descriptions	Impacts of the proposal on underpinning key characteristics and the effects on SLQs
<p><b><i>the coastal shores contrasts markedly with the monumental outer landscape presented by the mountains to the south and the open ocean to the north.</i></b></p> <p><i>“It can be difficult to appreciate the mountains’ height and scale when there are few scale indicators such as trees or buildings.”</i></p>	<p>This SLQ relates to the contrast in scale between the small scale of the coastal and crofting areas and the large scale of the mountains and adjacent seascape. The Offshore Development will be located a minimum of 23 km from the closest north-east edge of the NSA. It will not be seen to the north of the NSA, where the closest association with the Pentland Firth occurs, but offset to the north-east. Visibility across the northern coastal and crofting areas is intermittent, with coastal edges facing north-east, generally exposed to visibility and other coastal edges generally screened by intervening landform.</p> <p>The Horizontal Angle ZTV in Figure 16.8 shows that the seven WTGs will be seen as a relatively compact group, occupying only 1 to 5 degrees of the 360-degree views. Viewed from distances at and beyond 23 km, they will be seen as relatively distant features despite their notable vertical scale of 300 m. They will not diminish the large scale of the open ocean, but they will add large scale development into a previously undeveloped seascape, relatively close to the coast, which has some development characteristics. The magnitude of change as a result, will be moderated by those factors discussed previously, such as separation distance, the small number of WTGs, and their compact horizontal extent, as well as their location to the north-east which means that often they will be seen to occur ‘round the coast’ rather than in the more prominent position, directly out at sea. Furthermore, visibility will occur only across very localised parts of this NSA, with the majority of the designated area remaining unaffected. Taking all these factors into account, the magnitude of change on this SLQ will be <b>low</b> and the effect will be <b>not significant</b>.</p>
<p><b>SLQ: Rich variety of coastal scenery</b></p>	
<p><b><i>“From the sheltered Kyle to islands exposed to the full force of the ocean, the area exhibits a rich variety of coastal scenery. This includes both soft landscapes of sand and mud and harder landscapes of rock and cliff. One of the highlights of the north coast is the long, sandy Torrisdale Bay.”</i></b></p> <p><i>“Along its length the Kyle displays a combination of what can be considered as ‘east coast’ and ‘west coast’ characteristics. This is due to the intermix of rocky, coastal sections and flatter, sand flats and estuarine deposits. The northern coastline has high cliffs, shelving shores and sandy sheltered bays. This variety increases at the broad mouth of the kyle where a scatter of islands mirror the landform of the rocky coastal promontories, and mark the transition from the open sea to the sheltered kyle. In the east, the NSA includes coastal crofting areas, the headland between the Rivers Naver and Borgie, and the raised beach of Invernaver.”</i></p>	<p>While the Offshore Development will have no direct effect on the coastal scenery of the NSA, it may have an effect on the wider seascape setting. Although no direct reference is made to the seascape setting in the description of this SLQ, it is an inherent part of the coastal character. The Offshore Development will occupy part of the open sea and will be visible intermittently from coastal parts of the NSA, where small scale development is a baseline feature. The ZTV in Figure 16.11 shows the variable extents to which the Offshore Development will be visible along the NSA coastline. Torrisdale Bay marks the eastern most section, and here there will be no visibility in the bay but with visibility arising from the sea from a minimum distance of 23 km, and along the headland further west towards Skerry Bay from a minimum distance of 26 km. Visibility beyond this bay will be limited owing to the screening effect of the intervening islands and coast, although the eastern sides of the islands, including Neave, Eilean nan Ron and the Rabbit Islands will be subject to visibility, as will the surrounding seascape. Theoretical visibility is shown to be more extensive on the north-east coast of the A Mhoine peninsula, with almost continuous visibility along the inhabited section between Skinnet and Portvasgo.</p> <p>The magnitude of change that the Offshore Development will have on this SLQ will be <b>low</b> along the section of coast between Skinnet and Portvasgo, on the coast around Skerry, and across the small islands and seascape to the north. These are small parts of a much wider NSA across which there will mostly be no change in respect of this SLQ, and where other coastal parts will be affected, there will either be a low or negligible magnitude of change.</p> <p>The effect will relate to the location of the Offshore Development in the undeveloped seascape to the north-east of the NSA, the tall vertical scale of the WTGs and the contrast they will present relative to the either</p>

Underpinning landscape characteristics to inform detailed SLQ descriptions	Impacts of the proposal on underpinning key characteristics and the effects on SLQs
	<p>undeveloped, or lightly developed character of the NSA coastline. The low rating, however, relates to the notable separation between the NSA and the Offshore Development, with visibility from the coastline occurring beyond 23 km and out to 35 km, the small number of WTGs which will occupy a small proportion of the wider view, and the location of those WTGs, offset to the north-east, when the main association for most of the coastal areas is north across the open expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, not all coastal areas will experience visibility, with some sensitive locations, such as Torrisdale Bay and Tongue Bay, experiencing no visibility. The coastlines of the and the Kyle coast that fall within the NSA boundary are influenced by sparse settlement and cultivation, such that there is a limited sense of remoteness or wildness, and this baseline character will moderate the effects of the Offshore Development. Despite the high sensitivity of this nationally designated area, the low magnitude of change will lead to a <b>not significant</b> effect on this SLQ across all parts of the NSA. The Offshore Development will not redefine the characteristics of this SLQ as experienced in these coastal areas.</p>

### 1.5.4 Cumulative Effects

The cumulative assessment considers the following three scenarios;

- > **Cumulative Scenario 1** assesses the effects of adding the Offshore Development to a cumulative situation comprising all operational, under construction and consented wind farms;
- > **Cumulative Scenario 2** assesses the effects of adding the Offshore Development to a cumulative situation comprising all operational, under construction, consented and application wind farms; and
- > **Cumulative Scenario 3** assesses the effects of adding the Offshore Development to a cumulative situation comprising all operational, under construction, consented, application wind farms and West Orkney Offshore Wind Farm

The plan in Figure 16.16 shows that there are few cumulative developments within close proximity to the Kyle of Tongue NSA, and all operational and proposed developments shown to occur in the landscapes to the east, with the exceptions of the consented Sutherland Space Hub, located to the immediate west, and scoping stage West Orkney Offshore Wind Farm, located to the north.

The cumulative ZTVs in Figures 16.17 to 16.27 illustrate the limited extents to which the operational and proposed developments will be visible from the Kyle of Tongue NSA, especially the northern part where the enclosure of the hills around the Kyle screens visibility of most of the developments. Across the more elevated parts of Ben Hope and Ben Loyal in the southern part of the NSA, visibility is more likely to occur, albeit with most of the developments occurring as distant features.

The cumulative wirelines for Viewpoint 12: Ben Loyal and Viewpoint 13: A Mhoine, presented in Figures 16.42b and 16.43c illustrate the limited influence of the operational and proposed wind farms, largely owing to their distance from the hills in the southern part of the NSA but also the screening effect of the enclosing landform in the northern part.

#### 1.5.4.1 Scenario 1

The potential for a significant cumulative effect to occur in respect of Scenario 1 will be limited by the separation distance between the NSA and the Offshore Development which will weaken its influence on the cumulative situation. The consented developments with potential to contribute to the cumulative context include Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms at a minimum of approximately 14 km and 15 km respectively from the closest NSA boundary. These will form a cluster with operational Strathy North at a minimum of approximately 13 km, although only readily visible from localised parts of the north coast and the elevated east-facing hill sides in the southern part of the NSA. While other consented wind farms, including Limekiln Wind Farm, will

be visible from the elevated parts of the NSA, the greater separation distance combined with their location beyond the Strathy cluster will moderate their additional influence. The other consented development will be the Sutherland Space Hub, located less than 2 km to the west of the closest western NSA boundary. While there are no permanent tall structures propose for this site, the intermittent presence of space rockets and their launch into space will contribute to the cumulative effect.

The addition of the Offshore Development will give rise to a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. In the northern parts of the NSA where there is some patchy visibility of the Offshore Development from a range between approximately 25 and 40 km, the visibility of the operational and consented developments is limited, with small patches of visibility occurring along the coast of Strathy North, Strathy South and Strathy Wood, all occurring to the south-east at a minimum of approximately 13 to 15 km. In the southern part of the NSA where visibility of the Offshore Development occurs at a minimum of approximately 35 to 50 km, its influence on the cumulative context will be especially weak.

The combination of the high sensitivity and the low cumulative magnitude of change will give rise to a **not significant** cumulative effect.

#### 1.5.4.2 Scenario 2

The potential for a significant cumulative effect to occur in respect of Scenario 2 will be limited by the separation distance of the closest application stage wind farms, which are Ackron Resubmission at a minimum of approximately 30 km and Drum Hollistan 2 at a minimum of approximately 32 km, and both of which will be seen set behind the Strathy cluster. This means that the Scenario 2 assessment will effectively be the same as the Scenario 1 assessment, with a **low** cumulative magnitude of change.

The combination of the high sensitivity and the low cumulative magnitude of change will give rise to a **not significant** cumulative effect.

#### 1.5.4.3 Scenario 3

The potential for a significant cumulative effect to occur in respect of Scenario 3 will be limited by the lesser influence that the Offshore Development will have compared to that of the West Orkney Offshore Wind Farm. While this future proposed development will be located a similar minimum distance of approximately 25 km, compared to 23 km, it will have a much more notable influence on the NSA owing to its location across the northern horizon with which the Kyle of Tongue aligns. West Orkney Offshore Wind Farm will have a much larger number of WTGs compared to the seven of the Offshore Development. The addition of the Offshore Development will give rise to a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. It will be seen offset to the north-east and appear much smaller in extents compared to West Orkney Offshore Wind Farm. Its separation distance of 23 km and more will ensure it is seen as a relatively distant feature and occupying only a small proportion of the wider view.

The combination of the high sensitivity and the low cumulative magnitude of change will give rise to a **not significant** cumulative effect.

## 1.6 Step 4: Summary of Effects on the Special Landscape Qualities

The assessment has considered the effect of the Offshore Development on the three of the six SLQs of the Kyle of Tongue NSA that are relevant to this assessment. The finding is that the effects on these SLQs will not be significant. All other SLQs relating to other parts of the NSA and their setting, will not be significantly affected. The Offshore Development lies beyond the NSA, at a distance of over 23 km to the north-east, such that there will be no direct effects on the NSA, only indirect effects associated with its visibility as part of a wide and diverse context. The ZTV in Figure 16.11 illustrates the relatively limited extent of areas with visibility across the wider NSA, which is largely limited to intermittent visibility along coastal areas and across east-facing slopes and parts of the seascape around the coast. The Horizontal Angle ZTV in Figure 16.8 illustrates the small proportion of the full panoramas that the Offshore Development will occupy in views from this area.

Three of the six SLQs will not be affected by the Offshore Development, in most cases owing to the location of the Offshore Development more than 23 km to the north-east of the NSA, especially in the case of those SLQs which are not susceptible to indirect effects. The three remaining SLQs with potential to be affected include an *'an ever-present backdrop of mountains'*, *'scale, from domestic to monumental'*, and *'the rich variety of coastal scenery'*, all of which will be indirectly affected through visibility of the Offshore Development in views within the NSA.

Table 16.2.2 presents the findings of the assessment on these three SLQs, which are that the effects will not be significant on *'an ever-present backdrop of mountains'*, or on *'scale, from domestic to monumental'*, or on *'the rich variety of coastal scenery'*. These findings relate chiefly to a combination of the limited extents of visibility in those part of the NSA where the SLQs are experienced, the separation distances from those areas where visibility will occur and the limited influence that the seven proposed WTGs will have despite their tall vertical size. *'The rich variety of coastal scenery'* is the SLQ with greatest potential to be significantly affected owing to the coastal area being the closest part of the NSA to the Offshore Development, the lack of modern artefacts and contemporary land uses which occur in this area, its largely open and exposed character and its close association with the Atlantic Ocean. The extent and level of these effects will, however, be moderated by the notable separation distance of over 23 km, the intermittent occurrence of visibility along the coastline and the existing human influence of close-range and small-scale coastal developments and farmed land.

While there is potential for cumulative effects to arise through the addition of the Offshore Development, these will not be significant owing principally to the notable separation distance between the Offshore Development and the NSA, as well as the separation between the other cumulative developments and the NSA. This means that the Offshore Development and other developments will have a relatively weak influence on the cumulative situation.

While the Offshore Development will have effects on three of the SLQs of the NSA, the effects will be not significant. The overall effect on the Kyle of Tongue NSA will be not significant as the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the NSA as a whole will not be compromised.

## 1.7 References

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