Buchan Offshore Wind Farm

Non-Technical Summary

QMS Review

Name	Company	Date	Reviewed	Approved
EL	Natural Power	09/06/2025	LJ	SM
RML/CMO/TRY	BOW	04/07/2025	RML/CMO/TRY	DPT

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1 Introduction

1.1 BUCHAN OFFSHORE WIND FARM OVERVIEW

In 2019, the Scottish Government set a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2045 and to meet 50% of Scotland's energy needs from renewable sources by 2030 (Scottish Government, 2019). To help meet this goal, Crown Estate Scotland launched the ScotWind Leasing process in 2020, opening new areas of seabed in Scottish waters for offshore wind energy development.

As part of this, in January 2022, Buchan Offshore Wind Ltd. (hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant') secured the right to develop an offshore wind farm in the NE8 area, located approximately 75 km off the coast of Aberdeenshire, near Fraserburgh (see Figure 1-1). The Proposed Offshore Development comprises the components to generate and transmit electricity generated from the NE8 area site to landfall immediately north of St Fergus.

To support the applications for the required offshore permissions – including a Section 36 consent and Marine Licenses - the Applicant has submitted an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). This report assesses the potential environmental impacts of the development across all phases of its lifetime.

The Proposed Offshore Development is a floating offshore wind farm, which will generate electricity to send to the National Grid. This will involve installing offshore wind turbines and the necessary infrastructure to connect the turbines and the electricity generated by them to shore.

Once the infrastructure reaches the shore, the onshore works will be subject to a separate planning permission application to Aberdeenshire Council. The current offshore application also includes assessment of the area where the infrastructure meets the land. Please refer to **Figure 1-1.** for the location and boundaries of the Proposed Offshore Development.

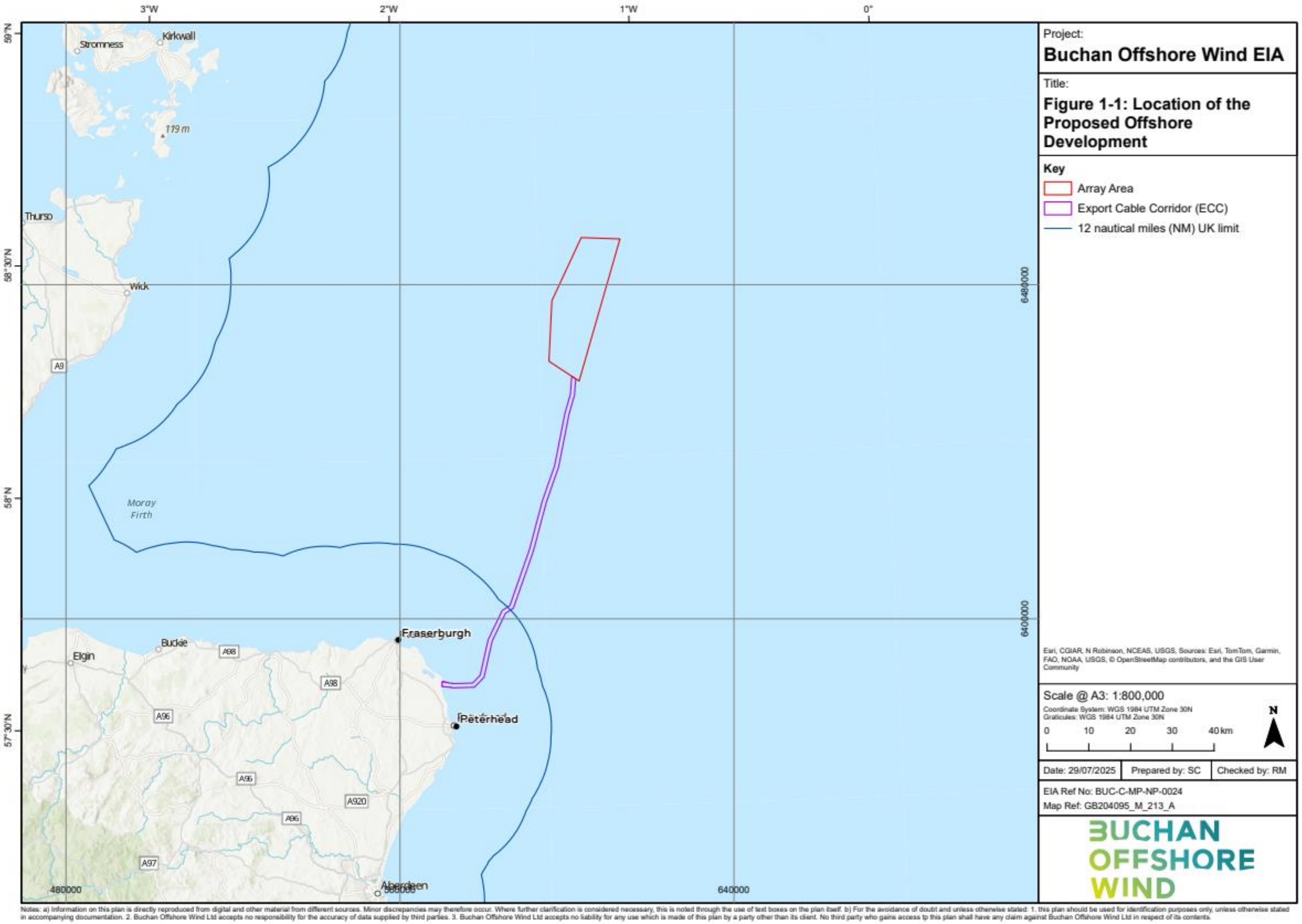

Figure 1-1: Location of the Proposed Offshore Development

1.2 THE APPLICANT

The Applicant is a joint venture which has three equal partners, with highly relevant and complementary capability and expertise: BayWa r.e., a global renewable energy business with UK offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh; BW Ideol, a proven floating technology leader and international floating wind project co-developer; and Elicio, an experienced Belgian offshore wind developer, owner and operator.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

This document provides a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the offshore Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) for the Proposed Offshore Development. While the full EIAR provides detailed environmental information to assess the likely significant effects of the development, the NTS offers a clear and accessible overview of the potential environmental impacts in accessible language, while the full EIAR offers more in-depth technical information.

The offshore EIAR gives a comprehensive assessment of the Proposed Offshore Development and its likely significant environmental effects. It includes technical details to help stakeholders understand the development, outlines the existing environmental conditions based on studies and surveys, and describes the methods used in the assessment. The report also identifies potential direct and cumulative environmental effects, highlights data limitations, and proposes mitigation measures to reduce or offset significant impacts. Additionally, it discusses the reasons for the chosen location and design of the development, as well as any reasonable alternatives considered.

The Proposed Onshore Development associated with this project will be subject to a separate environmental assessment and consent process, managed by Aberdeenshire Council.

The EIAR is organised into three volumes:

- Volume 1 – Offshore EIAR Introductory Chapters
- Volume 2 – Offshore EIAR Technical Assessments
- Volume 3 – Offshore EIAR Technical Appendices

Based on the Scoping Opinion received and discussions with Stakeholders, the EIAR focuses on the following topic areas:

- Chapter 6 - Marine Physical and Coastal Processes
- Chapter 7 - Benthic and Intertidal Ecology

- Chapter 8 - Fish and Shellfish Ecology
- Chapter 9 - Offshore and Intertidal Ornithology
- Chapter 10 - Marine Mammals and Other Megafauna
- Chapter 11 - Commercial Fisheries
- Chapter 12 - Infrastructure and Other Marine Users
- Chapter 13 - Shipping and Navigation
- Chapter 14 - Major Accidents and Disasters
- Chapter 15 - Military and Civil Aviation
- Chapter 16 - Marine Archaeology and Cultural Heritage
- Chapter 17 - Socio-Economics, Tourism and Recreation
- Chapter 18 - Climate Change
- Chapter 19 – Summary of Effects

During the offshore EIA process, the Applicant engaged in extensive consultations with both official stakeholders and the public. This included participating in several in-person and online public consultation events to present information and gather feedback. Full details of the consultation process, including a list of the stakeholders, are provided in **Volume 1, Chapter 5: EIA Methodology** of the offshore EIAR. Details of additional topic-specific consultation can be found in the relevant chapters of the EIAR.

In line with feedback received during the scoping process, the following topics have been scoped out of the offshore EIAR and not assessed further:

- Marine Water and Sediment Quality a WFD Assessment Report has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the water quality legislation);
- Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Offshore Airborne Noise and Vibration; and
- Offshore Air Quality.

Figure 1-2: Example of Floating WTG

2 Legislation and Policy

This section provides a high-level summary of the relevant policies and legislation related to the Proposed Offshore Development. It outlines the key international, UK, and Scottish regulations that guide offshore wind projects and their environmental and operational impacts.

2.1 INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The Paris Agreement

This international treaty aims to limit the increase in global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with an aspirational target of restricting warming to 1.5°C.

The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol, which came into force in 2005, sets internationally binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, with commitments running through 2020. The UK is a signatory to the Protocol, and its obligations were incorporated into domestic law through the Climate Change Act 2008.

COP29-Baku,2024

At COP29, world leaders agreed to increase climate finance to help countries cut emissions and adapt to climate change. A new target of $300 billion per year by 2035 was set. The conference also approved rules for global carbon trading and launched a fund to support countries dealing with the impacts of climate change. These outcomes support the transition to low-carbon energy, including offshore wind projects.

2.2 UK LEGISLATION AND POLICY

The Climate Change Act 2008

The UK is legally committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% from 1990 levels by 2050. Offshore wind development plays a crucial role in achieving these goals.

British Energy Security Strategy

The UK aims to install up to 50 GW of offshore wind energy by 2030, aligning with Scotland's renewable energy targets.

The Energy Acts

These include the Energy Act 2004, Energy Act 2008, Energy Act 2013, and Energy Act 2016, which together provide the framework for developing low-carbon energy, securing energy supply, and ensuring the UK meets its renewable energy goals.

UK Marine Policy Statement

The UK Marine Policy Statement provides the overarching framework for marine planning, ensuring sustainable development and the protection of the marine environment while supporting offshore wind energy growth. The framework is supported by national legislation including:

- The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, and
- The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, as well as
- The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007, which set out environmental impact assessment

requirements for developments in Scotland’s inshore and offshore waters.

UK Offshore Wind Sector Deal

The UK Offshore Wind Sector Deal aims to support the growth of the offshore wind industry, boosting investment, creating jobs, and ensuring the UK remains a global leader in offshore wind energy development.

2.3 SCOTTISH LEGISLATION AND POLICY

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

This law commits Scotland to reaching net zero emissions by 2045.

Scotland’s National Marine Plan 2015

This plan ensures the sustainable development of Scotland’s marine resources, including offshore wind.

The Scottish Energy Strategy 2017

This strategy aims for Scotland to produce 50% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030.

Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Policy Statement 2020

This outlines Scotland’s ambition to grow offshore wind energy to support its net-zero commitment by 2045. Updated drafts of the Offshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS) and Sectoral Marine Plan (SMP) are expected in 2025, which will provide further guidance and refinement on offshore wind development in Scotland’s waters.

Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy 2020

This plan identifies suitable areas for offshore wind development, including deep-water wind technologies.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)
NPF4 sets the long-term spatial strategy for Scotland’s development, emphasizing climate change, renewable energy, and sustainable use of land and marine resources. It supports offshore wind development as part of Scotland’s energy transition.

Regional Marine Plans
These plans provide detailed, area-specific guidance for marine use and environmental protection, complementing the National Marine Plan and supporting sustainable offshore wind development within defined regions.

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP)
The Aberdeenshire LDP guides local land use and development decisions, including the onshore infrastructure associated with offshore wind projects, ensuring alignment with broader environmental and planning policies.

2.4 CONSENTING PROCESS AND ASSOCIATED LEGISLATION

The Proposed Offshore Development requires several consents, licenses, and permissions to proceed. These are necessary to ensure compliance with legal and environmental standards. The key consents include:

Section 36 Consent (Electricity Act 1989)

This consent is required for the construction, installation, operation, and maintenance of offshore wind turbines and related infrastructure. It is granted by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

(BEIS) and ensures that the project will not cause significant harm to the environment, navigation, or other uses of the sea.

Marine Licenses (Marine and Coastal Access Act & Marine (Scotland) Act 2010)

A Marine License is required for any construction and installation activities in the marine environment This includes the placement of structures like wind turbines, cables, and other infrastructure in Scottish waters (Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009). Marine Licenses are issued by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in England and Wales or Marine Scotland in Scotland. The process includes consultation with key stakeholders, environmental assessments and consultation.

2.5 OTHER CONSENTS AND LEGISLATION

Pre-Application Consultation (PAC)

Under the Marine Licensing (Pre-application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, the Applicant has consulted with relevant stakeholders before submitting formal applications. Full details of these consultations can be found in **Volume 1, Chapter 5: EIA Methodology** and the **Pre-Application Consultation Report**.

Habitats and Birds Directives

These EU directives are aimed at protecting important natural habitats, species, and ecosystems along the coast. The UK's National Site Network, which includes Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar sites, ensures that these environmentally sensitive areas are protected from damaging activities.

Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA)

An HRA is required if a project could have a significant impact on European-designated sites, such as SPAs, SACs, and Ramsar sites. This appraisal assesses potential effects on the integrity of these sites and proposes measures to avoid or mitigate impacts. A detailed HRA for the Proposed Offshore Development has been completed, and the findings are included in the offshore EIAR.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

The Proposed Development must assess potential impacts on MPAs, which are designated to protect important marine ecosystems and species. Under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the project must assess whether its activities may affect these areas. The MPA assessment for the Proposed Offshore Development is provided in **Volume 3, Appendix 7.3: Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area Assessment**.

European Protected Species (EPS) Licence

If the project has the potential to disturb protected species such as whales, dolphins, or porpoises, an EPS licence may be required before works can begin. This ensures legal protection for these species under the relevant conservation regulations.

Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive is a European law designed to protect and improve aquatic ecosystems. For the Proposed Offshore Development, this directive applies to activities within coastal waters, extending up to three nautical miles offshore. It ensures that the Proposed Offshore Development will not cause deterioration in water quality or harm aquatic life.

In addition to the above consents, other permits or approvals may be needed depending on specific circumstances, such as those related to health and safety, navigation, or further environmental protections.

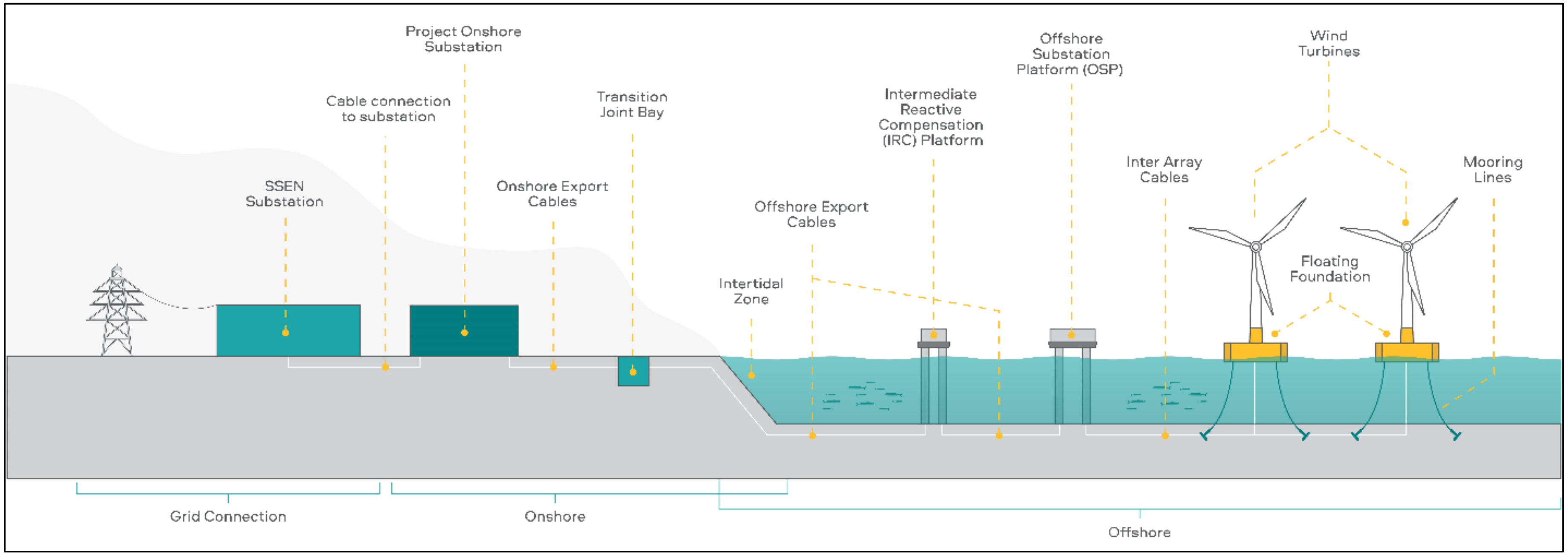

Figure 2-1: How Floating Energy Works

3 Site Selection and Consideration of Alternatives

The site for the Proposed Offshore Development was carefully selected to reduce environmental impacts and potential effects on local communities and industries. The Applicant undertook extensive assessments of multiple locations using national marine planning tools and engaged proactively with stakeholders, including regulators, local communities, fishing interests, and environmental groups—to ensure a well-informed, transparent decision-making process.

Following the award of the 330 km² Option Area, the Applicant refined the development site, known as the Array Area, to balance technical feasibility with environmental and socio-economic considerations. This process evaluated factors such as wind resource, seabed conditions, existing infrastructure, and marine traffic. The full 330 km² was retained to optimise turbine spacing, maximise energy yield, and maintain flexibility for future turbine technology advances, while considering environmental constraints like vessel traffic, ornithology, and fishing activity.

A key design refinement involved selecting floating turbine foundations instead of fixed-bottom structures due to the water depths at the site. Floating technology enables installation in deeper waters—approximately 75 km offshore—where stronger winds improve energy production and reduce visual impact. The Applicant assessed various floating foundation types, ultimately excluding spar and tension leg platforms due to technical and economic challenges in addition to consultation feedback.

The Proposed Offshore Development design also includes the use of HDD for cable installation to reduce disturbance to sensitive seabed habitats and coastal environments. Other mitigation measures, such as increasing turbine blade height, aim to reduce potential impacts on wildlife and vessel navigation.

The EIA has assessed all potential environmental effects based on the proposed infrastructure and activities to ensure impacts remain within acceptable limits. The Applicant continues to engage with stakeholders to refine designs and explore opportunities for co-existence.

Overall, the Proposed Offshore Development supports Scotland's and the UK's climate ambitions by providing an indicative 1 GW of low carbon electricity, contributing to net-zero targets, energy security, and economic growth through job creation and supply chain investment. The Project also advances floating offshore wind technology, positioning Scotland as a leader in this emerging sector.

4 Description of the Proposed Offshore Development

This section provides a description of the Proposed Offshore Development and details on how the wind farm will be constructed, operated, maintained and decommissioned.

The development consists of two main areas: the Array Area (330 km²) and the Export Cable Corridor (ECC) (86.5km²), located off the Aberdeenshire coast. The seabed in the area contains features such as varying water depths and natural elements like sand ripples, boulders, old shipwrecks, and some unexploded items from past military activity (called unexploded ordnance (UXO)). Part of the cable route passes through the Southern Trench MPA, but efforts have been made to reduce interaction with this protected area, with the cable avoiding the Southern Trench itself.

The offshore infrastructure will include up to 70 floating wind turbines (WTGs), each supported by floating foundations and mooring systems. These turbines will be connected to Offshore Substation Platforms (OSPs) through inter-array cables (IACs). Additionally, up to three OSPs, interconnector cables, and export cables will be installed to transmit power to shore.

Site preparation will involve a series of detailed activities including pre-construction surveys to assess seabed conditions, clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO), and removal of boulders and sand waves to ensure safe and effective installation. While the preferred method for cable installation is to bury cables beneath the seabed to provide long-term protection, in certain areas where burial is not feasible due to seabed conditions or obstacles, engineered cable protection measures will be installed to safeguard the cables. This approach balances maximising burial coverage with targeted protection, ensuring reliability and safety throughout the cable route. Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) involve pre-construction surveys, unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance, and seabed clearance for boulders and sand waves, conducted by various vessels. During construction, safety zones will be established, and different installation methods will be used for anchors, mooring lines, export cables, and platforms. Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) will be utillised for the landfall section to reduce onshore disruption, while offshore construction activities may cause temporary disruption to marine users and habitats.

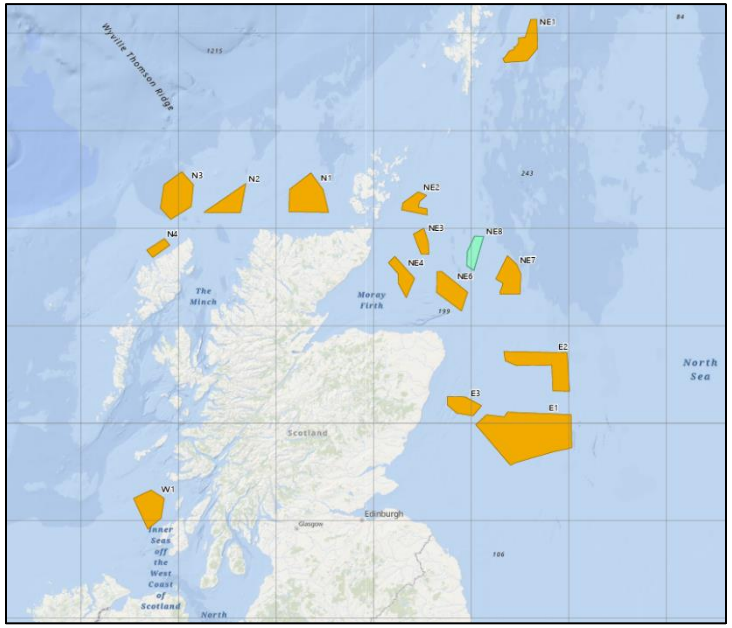

Figure 4-1: SMP Offshore Wind Plan Options

Throughout construction and major maintenance activities, safety zones will be established and a variety of installation techniques will be employed for anchors, mooring lines, export cables, and platforms to align with the site-specific conditions and environmental considerations.

The OSPs will be placed in the Array Area, while the Intermediate Reactive Compensation (IRC) platform will be approximately midway between the OSP(s) and the onshore grid connection point, depending on final project design. Both the OSPs and any IRC platform would be transported from shore, with jacket foundations secured using drilled, driven, or suction piles. Floating wind turbines will be integrated onto floating foundations and towed to the installation site. Commissioning activities are expected to include electrical testing and performance checks.

Various vessels, including multipurpose vessels, tugs, and cable-laying vessels, will be used throughout varying phases of the project lifetime. Helicopters may also be needed for personnel transport. during commissioning.

5 Environmental Impact Assessment Methodology

The EIA for the Proposed Offshore Development looks at potential environmental impacts throughout the entire project lifecycle, from pre-construction to decommissioning. Its purpose is to understand the environment, identify possible impacts, and evaluate their significance, including any cumulative effects with other developments.

The EIA process is based on key principles, such as identifying potential environmental impacts, evaluating their significance, implementing measures to reduce negative effects, and monitoring the impacts to ensure predictions are accurate and adjustments can be made.

The methodology involves several steps: first, establishing the current environmental conditions as a baseline using site-specific surveys, desk-based studies, analysis of scientific data, models and expert judgment to assess impacts; considering a worst-case design scenario to evaluate potential environmental impacts; and assessing the likely significance of effects based on their magnitude and the sensitivity of affected environmental features.

Embedded mitigation means measures built into the project design or commitments made early on to avoid, prevent or reduce and, if possible, offset environmental impacts. These are planned before the application and considered in the baseline assessments. They form part of the project's standard good practice and do not require extra action once agreed.

If significant adverse impacts, i.e. effects likely to cause notable harm exceeding established thresholds, are identified, additional mitigation measures may be proposed. Embedded mitigation aims to avoid or reduce impacts from the outset. Should residual effects remain after embedded mitigation, secondary mitigation measures may be implemented to further reduce impacts.

Tertiary mitigation, which refers to legally or regulatorily required measures applied if secondary mitigation is insufficient, is acknowledged as a possible measure in general. However, the thorough assessment undertaken in this EIA demonstrates that all significant impacts can be effectively managed through embedded and secondary mitigation alone. Therefore, tertiary mitigation is not required for this project.

5.1 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in the EIA process, ensuring that public and stakeholder feedback is accounted for within decision-making and detailed project design. Ongoing consultation helps address environmental, community, and socio-economic concerns.

The consultation followed the Marine Licensing (Pre-application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, encouraging public involvement and keeping authorities informed. Feedback from key stakeholders has directly influenced the proposed offshore development design process to reduce potential impacts where practicably feasible.

Stakeholder engagement includes both communication and consultation, with key objectives being to identify relevant stakeholders, provide information on potential impacts, gather feedback, and account for consultation results. Stakeholder engagement began in 2021 and continued after

the ScotWind bid award in 2022, shaping survey and assessment scopes based on concerns raised. Key stakeholders consulted before

the bid included government agencies, environmental groups, and industry representatives.

A pre-scoping workshop held in May 2023 with key stakeholders allowed for discussion on likely significant effects associated with the Proposed Offshore Development, with feedback incorporated into the scoping process. Regular communication ensured that stakeholders were kept informed about design updates, potential impacts and mitigation measures. Quarterly meetings were also held with NatureScot and Marine Directorate throughout the pre-application phase to ensure the Proposed Offshore Development and associated EIAR was developed taking account of any ongoing updates to policy and guidance.

Public consultation began in November 2023 following submission of the Scoping Report in September 2023, with feedback helping to shape the EIA process. This included consulting through public meetings, and events on the offshore site investigation campaign, the Proposed Offshore Development design scope, and the preferred landfall location. Ongoing consultation has been maintained throughout the consenting process with further events held in Q4 2024 and Q2 2025 as the design of the Proposed Offshore Development evolved.

Engagement with the commercial fishing industry included regular consultation events and the appointment of both Fisheries Liaison Officers and Fisheries Industry Representatives to address concerns and identify potential mitigation strategies.

Figure 5-1: Public Consultation Events

6 Marine and Coastal Physical Processes

The seabed in the Aberdeenshire offshore area is mostly flat, with depths ranging from 0 to 150 metres. Key features include the Southern Trench, Smiler's Hole, and Bosies Bank. The area experiences semi-diurnal tides with a tidal range of approximately three metres, which decreases further offshore. Tidal currents flow along the coastline, with speeds varying due to seabed features and weather. Wind-driven waves offshore are generally one to two metres high but can reach up to 12 metres during storms. In summer, water stratification occurs, affecting marine life and sediment movement. The seabed is mostly sandy or gravelly, with sediment transport mainly driven by tidal currents nearshore.

During construction, activities such as seabed preparation, cable installation, and foundation anchoring will cause short-term, localised increases in suspended sediments. Temporary changes to seabed structure may occur but are expected to recover within weeks to months. Dredging could briefly affect local flow and wave patterns. Impacts on hydrodynamics and sediment movement from foundations and cables are anticipated to be minimal, especially with the use of HDD for cable installation at the landfall location.

In operation, the seabed loss beneath infrastructure such as OSP and IRC foundations and cable protection will affect a small area of approximately 1.3 km², including seabed within the Southern Trench MPA. These impacts on the seabed and MPA are considered to be minimal in light of the area of seabed available. Temporary scouring around infrastructure may alter seabed composition locally but will be short-lived, with natural recovery. Effects on water column stratification at the Buchan Front are expected to be very small due to the distance from the development site.

Decommissioning may cause brief, localised seabed disturbance and increased suspended sediments similar to construction. A monitoring program will track changes in water column properties, such as temperature and salinity, throughout all phases to seek to ensure impacts remain minimal.

Figure 6-1: Flidar supporting data collection to better understand the environment.

7 Benthic and Intertidal Ecology

The coastal waters off the eastern coast of Scotland support a diverse range of subtidal and intertidal benthic habitats. The Proposed Offshore Development site features predominantly sandy and muddy habitats with rocky habitats in the nearshore which support a variety of marine life, including sea pens *Pennatula phosphorea* and burrowing species, ross worm *Sabellaria spinulosa,* and hydroids *Tubularia indivisa*. In the nearshore section of the ECC, areas of low resemblance bedrock, stony, and biogenic reefs exist, as well as aggregates of *Sabellaria spinulosa*, supporting diverse benthic communities and contributing to seabed complexity. The intertidal section of the ECC consists of clean mobile sands with very few fauna present. The seabed across the Proposed Offshore Development Site shows low levels of sediment contamination.

The Southern Trench MPA, designated for burrowed mud habitat, overlaps the southern section of the ECC, with protected species such as ocean quahog and fan mussels present in the surrounding area.

During construction, temporary seabed disturbance will occur from activities such as seabed preparation and cable laying. These impacts, including a brief increase in suspended sediments, are expected to be short-term, with habitats recovering within a few years. The risk of introducing invasive species will be managed through a biosecurity plan and infrastructure will be micro-sited, where practicable, to reduce impacts on any sensitive habitats present.

Operational activities, such as cable repairs, may cause minor, localised disturbances, but recovery is anticipated to be rapid. Some permanent habitat loss will occur where infrastructure occupies the seabed, but this will only impact a small proportion of those habitats, with the offshore structures also creating new habitats, potentially enhancing local biodiversity. Any electromagnetic or thermal effects from subsea cables are considered minimal.

Decommissioning will involve temporary seabed disturbance with natural recovery expected relatively quickly. Habitat loss of any newly created habitat will be minor and there is no significant risk from sediment contamination or introduction of invasive species during this phase.

Overall, the development is expected to cause minimal, localised impacts on benthic and intertidal ecology, with habitats recovering well, supported by appropriate mitigation measures.

Figure 7-1: Intertidal Survey Results

8 Fish and Shellfish Ecology

The waters around the UK, including at the Proposed Offshore Development Site, support over 330 species of fish and shellfish. Key North Sea species present include Atlantic salmon, herring, sandeel, cod, haddock, mackerel, rays, sharks, and commercially valuable shellfish like king scallops and Norway lobsters (*Nephrops*), all of which are vital to the wider food web. The region is also significant for squid, which migrate to the North Sea (including into the Moray Firth) to spawn. The Proposed Offshore Development Site supports commercially important species, including mackerel, herring, haddock, and *Nephrops*. A number of the species assessed are afforded protection under international and national legislation.

The assessment considers both impacts to the fish species themselves, as well as to impacts on key habitats such as those utilised for spawning and nursery areas. Of these, Herring and sandeel are demersal spawners (laying eggs on the seabed) and require specific seabed habitat for spawning. Studies, including surveys of the seabed sediments, have shown that relatively little of the seabed within the Proposed Offshore Development is suitable for Herring, and that although suitable sediment for sandeel does exist, the density of sandeel within the Proposed Offshore Development site is likely to be low.

While the Proposed Offshore Development Site does not overlap with designated conservation areas, several SACs featuring migratory fish (e.g. Atlantic salmon, lamprey, etc) are considered in this assessment, considering their potential migration routes to or from their natal rivers.

The methodology used to assess the potential impacts on fish and shellfish ecology receptors throughout construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning, follows the CIEEM approach recommended for ecological impact assessment of marine and coastal developments (CIEEM, 2022) through a Valued Ecological Receptor (VER) approach.

Appropriate mitigation measures will be in place to reduce the potential impacts on fish and shellfish receptors.

Construction impacts including habitat disturbance, increases in SSC and deposition, and increases in underwater noise are expected to be localised and temporary, with recovery expected in the short term i.e., within two to five years. The operation and maintenance phase is expected to cause minimal, localised disturbance and a relatively small area of important fish habitat loss. Decommissioning impacts are considered to be minimal and less than those predicted for construction with no long-term effects predicted.

No significant cumulative effects are likely to arise when the Proposed Offshore Development is considered with other plans and projects.

Overall, the impact on fish and shellfish receptors from the Proposed Offshore Development is considered minimal, with fish and shellfish receptors recovering well in the short term.

9 Offshore Ornithology

The Proposed Offshore Development is located in a region that supports a range of bird species, many of which are important from both ecological and conservation perspectives. Several species were identified as Important Ornithological Features (IOFs) based on their conservation status, population size and potential interactions with the Proposed Offshore Development. These species were categorised according to their conservation value, ranging from "negligible" to "international" importance. Key seabird species, including kittiwake, puffin and guillemot, are of international importance, utilising the area for foraging during the breeding season. Migratory wildfowl and waders such as pink-footed and barnacle geese were identified as IOFs due to their migration routes intersecting with the area, which may expose them to potential collision risks with offshore infrastructure.

In addition, non-breeding species occurring within the marine environment (such as red-throated diver and Slavonian grebe) may also be vulnerable to impacts during the development process, especially from vessel movements and the installation of offshore infrastructure. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated for these species were carefully considered during the impact assessment to understand any potential risks to bird populations. The seasonal distribution and behaviour of these species, particularly during their breeding and migration seasons, were accounted for in the assessment. For instance, the peak occurrence of kittiwake was observed to take place during the spring migration, while guillemot and puffin occur in greatest abundance during their respective breeding seasons. These species' interactions with prey species (including fish and invertebrates) were also assessed, since disturbance to habitats could result in impacts to the available food sources.

The construction phase of the Proposed Offshore Development is anticipated to cause some disturbance to IOFs, particularly to seabirds that are sensitive to vessel movements. Construction activities such as seabed preparation and vessel movements may temporarily displace birds, although these impacts are expected to be minimal. For example, while some mortality could occur for species like guillemot and razorbill, the impact is expected to be so small that it will not significantly affect their regional populations. Similarly, migratory species are expected to experience limited disturbance due to the minimal overlap between their migration paths and the development area.

During the operational phase, vessel movements and maintenance activities could cause some disturbance to seabird populations, including to kittiwake, guillemot, and puffin, but the overall impacts are expected to be negligible. Similarly, the likelihood of any collision impacts to seabirds and migratory waterbirds has been assessed and it was found that overall impacts would be negligible. The operational phase may also result in minimal habitat loss for prey species, such as fish and benthic organisms, although the large foraging ranges of seabirds are expected to preclude any significant effects. Artificial lighting on offshore wind farm infrastructure could affect nocturnal seabirds like shearwaters and petrels, but the risk of disorientation or collision is considered minimal, due to the distance of nearest colonies from the wind farm.

The potential for seabird displacement due to the presence of offshore infrastructure is considered minimal given their large foraging ranges. Collision risk with turbines and structures is also assessed as low due to species' flight behaviour and timing, with no significant effects expected.

The decommissioning phase of the project is expected to have similar impacts to the construction and operation phases, with disturbances to seabirds anticipated to be temporary and minimal. The potential removal of offshore infrastructure may cause temporary displacement, but no significant long-term effects on bird populations are expected. In some cases, infrastructure may be left in place if removal would cause greater environmental harm, which could further reduce disturbance. Similarly, the removal of infrastructure could affect prey availability for seabirds, but again, these impacts are anticipated to be negligible.

In light of the assessments, no significant impacts on seabird populations are expected during any phase of the proposed development. Mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce the potential for impacts on ornithological receptors and no additional monitoring or mitigation is considered necessary.

The Applicant will, however, engage with relevant stakeholders such as MD-LOT and NatureScot to contribute, where appropriate to targeted and proportionate regional or strategic monitoring initiatives that address knowledge gaps and improve understanding of the environmental effects of offshore wind developments.

Overall, the Proposed Offshore Development alone is not expected to cause significant adverse effects on seabird populations. The impact assessments suggest that the risks to bird species are minimal, and effective mitigation strategies will help ensure that these impacts remain negligible during the construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases.

Figure 9-1: The North East and East Ornithology Group (NEEOG) conducting British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) coastal bird surveys in 2024

Marine Mammals and Other Megafauna

The EIAR assesses the potential for impacts on marine mammals and other megafauna throughout the construction, operation, and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Offshore Development. The goal is to understand how the project might affect these species, particularly concerning increased underwater noise, changes in available habitat and prey availability, secondary entanglement risk, barrier to movement and presence of electromagnetic fields, and to ensure that any effects are reduced through various mitigation strategies.

During construction, activities including pile driving, other construction activities, UXO clearance and use of survey and positioning equipment and vessels will generate underwater noise. This noise could injure auditory systems or disturb marine mammals and other megafauna by causing them to change their behaviour or move away from affected areas. The presence of the WTG mooring lines may increase the risk of secondary entanglement for some species. These impacts will be reduced through activity-specific mitigation measures and careful planning to limit habitat disruption, and overall no likely significant effects are predicted.

In the operational phase, ongoing activities at the Proposed Offshore Development, including operation of the WTGs, maintenance, vessel movements, and the use of survey and positioning equipment, will generate lower levels of underwater noise than construction activities. While these effects are expected to be lesser than during construction, mitigation measures will still be implemented. Additionally, the electromagnetic fields generated by subsea cables may affect species that rely on electrical signals for navigation. These impacts will be reduced through specific mitigation measures. As with the construction phase, no likely significant effects are predicted on marine mammals or other megafauna during the operation of the Proposed Offshore Development.

Decommissioning the project will involve removing the structures and infrastructure of the Proposed Offshore Development. Although the scale of these activities is expected to be much smaller compared to the construction phase, and the duration shorter, mitigation will still be implemented where required and no likely significant effects are predicted.

In summary, the Proposed Offshore Development acknowledges the potential risks it poses to marine mammals and other megafauna. The project will take a precautionary approach, using expert assessment, scientific data, and tailored mitigation strategies to reduce the impact on these species throughout its lifecycle. Nevertheless, following the robust assessment of all impacts, no likely significant effects are predicted to arise from the construction, operation, or decommissioning of the proposed development on marine mammals and other megafauna.

10 Commercial Fisheries

The baseline study of the Proposed Offshore Development highlights key commercial fishing activities, including pelagic fishing for mackerel, demersal trawling and seining for species such as *Nephrops* and whitefish, nearshore potting and trapping for crabs and lobsters, and dredging for scallops. Most fishing activity is conducted by UK vessels, with some non-UK vessels operating to the north and north-east of the Proposed Offshore Development site and with limited potential interaction. Fishing data from 2018 to 2022 shows pelagic fishing dominates the region, especially to the north and west, at a considerable distance from the Array Area. Static gear fisheries, including potting and trapping for crabs and lobsters, are concentrated nearshore. Scallop dredging, where it interacts with the Proposed Offshore Development area, occurs between the 6 and 12 nautical mile limit, however it is recognised that this fishery operates more widely, including offshore of the 12 nautical mile limit.

The potential impacts of the Proposed Offshore Development during construction and operation are considered minor and localised, based on a thorough assessment of fishing patterns, gear types, and vessel activities. Temporary loss or restricted access to fishing grounds during construction may cause displacement of fishing effort; however, these impacts are short-term and mitigated through proactive engagement and communication with fishers, as well as safety protocols to reduce the risk of gear snagging. Increased vessel traffic during these phases may cause manageable disruptions, with mitigation measures such as designated safety zones in place to reduce interference.

During the operation and maintenance phase, the physical presence of turbines, associated moorings and other key components may restrict access to certain fishing grounds. Impacts on pelagic and demersal fisheries or scallop dredging are expected to be minimal, as these activities largely occur outside the immediate area of infrastructure. Displacement of fishing effort may lead to localised cumulative pressures, though the assessment concluded these would not result in significant long-term effects. Communication and ongoing coordination with the fishing community will further mitigate disruption, and the risk of gear snagging remains low due to infrastructure design and marking.

The decommissioning phase is expected to mirror construction in terms of temporary restrictions and minor impacts on most fisheries, with a moderate but temporary effect on crab and lobster potting. Displacement and increased vessel traffic will be managed similarly, with safety measures and communication reducing any risks.

Overall, the assessment concluded that impacts are minor and short-term, with no significant long-term consequences for commercial fisheries. This conclusion is based on detailed spatial and temporal analysis of fishing activity data, stakeholder engagement, and risk mitigation strategies such as the Proposed Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan, designed to balance development with sustainable fishing practices. Further monitoring is not deemed necessary, as ongoing communication and management will ensure any unforeseen issues are addressed promptly.

The Applicant will continue to engage with Government, other developers, and the fishing sector to seek to bring forward a scheme that can deliver beneficial outcomes for all involved.

11 Infrastructure and Other Marine Assets

The Study Area includes several planned and operational offshore wind farms, with five planned projects (Marram Wind, Broadshore, Sinclair, Scaraben, and Salamander) and one operational project (Hywind Scotland Pilot Park). These projects do not overlap with the Proposed Offshore Development Area, and the planned projects are in varying stages of development. Two additional wind farms—Green Volt and Muir Mhór—are located outside the Study Area; however, Green Volt's northern landfall option and Muir Mhór's landfall and part of its cable route lie within the Study Area.

Additionally, the Study Area contains critical subsea infrastructure, including 60 pipelines (including two non-operational pipelines that may be reused for the Acorn Project within the CCUS site) and four subsea cables (one active and three consented). Special care will be taken to reduce interference, particularly with the Captain Gas Export, Ross Gas Export, Sage pipeline and Britannia to St. Fergus lines which directly overlap the Proposed Offshore Development site. Of these, the Proposed Offshore Development crosses two active gas pipelines (Ross Gas Line and the Captain Gas Export Line), which will be carefully managed during design and construction to avoid conflicts. Offshore oil and gas fields, including Blake, Ross, and Captain, are operational in the region, and various exploration licenses have been awarded.

Other marine assets in the Study Area include dredge disposal sites, carbon capture storage sites, and telecommunications infrastructure, with no expected impacts on these activities. There are no aquaculture or nuclear sites, nor are there any planned or operational wave or tidal marine energy sites in the region.

During the construction phase, the potential risks to subsea cables and pipelines, such as temporary obstruction or damage from cable burial or vessel anchoring, are considered minor and not significant. Embedded mitigation measures, including cable crossings at right angles and implementation of exclusion zones, are in place to reduce these risks. While construction may temporarily affect nearby oil and gas operations, these impacts are negligible due to the limited spatial footprint of the works, careful scheduling to avoid peak operational periods, and ongoing communication and coordination with infrastructure operators to manage any potential conflicts promptly.

During the operation and maintenance phase, there are no significant effects expected on subsea cables or pipelines. Any future interactions will be coordinated with operators to avoid impacts. Decommissioning impacts are expected to be minimal.

12 Shipping and Navigation

As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Proposed Offshore Development, potential impacts on shipping and navigation have been carefully considered. These include impacts that might occur during the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of the offshore infrastructure.

Throughout the life of the project, a range of factors, such as the presence of floating turbines, mooring systems, cables, and support vessels, could affect how other vessels use the sea.

Some of the main effects identified include the potential for vessels, especially fishing boats, to snag on underwater cables or mooring systems, and the possibility that commercial ships or ferries might need to slightly change their routes to avoid the Proposed Offshore Development site. There could also be increased risks of vessel collisions or groundings if space at sea becomes more limited, or if vessels are diverted into unfamiliar waters.

In each case, the likely impact has been assessed as small (classified as "Minor" or "Negligible"). This is because the Proposed Offshore Development has been designed to allow enough room for vessels to pass safely, and because recognised safety practices will be followed. The Applicant will continue working with key organisations like ferry operators, marine authorities, and fishermen to reduce any risks.

To ensure safety at sea is maintained, several monitoring measures are planned. These include checks on the seabed to confirm cables remain buried, monitoring of vessel movements around the site, and maintaining navigational aids to help vessels identify the area clearly.

Overall, the effects of the Proposed Offshore Development on shipping and navigation are expected to be small and manageable. By continuing to engage with those who use the sea and by putting in place the right safety measures, the Proposed Offshore Development can proceed without causing major disruption to navigation.

Figure 12-1: The Karelle, used to conduct vessel traffic surveys.

13 Major Accidents and Disasters

The Proposed Offshore Development is situated in an area with a variety of existing marine activities, including commercial fishing, oil and gas infrastructure (pipelines and subsea cables), and both operational and planned offshore wind farms. While the Proposed Offshore Development's Array Area does not overlap with existing oil and gas infrastructure, the Export Cable Corridor does intersect with some existing subsea pipelines. The project will carefully manage these crossings to avoid interference. The site is used by both civil and military aviation, with the nearest civil airport approximately 55 nautical miles away, and the closest military radar station is at RAF Lossiemouth. There are no overlapping military training zones within the site.

A risk assessment was undertaken to evaluate potential hazards related to the Proposed Offshore Development, including risks it may cause, such as vessel collisions, fishing gear entanglement, and marine pollution, as well as risks it could face, including severe weather and accidents. The assessment also considered climate change factors, such as rising temperatures, increased rainfall, and stronger winds expected in the region over coming decades. Certain risks, such as nuclear incidents, were deemed very unlikely given the site's location and the nature of the Proposed Offshore Development.

To mitigate identified risks, a range of measures will be implemented. These include compliance with international safety regulations for all project vessels, establishment of safety zones, and burial of cables where possible to reduce risks to fishing gear, alongside regular communication. Pollution risks will be managed through an Environmental Management Plan and a Marine Pollution Contingency Plan. Emergency response plans will cover fire and other emergency scenarios, while aviation risks will be mitigated through appropriate marking of structures and coordination with authorities as appropriate. The infrastructure is designed to withstand extreme weather, incorporating scour protection and emergency procedures for storms and heavy seas. Regular maintenance and inspections will maintain safety throughout the operational lifetime.

The Proposed Offshore Development is not expected to cause or be subject to significant Major Accidents and Disasters impacts, either alone or in combination with other projects. The risks are considered manageable and kept at an acceptable level.

14 Military and Civil Aviation

The Proposed Offshore Development is located in the outer Moray Firth, approximately 40 nautical miles northeast of Fraserburgh. In aviation terms, the area is relatively uncomplicated, although two helicopter routes (known as Helicopter Main Route Infrastructure, or HMRIs) do pass through the area.

The closest major civil or military airport is Wick, which is far enough away that its operations or flight paths will not be affected by the Proposed Offshore Development. Similarly, most radar and aviation installations, such as weather radar or local airspace restrictions, are outside the Study Area. However, two specific radar systems may be affected: the Allanshill civil radar, and the Ministry of Defence's radar at Remote Radar Head Buchan.

There are no offshore oil and gas platforms close enough to the site to be affected, and although the Proposed Offshore Development lies outside official military low flying zones, military and search-and-rescue helicopters may still operate in the area. To ensure safety, aviation stakeholders are being consulted, and appropriate lighting, markings, and navigational information will be put in place. A coordinated Emergency Response Plan will also be developed.

During construction, wind turbine structures and construction vessels may pose a visibility risk to aircraft flying at low altitudes. However, these risks are considered manageable through advance warning systems like Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs), aviation safety lighting, and consultation with aviation stakeholders (including the MOD). As a result, impacts during the construction phase are considered negligible.

During operation, the movement of turbine blades may interfere with radar signals. This could lead to reduced detection of aircraft by radar systems, particularly for the Allanshill civil radar and the MoD's air defence radar at Buchan. Without mitigation, this impact could be significant, but measures are already being developed to prevent this. These include radar filtering software, the creation of radar zones to mask turbine signals, and the possible introduction of airspace requirements such as transponder zones. The offshore wind industry is working with relevant stakeholders, including through industry groups like the Offshore Wind Industry Council, to develop long-term radar solutions.

Once these mitigation measures are in place, any residual impacts are expected to be negligible and not significant. No additional effects are anticipated during the decommissioning phase beyond those already managed during construction and operation.

Cumulative impacts with other offshore wind farms are not expected because aviation impacts are assessed on a case-by-case basis for each radar system and airspace user. The mitigation for this project is specific and tailored to the receptors involved.

In summary, although there are potential effects on aviation—particularly radar systems and low-flying aircraft—these are well understood and manageable. With the mitigation in place, the project will not result in any significant residual effects on military or civil aviation.

15 Marine Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

Evidence indicates that humans have inhabited the coastal areas of the British Isles for over 15,000 years, with many now-submerged landscapes holding archaeological potential. Within the nearshore landfall area, a notable ancient landscape feature, likely former sand dunes dating back 8,000 to 9,000 years, has been identified, which may contain valuable prehistoric evidence. However, deeper offshore areas of the Proposed Offshore Development Site are generally considered to have low archaeological potential.

Seabed surveys in both the Export Cable Corridor and the Array Area of the Proposed Offshore Development Site identified numerous potential archaeological features. In the ECC, 152 anomalies were recorded, including known wrecks such as the St Fergus, Trinity, and Procyon, alongside a newly discovered wreck which may be the wreck of the Alcora. Similarly, 145 features were found in the Array Area, including several wrecks and magnetic anomalies, some likely associated with historical maritime or wartime activity.

The Study Area also holds potential for undiscovered shipwrecks and aircraft, particularly from the 19th and 20th centuries. A total of 65 recorded losses of vessels and aircraft were identified, mostly dating from this period. At the landfall site, four heritage features were documented: the remains of the Excelsior barque, parts of HMS Erne, and the still-operational Rattray Head lighthouse. Should any military aircraft wreckage be discovered within the Proposed Offshore Development Site, it would be automatically protected under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

During construction, direct impacts to archaeological sites may occur from seabed disturbance associated with cable installation, foundation anchor placement, and other works. Such disturbances can cause permanent damage to archaeological features once impacted. To mitigate this risk, Archaeological Exclusion Zones and avoidance strategies will be employed wherever possible to prevent damage. These measures aim to reduce the significance of impacts to negligible or minor. Indirect impacts, such as changes to sediment transport that might expose or bury heritage features, are expected to be temporary and localised, with no significant environmental consequences.

In the operation and maintenance phase, activities including cable repairs and anchor maintenance could potentially affect archaeological assets, though these impacts are anticipated to be minor. Infrastructure may alter sediment movement patterns, which could have slight effects on preservation; in some cases, increased sediment deposition may improve the protection of vulnerable sites.

In conclusion, the Proposed Offshore Development is expected to have minimal effects on marine archaeology and cultural heritage. With embedded mitigation such as Archaeological Exclusion Zones and protocols for unexpected finds, residual impacts are anticipated to range from negligible to minor. No additional mitigation or monitoring is currently required.

16 Socio-Economics, Tourism and Recreation

The Proposed Offshore Development is expected to deliver socio-economic benefits to Scotland and local communities. Scotland, which accounts for around 30% of the UK offshore wind workforce, stands to gain through increased employment, infrastructure investment, and long-term community growth. Key port areas such as Aberdeen, Dundee, Ardersier, or Buckie are likely to see substantial economic activity linked to the development.

During the construction phase, the Proposed Offshore Development is forecast to generate over 7,000 employment years and contribute more than £500 million in gross value added (GVA) across Scotland. The primary construction port is expected to support over 1,100 jobs at peak activity. This boost in workforce could help reverse local population decline, encouraging young families to settle. However, the influx may place temporary pressure on housing availability, especially short-term accommodation, which could impact tourism in popular areas.

Additional demand on local services, including healthcare, education, and transport, is anticipated. Urban centres are likely better equipped to manage this, whereas rural communities could face challenges. Socio-cultural impacts are expected to be moderate and varied; while some communities may express concern over rapid change, many report improved quality of life and community pride linked to offshore wind projects.

In the operation and maintenance (O&M) phase, the Proposed Offshore Development will support approximately 392 jobs in Scotland, with around £140 million spent annually on O&M activities UK-wide. The majority of benefits will be locally concentrated, particularly around the O&M port when selected. Even modest population increases in rural communities, estimated at about 144 people including families, can be significant. Increased demand for housing, schools, healthcare, and other services will require careful community engagement and planning to ensure local needs are met.

During decommissioning, economic activity will decrease but still provide short-term employment opportunities, equivalent to between 140 and 290 full-time jobs for one year (job years). Regional spending is expected to be around £41 million. Social and housing impacts during this phase are likely to be minimal due to the shorter duration and smaller workforce. Impacts will also depend on which ports are used for decommissioning activities.

In summary, while challenges around housing, service capacity, and community integration particularly in smaller towns, are anticipated, they are outweighed by the long-term socio-economic benefits. With careful planning and active engagement, the Proposed Offshore Development offers an opportunity to bring meaningful positive change to Scotland’s coastal communities and strengthen Scotland’s leadership in renewable energy.

17 Climate Change

The Proposed Offshore Development in Aberdeenshire will generate renewable wind energy, significantly reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over its lifespan. By replacing electricity generated from fossil fuels, the Proposed Offshore Development is expected to avoid 2.7 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions over the project lifespan, supporting the UK's carbon reduction and net-zero targets.

The Proposed Offshore Development Site contains some marine habitats that store carbon, such as seagrass beds and sediments, but their carbon content is relatively low compared to other ecosystems. Construction may cause minor disturbance to these habitats, potentially releasing small amounts of carbon, but mitigation measures including micrositing are planned to reduce impacts.

The Proposed Offshore Development has been designed to withstand climate risks such as rising sea levels and storms. Vulnerability during construction and operation is considered low to medium, with infrastructure built to be resilient to extreme weather events.

Operational emissions are minimal compared to the emissions avoided by generating renewable energy. Routine activities may cause slight disturbances to carbon-storing habitats, but these are not significant.

During decommissioning, emissions from vessel use and infrastructure removal are estimated to be low and could be further reduced by recycling components. Future technological advances may also lower these emissions.

A full lifecycle assessment estimates total emissions at about 1.5 million tonnes CO_2e, with construction responsible for the majority. However, the emissions payback period is just one year, meaning the Proposed Offshore Development quickly offsets its initial carbon footprint. The low carbon intensity of the electricity generated (around 10.5 g CO_2e per kWh) underscores the Proposed Offshore Development's positive climate contribution.

In summary, the Proposed Offshore Development will provide a significant reduction in GHG emissions by replacing fossil fuel power, with minimal and manageable impacts on Blue Carbon habitats and climate resilience. It aligns well with UK carbon reduction goals and supports a sustainable energy future.

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