Barvas Estate Trust

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Marine Directorate
Licensing Operations Team
Scottish Gov
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1May 2026

For the attention of the Scottish Ministers.

Ref: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 – Spiorad na Mara Limited – Spiorad na Mara Wind Farm – Isle of Lewis

Dear Sirs,

Urras Sgire Oighreachd Bharabhais Community Company (hereinafter referred to as "Barvas Estate Trust") is a community company established in April 2016 to buyout the 34,580-acre Barvas Estate land and Fish Hatchery on behalf of the residents of the estate land located on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis.

Barvas Estate is one of the community owned estates that is closest to the above referenced Wind Farm development. The proximity of this development to shore is unique as N4 is the closest lease of all ScotWind marine areas let in 2021 by the Scottish Government, and the closest to shore of any marine wind farm in Europe.

The development will create significant visual impact due to an array of 60 wind turbine generators, 338m in hight above mean sea level and situated only 5km to 13km from the coastline. The consenting application for this wind farm has been fragmented into separate submissions by the developer. The current application relates to the marine elements consisting of the wind turbine generators, potential for an offshore substation platform and subsea cable arrays up to the point of land fall. It is pertinent to consider that a subsequent application will inevitably follow for the onshore transmission infrastructure and a large-scale substation of up to 50,000sqm. This will dominate the landscape of the largest township within the Barvas Estate.

Currently, Barvas Estate land mainly comprises of open moorland, rivers and several crofting townships dotted along the coastline of the estate with unspoilt sea views in an area of the Isle of Lewis that is steeped in a traditional way of life enjoyed by both its residents and many tourists attracted to the area due to its natural beauty, culture including Gaelic language, wildlife, fauna and historic sites of interest.

The Directors of the Barvas Estate Trust have adopted a neutral position on the proposed Wind Farm development and sought the views of our community for direction on any representation for project consenting. As a guide we have reviewed the application for its potential benefit or negative impact on the Barvas Estate reflecting upon the 'purposes' contained in our Articles of Association, these are:

1) *To manage community land and associated assets for the benefit of the Community and public in general.*
2) *To provide, or assist in providing, recreational facilities, and/or organising recreational activities which will be available to members of the Community and public at large with the object of improving the conditions of life of the Community.*
3) *To advance community development, including urban or rural regeneration within the community.*
4) *To advance the education of the Community about its environment, culture, heritage and/or history.*
5) *To advance environmental protection or improvement including preservation, sustainable development and conservation of the natural environment, the maintenance, improvement or provision of environmental amenities for the Community and/or the preservation of buildings or sites of architectural, historic or other importance to the Community.*

Most of the feedback from our community referenced several areas of concern including environmental damage, disruption impacting the welfare of residents, negative impact on tourism, detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of residents, and unprecedented proximity and scale of the marine wind turbines. One response received was in favour of the development caveated that there should be joint ownership with the community for shared commercial benefit as we would have to live with the intrusion during the construction, operating and decommissioning phases of what is a large scale industrial development that would impact the lives of local communities for a minimum of three to four decades. Shared benefit however is evidently not the intent of the developer.

If this development were to proceed Barvas Estate would like to see significant amendments to minimise the impact to an acceptable scale in keeping with the environment and residents' concerns, coupled with a commensurate community compensation package for those communities along the western seaboard of the Isle of Lewis that would be most impacted.

Specific areas of concern raised within the community include:

Lack of Community Engagement

There was no consultation with the communities on the west coast of Lewis prior to the Crown Estate Scotland identifying and leasing of the N4 area for development. The plan was imposed upon residents without consent. Our local council authority (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) has since admitted and apologised that they had misrepresented these communities by stating to the Scottish Government that there was no objection from local communities to the proximity of N4 location and the communities were in favour. This misrepresentation is a significant breach of our communities' rights under existing planning legislation which alone would justify suspension of any consenting until a public enquiry is undertaken.

Scotland's National Marine Plan (NMP) GEN 18 '*Early and effective engagement should be undertaken with the general public and all interested stakeholders to facilitate planning and consenting processes.*'

NMP Para. 4.77 *'Engagement with the public and other stakeholders should be appropriate, proportionate and meaningful. It should be undertaken as early as possible in planning and consenting processes,'*

NPF4 Spatial Principles - Just Transition. *'We will empower people to shape their places.'*

The above opportunities for early engagement were not afforded to our community.

During the consenting phase the developer has held several statutory meetings with the public, however, there has been very minimal adjustments to the original scale of the development to address the concerns voiced from residents' feedback. As such significant concerns remain.

Visual, Sound and Light Pollution

The N4 lease area is unprecedented in the UK both in terms of proximity (5km to 13km) from shore, where most townships and residential settlements are located, but also combined with the large scale (338m above mean sea level) and number of wind turbine generators, these will be the tallest marine wind turbines in UK waters. The visual landscape will be significantly affected.

The developer has presented a matrix to capture the severity of 'impact' and 'effect' for several elements that can impact 'receptors' along the coastline, namely the residents. What is apparent is that this approach conveniently reduces the combined rating from 'Major' to 'Moderate', 'Minor' or 'Negligible'. Despite several 'Major' and 'Moderate' impacts identified in areas of concern these have overall been downgraded by the developer. We question the validity of this approach where the developer's own findings had identified concerns.

The sound pollution during construction over a 5-year period and then operation for 35 years has not been adequately discussed with minimal mention of light flicker effect of blades across all times of the year or light pollution at nighttime. What is evident is that the developer has not fully considered these issues given the unprecedented size, proximity, or final selection of turbine heads prior to seeking consent as there is no offset benchmark data readily available for comparison. We respectfully request that all impacts are fully understood and meet reasonable levels acceptable to the most vulnerable, and all, in our community prior to any consent being considered.

Unfavourable Impact on Health and Wellbeing of Residents

Within the developer's own Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), they have stated that the impact of construction-related or operational visual change may be psychological. Changes to familiar seaward views can reduce visual amenity and the restorative value residents may derive from their surroundings, which in turn may contribute to increased stress, annoyance, and reduced mental wellbeing. In a rural island setting such as the Isle of Lewis, where the coast and open sea views are a defining part of everyday life and are strongly associated with perceived naturalness and remoteness, temporary industrial features (more than 35 years!) may be experienced as a more pronounced intrusion than in more developed settings.

For the most vulnerable members of our community, the impact was initially classified as Major before being subsequently reassessed to Moderate. As above all negative impacts on our communities' residents need to be fully considered with an appropriate level of due diligence and appropriate mitigations applied before any consent can be considered.

Lack of understanding of Cultural Significance

The EIAR makes no reference to our personal, cultural, or historical attachment of the population of Lewis to their landscape and heritage and fails to assess impacts on the living intangible heritage of the Gaelic community. Until a full assessment addressing impacts on Gaelic language and culture, community wellbeing, and Barvas Estate communities' relationship with our coastline is completed and publicly consulted upon, this application cannot lawfully be determined.

NMP Para. 4.20 *'The historic environment includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time,'.*

NPF4 Policy 7 a *'Development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place.'*

Significant Adverse Impacts on Protected Birdlife, Migratory Fish and Habitats

The development occupies primary foraging grounds for the Lewis Peatlands SPA red-throated divers, falls within the foraging range of the St Kilda gannet colony, and crosses a principal UK migratory corridor for protected species, including whooper swan and pink-footed goose. The EIAR fails to adequately assess the threats of collision, displacement, and barrier effects to these declining populations. Thus, consent would breach the **Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994**, the **2018 Offshore Regulations**, the **Marine (Scotland) Act 2010**, and the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**, as the proposal is likely to adversely affect the integrity of the following SPA's: Lewis Peatlands, West Coast of the Outer Hebrides, Seas off St Kilda and St Kilda. There have been no direct studies undertaken on the potential impact to fragile migratory salmon and seatrout stocks that enter fresh waters from the sea into several rivers along the coastline obstructed by N4. Several of these rivers generate income to the community from local and visiting sport anglers.

NPF4 Policy 7 l '*Development proposals affecting a World Heritage Site or its setting will only be supported where their Outstanding Universal Value is protected and preserved*.'

NPF4 Policy 11 e ix Impact on '*biodiversity including impacts on birds'* must be addressed.

Failure to Protect the Integrity and Setting of Scheduled Monuments

The EIAR anticipates significant adverse effects on coastal heritage. It fails to assess the impact on key scheduled monuments such as SM13786. The proposal would harm the Calanais monuments, Arnol Blackhouse and wider historic landscape by introducing an industrial horizon into their natural surroundings, fundamentally undermining the meaning, experience, and interconnected setting of these sites, directly conflicting with **NPF4 Policy 7**. There are many alternative sites for offshore wind development and no reason for over-riding public interest for choosing this site.

NMP Para. 4.22 '*Marine planning should help to ensure that future marine activities and developments can be carried out in a way that respects the marine historic environment and the setting of important coastal heritage assets.'* **Para. 4.23** *'Designated assets should be protected in situ within an appropriate setting'.*

NPF4 Policy 7 h *'Development proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported where:'* **ii '***significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of a scheduled monument are avoided; or* **iii** *exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a scheduled monument and its setting and impacts on the monument or its setting have been minimised.'*

Unassessed Onshore Impacts and Breach of Statutory Rights of Crofters

Granting marine consent whilst the onshore phase of the development has yet to be presented is of concern. Impacts on irreplaceable machair and deep peatland remain unassessed, directly contravenes **NPF4 Policy 3**, which requires biodiversity (including irreplaceable habitats) to be left in a demonstrably better state. In addition, the proposal fails to engage the statutory rights of crofters under the **Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993**.

NMP Para. 4.77 '*There should be a presumption in favour of publicising applications for marine and terrestrial components of a development together during consenting processes*.'

Irreparable Harm to the Tourism Economy and Coastal Character

The Spiorad na Mara development would industrialise the unspoiled coastal scenery and dark skies on the Isle of Lewis, destroying the very qualities that attract many visitors to our community. Residents have consistently warned during consultation that this visual impact would decimate the tourist industry on which so many of our Estate residents and the local community are dependant. Tourism is built on the area's landscape, seascape, heritage, nature, and dark skies. This development risks long-term damage to local businesses and the wider economy, contrary to **NPF4 Policy 30**.

NMP, Para. 12.28 '*An unspoiled environment, high quality landscape and a sense of closeness to nature are important to many people. Scenery and environmental quality are key factors in attracting visitors to Scotland's coasts,*'

Housing Values

During the consultation period, the impact on the market value of houses or desirability for resale was raised by many residents. The marine planning application has not addressed this point. No assurance has been given that there will not be a detrimental effect on housing values or offer of compensation.

The Barvas Trust respectfully request Scottish Ministers give due consideration to the above concerns and observations raised within our community when assessing the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm planning application.

Thank you for your consideration.

For and on behalf of Urras Sgire Oighreachd Bharabhais Community Company.

[Redacted]

Director & Chairman
Barvas Estate Trust

BT

From: radionetworkprotection@bt.com
To: MD Marine Renewables
Cc: radionetworkprotection@bt.com
Subject: FW: WID14280 - reply by 7 May 2026 MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date: 01 April 2026 10:54:10
Attachments: [Redacted]

General

BT Group

OUR REF: WID14280

Thank you for your email.

We have studied this proposal with respect to EMC and related problems to BT point-to-point microwave radio links. We have historically replied to parts of this Offshore wind farm with no objections. If any changes have been made to the locations or heights of any of the onshore structures, please confirm and we will reassess for you.

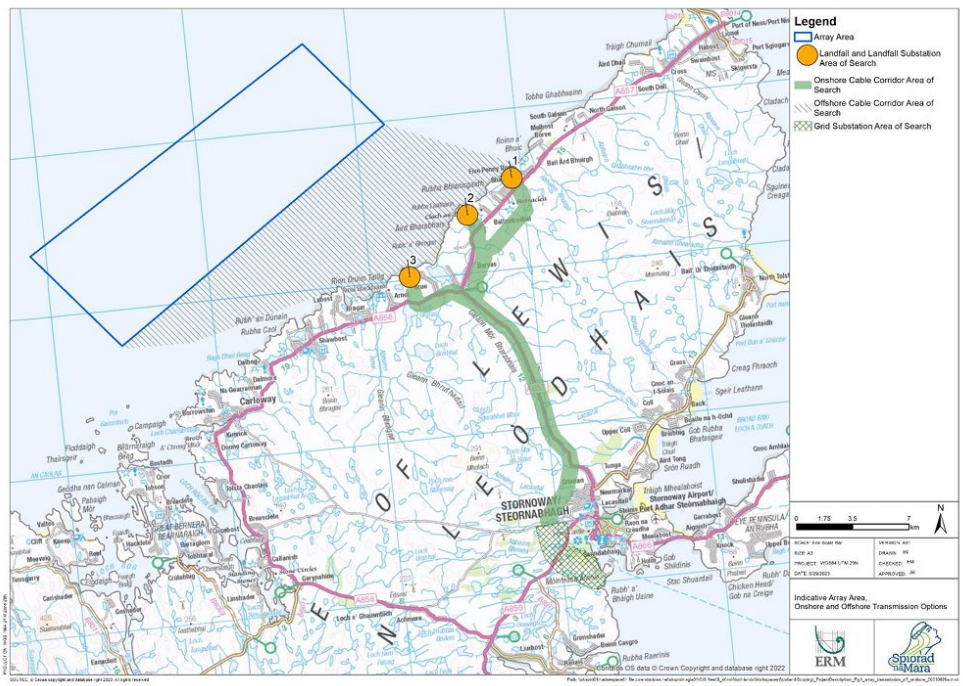
If all remains the same the conclusion is the project indicated should not cause interference to BT's current and presently planned radio network.

BT requires 100m minimum clearance from any structure at height to the radio link path. It should be noted that this decision is for the date of its issue, includes no micro-siting, as the use of the spectrum is dynamic and can change on an ongoing basis. Therefore, please reconsult us if there are any changes during the planning process with heights and locations of any structures, and its finalisation, as we may have new links assigned by Ofcom over its duration.

Please note this refers to BT Radio Links only, you will need to contact other providers separately for information relating to other supplier links / equipment.

Please direct all queries to radionetworkprotection@bt.com

Figure 1.1-1 Project Overview


Legend
Array Area
Landfall and Landfall Substation Area of Search
Onshore Cable Corridor Area of Search
Offshore Cable Corridor Area of Search
Grid Substation Area of Search
Indicative Array Area, Onshore and Offshore Transmission Options
ERM
Spiorad na Mara
1
2
3
Carloway
STORNOWAY
STEORNABHAGH
Tolsta
Ness
Barvas
Port of Ness/Port Nis
Shawbost
Arnol
Bragar
Dell
Crossbost
Lochs
Leurbost
Balallan
Callanish
Breasclete
Garrabost
Aird Uig
Timsgearraidh
Lochmaddy
Tarbert
Lochboisdale
Castlebay
Oban
Fort William
Inverness
Ullapool
Stornoway Airport/ Port Adhar Steornabhaigh
EYE PENINSULA/ AN RUBHA
Sgurr Mor
Beinn Mhor
Clisham
Mealasta
Uisken
Kilpheder
Howmore
Daliburg

[Redacted]

National Radio Planner
Radio & Satellite Platforms
Front door link for New Work Requests https://forms.office.com/e/PY2TfL0FfN?origin=lprLink

[Redacted]
E: [Redacted]



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General

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28 May 2026

Marine Directorate - Licensing Operations Team
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MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

Re: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Section 36 and Marine Licence Application - Letter of Support

CBI Scotland writes in support of the application by Spiorad na Mara Ltd for consent to develop the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm off the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. The CBI represents 850 members who themselves comprise 1,100 separate registered companies and 150,000 trade association members.

Scotland's net zero ambitions are not achievable without large-scale offshore wind development. The ScotWind leasing round identified the Isle of Lewis area as strategically suitable for offshore wind, and Spiorad na Mara represents a serious, well-resourced response to that opportunity. The project would contribute meaningfully to Scotland's target of 11GW of offshore wind by 2030 and its wider commitment to net zero by 2045. Our members across energy, manufacturing, financial services and professional services are making investment decisions today based on whether Scotland can deliver the energy infrastructure that underpins a competitive, low-carbon economy. Projects like this one are part of that case.

The economic benefits to the Western Isles, to Scotland and to the wider UK are also significant. The EIAR documents the project's potential to support employment during both construction and the 35-year operational phase, and the applicant's commitments to local supply chain engagement, skills development and community integration are among the more substantive we have seen from a major developer. The Western Isles faces real demographic and economic pressures: a declining and ageing population, limited employment diversity and constrained public services. Long-term, well-paid employment in the operation and maintenance of a major offshore wind facility could make a genuine difference to those communities.

CBI has consistently called for faster, more certain consenting processes for nationally significant energy infrastructure. Scotland cannot afford to let projects of this scale and importance not progress, we urge Scottish Ministers to continue this application and to grant the necessary consents.

[Redacted]

Head of Policy
CBI Scotland

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

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E-mail planning@cne-siar.gov.uk
Writer [Redacted]
Our Reference MF/AMK
Your Reference
Date 30 June 2026

Scottish Government
Licensing Operations Team
Marine Directorate
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By email to: MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

Dear Sir/Madam

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990

MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010
The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis – 26/00107/CONSG

With reference to the consultation on the above applications and on the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Windfarm Environmental Impact Assessment Report (the EIA Report) received by email dated 16 March 2026, I write to confirm that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar at its meeting on 25 June 2026, resolved to issue the following as its consultation response to the Marine Directorate:

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar having had regard to the examination of 'relevant parts' of the EIA Report and the internal consultation responses and advice received (appended as Consultation Responses – Appendix 8 and 8A):

- *Raises a strong concern about the adequacy of the EIA Report, in relation to the assessment of the significant positive and negative environmental effects of the project as a whole, and specifically in relation to the historic environment, offshore airborne noise, and socio-economic and recreation impacts, including commercial fisheries.*

- *Raises an Objection to all three applications, in relation to the principle of the development of the proposed offshore windfarm at the proposed location and, as a consequence of its location, scale and nature, its likely significant adverse effects on seascape, landscape, and visual amenity, and on the historic environment resources of the planning authority area. These significant adverse effects are such that they are considered to outweigh any positive contribution to renewable energy generation and climate change targets.*

- *Considers that the significance of effect is so great that the proposed development would fail to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989, which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty of the countryside, and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest, and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.*

In arriving at its response, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar focused on matters within its remit and/or area of interest. This included an examination of the following 'relevant parts' of the EIA Report and also the relevant legislative, regulatory and policy contexts.

- Landscape, Seascape, and Visual
- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage
- Offshore Airborne Noise
- Commercial fisheries
- Socio-Economic, Tourism and Recreation

Consideration was also given to the Principle of Development.

The Report to Comhairle dated 25 June 2026 sets out in detail the EIA examination and findings on the matters considered by the Comhairle in arriving at its Consultation response. The Report and its Appendices can be viewed on the Online Planning Portal | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar using the reference: 26/00107. A copy of the Report is attached to this response, for ease of reference.

A summary taken from the Report is provided below:

- Landscape, Seascape, and Visual – the Comhairle's examination largely concurs with the EIAR assessment, in that the predicted significant effects, and the number of landscape, seascape, and visual receptors affected, are across an extensive geographical area and there is overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character, quality, and enjoyment of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.
  - On that basis, it is considered that the proposal is not appropriately located and would not accord with relevant landscape-related planning policies, including NPF4 Policy 4 – Natural Places and Policy 11 - Energy, National Marine Plan Policy GEN7 - Landscape/Seascape, and OHLDP Policy NBH1 – Landscape and EI 8 – Energy and Heat Resources. This in turn supports the View that the development is not appropriately located.
  - Further, the significance of effect is so great that it fails to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989 which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty of the countryside, and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.

- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage – the Comhairle has examined the Cultural Heritage assessment and concludes that the likely effects of the proposal on the setting of terrestrial heritage assets and places are seriously underestimated.
  - The findings of the Comhairle's examination of the EIA Report support the View that the development is not appropriately located. It is considered that the proposed development would cause serious harm to the historic environment and would not accord with National Marine Plan Policy GEN6 – Historic Environment, NPF4 Policy 7 – Historic Assets and Places, OHLDP NBH4 – Built Heritage, NBH5 - Archaeology, and NBH6 – Historic Areas.

    - Further, the significance of effect is so great that it fails to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989 which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.

- Offshore Airborne Noise - given the identified concerns with aspects of the methodology used and lack of clarity regarding the assessment process and findings of significance, it is concluded that the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposed development would comply with the relevant policy requirements of National Marine Plan Policy GEN13 – Noise, NPF4 Policy 23 – Health and safety, and OHLDP Policy PD6 – Compatibility of Neighbouring Uses.

- Commercial Fisheries - the assessment within the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposal would not result in significant adverse effects on commercial fishing and angling, or that such effects would be capable of appropriate and effective mitigation. As a consequence, it is considered that the proposal would not accord with National Marine Plan Policies GEN 1, GEN 4, FISHERIES 1, FISHERIES 2, FISHERIES 3, and WILD FISH 1, and NPF 4 Policy 29 – Rural Development.

- Socio Economics - the assessment has been reviewed by Comhairle Economic Development and is considered broadly to identify the correct impacts; however, it is considered that the methodology used is inconsistent, and in the case of tourism, there is a lack of engagement with the tourism sector, with the data adopted being out of date, which calls into question the reliability of the findings. Assumptions in the EIA regarding what is classified as 'minor' before and after mitigation require further scrutiny and it is noticeable that nearly all effects are ultimately deemed to be 'Not Significant in EIA terms'. Further, the mitigation measures currently identified are deficient in relation to workforce accommodation and traffic and transport and, more generally, not sufficiently specific or robust, which puts the potential benefits to the Western Isles at significant risk.
    - Comhairle Economic Development advise that if the Scottish Ministers are minded to grant consent for the proposal, it is recommended that the socio-economic methodology be independently reviewed, to provide a more comprehensive picture of impacts associated with the totality of the scheme, which can then be disaggregated into offshore and onshore components of the project and conditions are used to secure and strengthen these mitigation measures, including in relation to the provision of a comprehensive Socio-Economic Strategy.

Further, following a review of the above topic chapters of the EIAR, it is considered that the submission does not meet the EIA requirements, principally on account of the EIAR not enabling a systematic assessment of the project as a whole. In addition, in relation to Cultural Heritage, Airborne Noise, Commercial Fisheries and Socio-Economics, as indicated above, the methodology for the assessments and the resultant findings are not considered sufficiently robust to enable confidence in the conclusions reached. Consequently, overall, it is considered that the submitted EIAR fails to identify the significant environmental effects of the project as a whole.

In terms of the Principle of Development the following was considered:

- Principle of Development – the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy identifies 15 Plan Options as the preferred strategic locations for the sustainable development of offshore wind and marine renewables as referenced in the National Marine Plan. The proposed windfarm is located within the site identified as Plan Option N4. However, inclusion as a Plan

Option in the Sectoral Marine Plan does not negate the need to consider whether or not the Project as proposed would be acceptable in its location.

- The ScotWind leasing round far surpassed the Scottish Government's identified maximum potential capacity of 10GW, with some 27.6GW of supply being identified from 20 developments. Consequently, whilst recognising the importance of maximising renewable energy generation, it is considered that this should not be at any cost and, further, that the removal of N4 would not jeopardise the achievement of the energy supply targets in the Sectoral Marine Plan.
- It is concluded that in relation to key considerations, as set out in the assessment, that the significant adverse effects of the proposed development on Landscape, Seascape and Visual and on Cultural Heritage cannot be effectively mitigated, and the resulting harm from these effects alone would be so great that the Principle of Development of an offshore windfarm at this location is not acceptable. Further, the contention that NPF4 has established the principle of development of a windfarm in this location in the marine environment is not accepted.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar requests that Scottish Ministers have regard to its response together with all other material matters in determining the applications by Spiorad na Mara Ltd for Consent under Section 36 of The Electricity Act 1989, and Marine Licences under The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.

We would be obliged if you would acknowledge receipt of this response to the consultation.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted]

Planning Manager (Development Management)
On behalf of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Enc: Appendix 8 and 8A – Consultation Responses
Report to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 25 June 2026

APPENDIX 8

CONSULTATIONS

1.1 Statutory consultations will have been undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Ministers by the Marine Directorate, as the determining authority. The extent of those consultations and the content of the responses received are not routinely made public by the Marine Directorate or shared with the Comhairle.

1.2 To inform the Comhairle's response to the consultation, internal consultations were undertaken with specialist colleagues within the Comhairle and these are reproduced below. In addition, the specialist advice of a Landscape Consultant was obtained, and these comments are included in a separate document as Appendix 8A.

Comhairle Archaeology Service

1.3 The subject of Offshore Archaeology & Cultural Heritage is considered in Chapter 15 Vol 2a and is supported by a number of supplementary annex documents that detail aspects of the study. The report sets out the appropriate policy and guidance in relation to assessment of known archaeological and the potential for unknown archaeological and palaeo-environmental assets & deposits within the proposed Array Area and the Offshore Cable Area of Search (OCAS). It also includes assessment of effects on setting to onshore archaeological assets from the offshore development.

1.4 The potential effects from phases of the development have been separated into construction, operation & maintenance and decommissioning and demonstrate a range of mechanism's that may impact historic environment assets either directly or indirectly.

1.5 The embedded offshore mitigation measures outlined in *Table 15-15,* should ensure that direct impacts on assets or palaeo-landscapes will be mitigated based on Protocol for Archaeological Discoveries and through condition for a program of archaeological works that could include but is not limited to, further survey & reporting, micro siting, recording or sampling. Indirect impacts from development on the setting of monuments is presented in Appendix 15.1 Vol 2c Offshore Cultural Heritage Settings Assessment Vol.2; this identifies a limited number of assets that will be moderately impacted; no mitigation is recommended.

<u>Desk Based Assessment</u>

1.6 The baseline data for the offshore development is presented in the Marine Archaeology Desk Based Assessment (Appendix 15.1 Vol 2c). This comprises of a good overview of the geological and palaeo-landscape history of the Offshore Project Boundary and wider area, covering the glacial, post glacial environment's up to the Holocene epoch. It also summarises the geophysical survey results identifying anomalies that will require consideration in terms of mitigation.

1.7 The desk-based assessment also provides an archaeological and historical overview of the chronological periods of the Outer Hebrides from the first known occupation up until the recent past. However, it is important to note that this study does not reflect the standard required to present a clear and detailed understanding of the archaeology and history of the Outer Hebrides (as far as responsibly possible). Unfortunately, this part of the assessment gives a generic response that fails to draw out important detail regarding Outer Hebridean archaeology & history.

1.8 This is a fundamental error given that the island archipelago, including the Isle of Lewis are at some remove from the mainland. The fact that the marine environment has been an almost constant feature to many aspects of cultural history seems to have been not engaged with fully. It is worth pointing out that prior to the Second World War it was easier travel by boat rather than use the road network, for many parts of the islands.

1.9 While it is accepted that archaeological evidence of engagement with the marine environment is limited for earlier periods of prehistory, it is still clear that the marine environment was exploited and that trade networks existed from the Early Neolithic onwards, not to mention the routes of travel & communications developed from the first populations to arrive in the Outer Hebrides, during the Mesolithic.

Several broad points are worth highlighting

1.10 The overriding trend for settlement in the Outer Hebrides is for multi period reuse of locations over millennia, subsequently early structures and deposits are buried beneath later sites or sand accretion. Most of these sites are located in machair environments for agricultural soils and ease of access to the coast.

1.11 The Iron Age period in the islands in contrast to the mainland persist over a long period (circa 800 BC until the arrival of the Norse). During this period significant changes in history occur, interaction between the Pictish and Dal Riata Kingdom(s) potentially including the establishment of the Gaelic language. The arrival of Christianity through Irish monks following the hermitic tradition of island monasticism, that later led to the more formally established churches and finally the arrival of the Norse circa 9th century. The key point here is that throughout this period the marine environment is intrinsically linked to these changing social and political cultures which are reflected in land based archaeological remains. These comprise notably of multi period settlement remains, broch sites, many located near the coast, early church sites either through structural remains or place name evidence and Norse sites identified through excavation or inferred from burials and chance finds.

1.12 Other observations of note

- (3.1.11.6) Eilean Loch Arnol, the assessment has not identified that the earlier settlement was on the coast, most of which has been eroded away; therefore, it is likely that the dun was equally making statement towards the sea lanes.
- (3.5.2.9) Reference to Bronze Age settlement shift from upland sites (Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre, 2025). Although common is other areas, this is not really seen in the Islands. This seems an unusual source reference
- (3.5.4.4) Indirect evidence would suggest Barvas as the nearest Norse site to the development area, Bosta is the nearest excavated site. Additionally Great Bernera is not a tidal island.
- (3.5.6.3)The subject of the sinking of the HMY Iolaire is referenced to 'The Iolaire Centre', it is questionable that it is appropriate the gather source information for development from a charity that only has an online presence. This seems an unusual source reference
- The DBA has not identified the intrinsically close social & cultural links that many of the communities have with the historic graveyards located along the coast. Some historic graveyards are still in use whereas others have had extensions or been relocated nearby.
- (3.5.6.4) The WW2 infrastructure on the Outer Hebrides was less to do with vulnerability and more associated with the Chain Radar system and support for Atlantic conveys.

Geophysical and Geotechnical Assessment

1.13 The assessment of the Marine Archaeological Study Area (MASA) is presented in Annex 15.1.2 & 15.1.3 Assessment of Geophysical & Hydrographic data and review of Geotechnical data. It comprised of appropriately referenced data on known archaeological assets and the archaeological assessment of geophysical/ geotechnical and hydrographic survey data. However, it is noted that there is a survey data gap of c.2.5km along the eastern nearshore area of the OCAS. The archaeological potential for this area is currently uncertain and therefore potential development impacts have not been assessed, further survey with archaeological assessment of geophysical data will be required for this area. From a number of anomalies identified from the geophysical survey data, five have been assigned archaeological exclusion buffer zones, three of which have been assigned an archaeological potential rating of medium. Assessment of geophysical/ geotechnical data identifies the potential for quaternary palaeoenvironment & archaeological deposits to be present in certain areas. Further archaeological assessment of survey data can provide valuable information on the processes of glacial

history that leads into the climatic amelioration of the Late palaeolithic and Early Holocene periods (*Annex 15.1.2 - Archaeological Assessment of Geophysical and Hydrographic Data, Volume 2c*).

Setting Impacts

1.14 The Offshore Cultural Heritage Setting Assessment is presented in Appendix 15.2 Vol 2c. The setting assessment comprised of 43 designated and 3 undesignated historic environment assets that were considered under the criteria of distance from the development, turbine blades theoretically visible and coastal setting significance. The sites include in the later stage of assessment were supported with theoretical visualisations supported with wirelines and to a lesser extent photomontage.

1.15 It should be noted that the selected assets are intended to be a representative sample of significant archaeological or historical sites along west coast of the Isle of Lewis which has extensive archaeological remains that range from the Neolithic to the 20th century.

1.16 Of the sites selected for further assessment the majority were rated with a low or negligible score for magnitude of change from the development, which equates to either a negligible or minor adverse significance of effect on the asset; both of which are not significant in EIA terms. Two sites, Teampull Eoin and Dun Borve were scored medium for magnitude of change which equates to moderate adverse significance of effect, which are significant in EIA terms.

1.17 This is considered a surprising result considering that the proposed development will be a dominant intrusion into, for what is the most part, a natural landscape/seascape. The Isle of Lewis has had extremely limited industrial development and much of the present landscape relates to low impact crofting activity and is a palimpsest of the past historic environment. Sites such as Cnoc na Moine Cairn, Clach an Trushal and Arnol Blackhouse are good examples where the concept of impacts on setting have not been fully regarded.

1.18 Importantly the reason for this seems to be the lack of detailed understanding of Outer Hebridean archaeology and history presented in the Desk Based Assessment. Both the prehistoric sites are single assets that are part of wider Neolithic ritual landscapes, and it seems implausible that the seascape was not a significant part of physical and spiritual world. With regard to Arnol Blackhouse the views across the landscape reflect the differing cultures that have occupied the land along this western seaboard. The views across this multi period historical landscape are key vistas which are integral to the blackhouses cultural significance.

1.19 Further examples where the importance of the site has not been fully understood are seen Dun Stuigh and St Peters Church, Pabay Mor. The location of both sites is integral to the seascape. The dun clearly projects its prominence over the entrance to the interior of Loch Roag from the open sea, as well likely being a defensive structure as well. While St Peters is likely a medieval structure, it is built into an earlier settlement mound and place name evidence of the island 'Pabbay' strongly suggest an Early Christian origin; potentially founded by Irish missionary's or their followers. The tradition for establishing churches on remote islands was to transpose the teachings of St Anthony in remote desert isolation to that of isolation in the ocean. Here then we see that the view outward across the sea is a key element of the site.

1.20 For the Calanias Ritual landscape area we see ancient monuments interact with historic & modern settlements; however, these all occupy the lower levels. The surrounding ridge line has extremely limited intrusion in terms of a communications mast. The introduction turbine hubs and blades along the ridge would add an aspect of intrusion into this area. Given that Calanais is the main archaeological tourist attraction on the Isle of Lewis and its association with celestial phenomena making it an attraction in the day and at night; there is the potential for attributed value by the public to be impacted. This has not been reflected to any degree in the assessment.

1.21 Other observations of note

- It was noted that no mitigation was proposed for Teampull Eoin or Dun Borve.
- The Archaeology Service does not agree with the justification for excluding Pabbay Beag from further assessment.
- Sites that are low or much diminished are considered in the report to be of a lesser value; this fact should not necessarily detract from its setting.
- As noted above the photomontages for Arnol clearly demonstrate a development dominating the landscape / seascape, this also the case from the viewpoints that represent Reef Beach & from Forsnaval. In the last example the development dominates the cluster of islands in west Loch Roag; let alone the heritage assets that are located on them.

1.22 The Archaeology Service is aware of importance of attaining Net Zero targets and renewable energy development is an essential part of achieving this aim; however it is clear that the limited distance of this development from the coast will negatively impact the general character of the west side Isle of Lewis and the archaeological and cultural heritage assessment report highlights this potential further. The exceptional preservation of the cultural heritage remains that span over at least 6 millennia are linked into the present-day culture of the islands communities and are an important asset in terms of tangible and intangible heritage, cultural engagement, and sense of place.

1.23 The Archaeology Service considers that this development is not appropriately located.

Comhairle Environmental Health Service

1.24 Environmental Health has reviewed the submitted information available to date. This response considers matters within the remit of Environmental Health, namely public health protection, environmental nuisance and amenity considerations. The following observations have been made:

<u>Baseline noise assessment</u>

1.25 While winter baseline noise surveys provide useful contextual data, baseline measurements undertaken solely between mid-December and January are not fully representative of the acoustic environment experienced during extended 24-hour construction operations occurring between April and October. Given the seasonal differences in background noise levels, receptor activity (e.g. windows open, increased outdoor amenity), and atmospheric sound propagation, additional justification, conservative assumptions, or supplementary baseline information would be required to ensure that construction noise impacts are not underestimated.

1.26 It is recommended that the baseline noise survey assessments are repeated to reflect the time of construction operations.

<u>Methodology</u>

1.27 BS 5228-1 is designed for assessing airborne noise from terrestrial construction activities affecting human receptors and is not applicable to airborne noise emissions arising from offshore percussive piling at distances of approximately 6 km. The standard's assumptions regarding source characteristics, propagation environment and receptor context are unlikely to be representative of offshore marine construction.

1.28 It is recommended that a marine-specific assessment approach is used. Such an approach should be based on methodologies and evidence appropriate to offshore environments and should demonstrably reflect the characteristics of offshore piling activities and their potential to affect onshore human receptors.

<u>Construction phase percussive piling noise</u>

1.29 The Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), Chapter 19 (Offshore Airborne Noise), models construction-phase percussive piling noise using variable hammer energy scenarios, with results

presented in Tables 19-23 to 19-27. While the use of variable hammer energy is acknowledged as reflective of offshore construction practice, the role of these assumptions in informing the assessment conclusions is not sufficiently clear for the purposes of informed decision-making.

1.30 Can the Applicant clarify whether the conclusion of "not significant" construction-phase effects in Table 19-27 is robust under continuous 100% hammer energy piling, and confirm whether any reliance is placed on reduced or variable hammer energy as an embedded or secured mitigation measure?

Results in Tables 19-23, 19-24, 19-25 and 19-26

1.31 The information in the four tables is logically structured and systematically organised. However, the results are not clear in practical or assessment terms for several reasons.

1. There is no immediate explanation of significance, as the tables provide numerical results only, without

- A summary of what the numbers mean
- Any indication of whether levels are high, moderate or negligible

2. While noise levels are given, the tables do not clearly state which human receptors or locations each distance corresponds to. Do the distances reflect worst-case receptor locations, vessels, or open sea conditions? There is no direct link between the piling noise levels and specific human health receptor assessments. This makes it difficult to judge the relevance from the tables alone.

3. The tables use A-weighted LAeq,T, but:

- Percussive piling is impulsive and low-frequency-rich
- The tables do not explain:
  - Why A-weighting is appropriate?
  - Whether other metrics (e.g. peak, unweighted, low-frequency consideration) were evaluated elsewhere?

This omission raises questions about completeness.

4. There is no clear "worst-case summary"
Having four separate tables means that the reader must determine for themselves which scenario represents the worst credible case. There is no single headline statement such as "The maximum predicted airborne piling noise level is X dB(A) at Y distance"

Can the applicant provide a summary statement linking predicted noise levels to significance?

Maximum hammer energy per 24 hour period

1.32 The Percussive Piling area is split into three zones to limit the maximum hammer energy (as detailed in Table 19-21) The details of the three zones within the percussive piling area are not set out and there is no description of the spatial extent of each of the Zones, how they are derived (e.g. distance-based, exposure-based or receptor-based)

1.33 Clarification is required how the three zones referenced in Table 19-28 are derived from, or relate to, the Maximum Design Scenario described in Table 19-21, including:

- the spatial definition and extent of each zone;
- the basis for adopting a zonal approach for airborne percussive piling noise; and
- how these zones relate to the predicted noise levels and significance conclusions presented earlier in Chapter 19?

Statement at paragraph 19.8.1.16

1.34 *Following detailed design and availability of construction contractors and equipment, if further mitigation is identified this **will** be explored. Post-consent, the Applicant will engage with MD-LOT and consider additional factors that could benefit NSRs. For example, minimising the overall duration of works is generally advantageous, if higher noise levels can significantly shorten the overall works duration this **would be** considered. It can also be beneficial to schedule quieter working periods to provide respite.*

1.35 This statement does not provide the level of certainty normally required to conclude that major or moderate significant adverse effects on human health will not occur. Reliance on post-consent discussion with MD-LOT is not equivalent to secured mitigation. Can the Applicant clarify how this commitment (19.8.1.16) provides certainty at the point of consent that moderate or major adverse effects on human health will not occur, including:

- whether the assessment conclusions rely on any future, unspecified mitigation to avoid significant airborne noise effects;
- what exposure scenarios would trigger the need for further mitigation to be "explored" post-consent;
- and how public health protection would be assured in advance of, rather than contingent upon, post-consent regulatory discussion?

Tables 19-29 and 19-44

1.36 As currently presented, it is not fully clear that the conclusions in Tables 19-29 and 19-44 are robust under all reasonably foreseeable construction scenarios, nor that potential moderate or major adverse effects on human health can be confidently ruled out at the point of consent. There remains uncertainty around:

- worst-case exposure scenarios;
- reliance on variable or reduced hammer energy;
- the role of zoning in mitigation; and
- the extent to which post-consent measures are relied upon.

1.37 As such, Environmental Health cannot currently be fully confident that moderate or major adverse effects on human health would not occur under all reasonably foreseeable construction scenarios. Accordingly, further clarification is advised before full weight is placed on the stated residual "not significant" conclusions.

Chapter 25, Table 25-14 (Environmental Management and Mitigation)

1.38 The measures in Chapter 25, Table 25-14 (summary of environmental management and mitigation measures relevant to the Proposed Development) do not currently provide sufficient detail or clarity to allow full confidence that the mitigation measures relied upon in the EIAR are clearly defined, secured, and capable of being effectively implemented to protect human health.

1.39 In particular, Environmental Health notes that:

- Table 25-14 relies heavily on cross-references to other chapters or tables within the EIAR, many of which:
  - provide only high-level descriptions,
  - defer detail to post-consent plans or strategies, or
  - indicate that mitigation will be "considered", "explored", or "managed" at a later stage.

- In several instances, it is not clear what specific measures are being committed to, how they will operate in practice, or how their effectiveness has been taken into account in reaching residual effect conclusions elsewhere in the EIAR.

- The cross-referenced material does not consistently provide:
  - defined thresholds or trigger levels,
  - clear implementation mechanisms,
  - or confirmation of how measures would be secured through conditions or licensing requirements.

1.40 As a result, it is difficult for Environmental Health to determine whether the mitigation measures listed in Table 25-14 represent:
- embedded mitigation already accounted for in the assessment, or
- indicative intentions that remain subject to further development post-consent.

1.41 It is recommended that the Applicant be asked to clarify and, where necessary, supplement the information in Chapter 25, Table 25-14, to clearly distinguish between:
- embedded mitigation forming part of the assessment,
- future management measures, and
- mitigation to be secured through consent conditions or licensing.

Request for Re-examination of Operational Infrasound and Low-Frequency Noise

1.42 Environmental Health considers that the scoping-out of operational infrasound and low-frequency noise (LFN), as presented in Table 19-5, should be re-examined. While this approach has been based largely on onshore evidence, the increasing availability of data from operational offshore wind farms, offshore-specific sound propagation conditions, and the scale of modern turbine designs warrant a review of whether the original assumptions remain valid.

1.43 Environmental Health therefore requests that this issue be reassessed at a proportionate screening level, using available offshore operational evidence, to demonstrate whether infrasound and LFN continue to be appropriately controlled. Such a re-examination should clearly explain why these noise components are not expected to give rise to adverse effects on human health, taking into account offshore conditions and receptor distances.

1.44 This clarification would assist in demonstrating that potential human health impacts associated with operational infrasound and low-frequency noise have been fully considered and that the scoping-out position remains robust and justified.

Comhairle Economic Development

1.1 <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

1.45 The Spiorad na Mara Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report includes descriptions of a range of potential socio- economic and socio-cultural impacts from the development. This response provides observations on the EIA from the Comhairle's Economic Development Service.

1.46 It should be noted that the Comhairle does not employ a dedicated economist and has not undertaken technical analysis of the economic impacts assumed within the EIA. The Comhairle recommends that the Marine Directorate consider commissioning an independent economist to interrogate assumed employment and GVA impacts, and to further analyse areas within the methodology and assumptions made.

1.47 The socio-economic assessment has been reviewed, with the main focus being on jobs, GVA and areas where in our view there may be specific economic impact. Observations are only made on socio-cultural impacts and effects where they may link to economic impacts.

1.48 The following chapters and associated appendixes of the Spiorad na Mara Environmental Impact Assessment Report have been considered in particular:
- 6a Socio-economics

- 6b Socio-Economics – Figures
- 6c Appendix 6.1 Social and Economic Baseline
- 6c Appendix 6.2 – Focus Group Summary Report
- 20a Other Sea Users and Recreation
- 23 Combined Effects Assessment, Volume 2a
- 24 Summary of Likely Significant Residual Effects, Volume 2a
- 25 Summary of Offshore Mitigation / Statement of Offshore EIA Commitments, Volume 2a

1.2 METHODOLOGY

1.49 We note that specialist economists and specialist public engagement contractors conducted the assessment, and we do not intend to interrogate the methodology adopted. There do appear to be some fundamental issues that should be highlighted, and we would request that the Marine Directorate seek an independent review of the methodology.

1.50 Primarily, the approach taken of considering the onshore and offshore elements of Spiorad na Mara in totality in some areas, and not in others, is not helpful when seeking to understand impact and mitigation. The socio economic assessment inconsistently treats the offshore project and the onshore transmission works, for example stating:

- Jobs and GVA are assessed for the whole project
- Wider socio economic and socio cultural impacts are assessed for the offshore project only

1.51 The reason given for this approach in terms of jobs and GVA is that:"It has not been possible to disaggregate offshore and onshore spend, and so jobs and GVA have been modelled for the Project as a whole". While this may be an accepted industry approach to quantifying employment for the purposes of a socio-economic assessment, it is difficult to understand why no broad split between onshore and offshore CAPEX could have been assumed. Given that there is an indication elsewhere that 400 jobs are anticipated for the offshore construction phase, it is assumed there must be more detail available on workforce projections, roles and locations, that would have provided greater clarity to areas within the EIA.

1.52 It would have been helpful from the outset for socio-economic impacts to assess:

- Jobs and GVA for the whole project – then disaggregated into onshore and offshore.
- Socio-economic and socio-cultural impacts for the whole project – then disaggregated into onshore and offshore.

1.53 Without this there does appear to be some confusion in the approach of socio-economic and socio-cultural which contribute to a lack of specificity at points in terms of the nature and scale of potential impact and as a result the mitigation required. This is particularly noticeable in discussions around tourism and housing construction workers *required for the Offshore Project who are likely to need temporary accommodation on Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and assesses the impact that this additional demand could have on the availability of accommodation for visitors, and on the availability of transport to the island*.

1.54 While an assessment of the wider socio-economic and socio-cultural effects arising from the Offshore Project in combination with the OTW Project is provided in Section 6.12, this would have been beneficial from the outset and is limited.

1.55 The assessment of potential socio-economic effects of the proposed development has been undertaken in consultation with communities and stakeholders, and with a wide-ranging data collection. A reasonable of data sources are consulted. However, there is more recent data available in relation to the tourism sector (2025 work commissioned by Visit Hebrides) that could have been used. There is also no acknowledgement of the limitation of national data sources such as SIMD in a rural and island context.

1.56 Gaps in data at local level could have been beneficially addressed through commissioning specific and more in-depth pieces of research, particularly in areas such as tourism.

1.57 The assessment provides a wide-ranging and accurate view of the social and economic context in the Western Isles, capturing specific challenges around population, service provision including child, health and social care, housing supply and demand, and so on. There is a substantive amount of historical and contextual information included which detracts from the key information which requires to be reviewed.

1.3 SCOPE

1.58 The assessment of socio-economic impacts appears to be comprehensive in terms of scope. The EIA outlines community and stakeholder consultation undertaken, and advises as to how socio-economic factors highlighted, such as the need to consider transport, impact on property values, impact on sectors such as crofting, fishing and tourism have been considered within the EIA. All socio-economic impacts identified during the scoping have been assessed, including socio-cultural impacts and distributional effects. The assessment was carried out for all stages of the project.

1.59 The assessment considers the following potential effects:

- Change in employment levels;
- Change in GVA levels;
- Change in demand for housing and local services;
- Change in the volume and value of tourism;
- Change in the value of onshore business activity linked to commercial fishing;
- Change in socio-cultural conditions.

1.60 Jobs and GVA have been assessed at the following levels:

- National Study Area - Scotland
- Local Study Area – Western Isles
- Islands Study Area – Lewis and Harris
- Smaller Study Areas – a West Side SSA and Stornoway SSA are both identified for assessment of wider socio-economic and socio-cultural effects. West Side due to turbine visibility and Stornoway due to likely location of incoming workforce.

1.61 The assessment appropriately considers impacts across construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning phases.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON KEY FINDINGS

4.1 General Note

1.62 The matrix at Table 6-11 summarises the methodology for determining the significance of effect, either as: Negligible, Minor, Moderate or Major. The EIA notes (6.5.4.8) that, 'professional judgement is applied, where appropriate, to determine significance of effect'. While we appreciate that value judgements need to be made, this poses the risk of underestimating the significance of effects due to lack of appreciation of the island context. On these grounds even minor and negligible impacts need to be properly considered in terms of mitigation.

1.63 Assumptions in the EIA regarding what is classified as 'minor' before and after mitigation require further scrutiny and it is noticeable that nearly all effects are ultimately deemed to be "Not Significant in EIA terms". Again, on this basis we would suggest independent review of the socio-economic assessment would be beneficial.

4.2 Summary of impacts

1.64 Employment and GVA effects are quantified at national and Western Isles levels only. Jobs and GVA are quantified for the whole project - onshore and offshore.

Construction phase jobs (Western Isles)

1.65 Based on the use of CAPEX for the whole project, the following is estimated in terms of construction phase employment at Western Isles level (Table 6.17):

- 75-80 FTE direct jobs
- 32-34 FTE indirect jobs
- 52-56 FTE
- This equates to 159-171 total FTE per annum over the 5-year construction period.

1.66 The EIA concludes that the overall construction impacts in terms of jobs are 'Not Significant in EIA terms'. The basis for this is the direct jobs created of 75-80. Indirect and induced jobs have not been included in this assessment, which would have taken total FTE per annum to between 159-171. While it is correct that these are for a limited period, these are a significant number of jobs in the local context, albeit they are only over a 5-year period. Independent scrutiny of this assessment is required to identify whether it is reasonable to discount indirect and induced jobs when assessing impact.

1.67 There are significant dependencies associated with the extent to which these numbers can be achieved, and the EIA lacks consideration of how projected job numbers and GVA (and other impacts) might decrease due to these dependencies. For example:

- Achieving of indirect and induced employment impacts is reliant on the extent to which local businesses can secure contracts.
- The EIA assumes impacts in accommodation, catering, etc during the construction phase but it is unclear whether accounts for the extent to which the workforce for the offshore elements will be housed in vessels, or whether it is a formula based on the total project CAPEX.
- With decisions on ports still to be taken, the number of job and GVA impacts could reduce should Stornoway not be selected. Direct, indirect and induced jobs will depend on selection of base ports for vessels and suppliers, and the way these ports are utilised.

1.68 Construction Phase GVA (Western Isles)

- Total GVA (direct, indirect and induced) added to the local economy is estimated to be £13m-£14m per annum in the Western Isles over the 5-year period of the construction phase.
- The overall significance of the effect for the economy of the Western Isles is assessed as 'Not Significant in EIA terms'.
- The basis for this is temporary nature of the GVA generated by the works and, that in the context of the local baseline GVA of £645m per annum, direct GVA of between £6.4m and £6.8m only represents 1%.
- Again, it is felt that independent scrutiny of this assessment is required to identify whether it is reasonable to discount indirect and induced GVA when assessing impact.
- As with employment impacts, the magnitude of the impact depends on the share of local content and the ability of the local supply chain to respond, with the decision on usage of local ports critical to securing local benefit.

1.69 Construction Phase Wider socio-economic impacts (Western Isles)

- The EIA assesses wider socio-economic impacts solely in relation to the construction of the offshore element of the project. A range of sectors are reviewed, including construction, fisheries, and aquaculture in terms of economic impact during this phase, with limited impact foreseen.
- The EIA confirms that an offshore construction workforce of 400 will be accommodated on vessels but indicates there will be some on-island presence, including during crew changes. A key issue

that leads to gaps in the assessment is the lack of clarity on on-island accommodation requirements during the offshore construction phase.

- The overall significance of the effect on the tourism sector in the West Side SSA, Stornoway SSA and in Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh is assessed as 'Minor Adverse' and therefore 'Not Significant'. This assessment is discussed in greater detail below.

1.70 Construction phase Socio-cultural effects (Western Isles)

- Socio-cultural effects are assessed for the Offshore Project only. Explanation as to on-island impact during the offshore construction phase is limited.

1.71 Operation & Maintenance Phase jobs (Western Isles)

- Between 175 and 188 direct FTE jobs per year would be retained in the Western Isles
- This would comprise between 80 and 120 permanent operation and maintenance staff, and routine maintenance staff who would be required temporarily for short periods throughout the operation and maintenance phase.
- As well as direct employment, the operation and maintenance phase of the Project would also support indirect and induced employment in the supply chain as a result of increased spending in the local economy.
- As with employment impacts, the magnitude of the impact depends on the share of local content and the ability of the local supply chain to respond, with the decision on usage of local ports critical to securing local benefit.
- No firm commitment is in place to locating an O&M base or employment in Lewis, there is further a suggestion of remote monitoring which would not necessarily be based on island, and which could reduce local jobs.
- Notes that some operational employment may be taken up by people who require to relocate to Lewis and Harris. This is positive from a population attraction, demographic and growth perspective given the severity of the population challenge in the islands.
- The overall significance of the effect for the Western Isles is assessed as Moderate Beneficial, which is 'Significant in EIA terms.

1.72 Operational and maintenance phase (GVA)

- Operation and maintenance phase of the Project would generate between £330m and £355m in direct GVA within the Western Isles, over the 35 year operational period. This equates to between £9.4m and £10.1m per annum to the Western Isles economy.
- Based on the low magnitude of impact and low sensitivity of the local economy, the overall significance of the effect for the Western Isles is assessed as Minor Beneficial, which is Not Significant in EIA terms.

1.73 O&M Phase Wider socio-economic impacts (Western Isles)

- A range of sectors are reviewed, including construction, fisheries, and aquaculture in terms of economic impact during this phase., with limited impact forecast.

1.74 Tourism Impact

- The EIA notes scope for adverse impacts to the tourism sector relating to impact on accommodation providers and other tourism businesses in the area, and potential for reduced amenity / visitor experience due to the number of significant visitor assets on the West Side of Lewis across heritage, beaches etc.
- Research showing limited impact of offshore wind on tourism in an areas is cited but it is acknowledged this may not be directly comparable to the local context.
- Further scrutiny of the impact on this sector is required within the EIA. The information used is out of date so does not reflect the current size of the sector, which has grown significantly since 2017. Given the significance of the sector locally, specific research relating to potential tourism and visitor impact within the local context would have been beneficial. Regarding data:

- The figures used for assessing the contribution of the sector to the islands date from 2017. A 2025 tourism report is available, provided by Visit Outer Hebrides. The newer report provides 2024 figures and indicates significant growth from the 2017 survey - including approximately 333,500 visitors to the Outer Hebrides, around 57,000 day visitors, estimated visitor spend of £81.5m excluding transport, and £136m including transport costs. It also estimates that tourism now accounts for around 16% of the Outer Hebrides economy, whereas in the 2017 study annual visitors were estimated at 219,000 with tourism contributing an estimated 10-15% to the economy.
- The EIA would also have benefited from using locally collated bed-stock and bed-night data - this is available from Outer Hebrides Tourism. There is an over-reliance at certain points on Scotland level visitor data - for instance 'peak self-catering unit occupancy for Scotland is 58.4%' was a figure used to suggest that there is some capacity within the local tourism accommodation markets to absorb the additional demand.

- While the analysis understandably focuses on the West Side of Lewis, it would be helpful to have considered displacement impacts on other areas / islands, which could in turn add pressure to visitor infrastructure, particularly transport, elsewhere.
- There is also a lack of consideration to the interaction between the development and the tourism sector. For example, scope for timetabling / scheduling crew changes around cruise ship visits, and also a recognition of April-October construction periods coinciding with peak visitor months. Sustained engagement with the sector is required in order to deal with these practical issues.
- The overall significance of the effect in the West Side SSA is assessed as Moderate Adverse, which is Significant in EIA terms. As a result of the scale of impact, the EIA identifies an additional mitigation measure, comment on which is below.

1.75 <u>O&M Socio-cultural effects (Western Isles)</u>

- Socio-cultural effects during the operation and maintenance phase are assessed for the Offshore Project only, as discussed in Section 6.5.3.

1.76 <u>Decommissioning Phase Impacts</u>

- Employment and GVA have not been quantified due to insufficient information, but expected to be 'less than, or comparable to, those created during construction'.
- On this basis limited information on the impact of the decommissioning phase is provided, and is largely viewed in the same lens as the impact during construction phase. It is noted that a Decommissioning Plan would be put in place which should be of sufficient scope to cover all potential impacts during this phase.

<u>Cumulative Effects – onshore and offshore</u>

1.77 Section 6.12 considers the interface with the onshore transmission works but concludes that cumulative effects of both, to the extent that they are known, do not warrant any additional mitigation other than those already proposed. The only proviso is in relation to housing, service provision, infrastructure and ferry services, where it is suggested further examination during the socio-economic chapter of the onshore EIA will explore the need for further mitigation should this be required. We agree that further examination of these areas is required but that this should have been done through an overarching EIA approach from the outset.

1.78 Even at this stage we would highlight that the assessment does not adequately reflect the existing acute housing shortage and high demand for accommodation on Lewis. It is recommended that a Workforce Accommodation Strategy be required as a consent condition.

<u>Cumulative effects – other developments</u>

1.79 Section 6.13 considers cumulative effects with other renewable energy developments. It concludes that it is not expected that the cumulative effects of the Project in combination with the Other Developments identified (in terms of workforce, skills and infrastructure) would be any greater than

those of the Project alone. However, it acknowledged that there are limitations in the data available at this stage. From the Comhairle perspective, the concurrent nature of various developments does pose a cumulative risk to local services and infrastructure and needs to be given greater consideration. We note and agree that collaboration and communication is ongoing between Northland Power and other developers but we would like to see a firmer commitment to ongoing collaboration articulated, particularly where there are practical opportunities and commitments that may emerge.

5. MITIGATION MEASURES

1.80 Table 6.27 provides a summary assessment of residual effects (i.e. after mitigation measures are applied). It is noticeable that all areas are deemed to be 'not significant' in terms of impact other than labour market impacts during the O&M phase, which are assessed as 'Moderate beneficial (significant)"

1.81 Realisation of benefits and reduction of adverse effect will depend on delivery of mitigation measures. While a range of embedded mitigation measures are identified, these tend to be high level and lack firm, measurable commitments. Limited detail on targets, timescales or monitoring means the effectiveness of these mitigations is uncertain.

1.82 Embedded mitigation measures relating to socio-economic impacts can be secured through a condition of the Section 36/ and or Marine Licence. Comments below relate to Marine Directorate may wish to propose how mitigation measures M042, 48, 49 and AA04 can be strengthened. All of these relate to the onshore and offshore elements of the project.

- Chapter 24 (Volume 2a) provides a summary of Likely Significant Residual Effects. Specifically, 24.2 and table 24.1 summarises residual effects for socioeconomics
- Chapter 25 (Volume 2a) provides a summary of Offshore Mitigation / Statement of Offshore EIA Commitments, with Table 25.1 summarising commitments and mitigation measures for socio-economics.

ID	Commitment	Review Comment
M042	Project to work with key stakeholders and service providers to understand pressure points on existing services and on storage / port facilities on Lewis, and charter vessels and/or flights to transport crew and materials where required to avoid creating excess pressure, and potentially provide additional capacity. Large construction components to be transported by specialist vessels via private charter. The Project will engage with other developers on opportunities to collaborate on transport services and storage facilities, including through the Renewable Energy Major Developments Forum.	Commitment to a transport and traffic management plan, covering internal and external transport links during all phases of the project, is required at this stage. This should be integrated into an overall Traffic Management Plan for the offshore and onshore elements of the project, and approved by Transport Scotland and by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.
M048	The Project is committed to maximising opportunities for local businesses to compete for contracts on the Project, and will continue to support the development of the local supply chain to develop the skills and capacity needed to construct and operate the Project. In advance of construction, the Project will: • engage with local suppliers to understand local capabilities;	Local Procurement Protocol to be developed in consultation with HIE and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and included within a wider Socio-Economic Strategy for the Development. This should include specific targets and associated actions (including % of project spend locally) detailing how the Developer will support local supply chain engagement and development, including through progressive

ID	Commitment	Review Comment
	• make suppliers aware of opportunities associated with the construction of the Onshore Project, when these will arise, and what the requirements are likely to be; • develop tender criteria to promote local content and the use of local contractors and suppliers in onshore construction works.	procurement policies, in order to retain spend locally during the Development.
M049	The Project is committed to maximising opportunities for local people to apply for jobs created by the Project, and will continue to work with the supply chain and other local stakeholders to develop the workforce skills required for the construction and operation of the Project. In advance of construction, the Project will support skills development initiatives, and will work with stakeholders and other agencies such as HIE on wider skills development initiatives. The Project will also develop tender criteria to promote local skills and employment.	Actions and targets to build capacity within the local workforce, including training, programmes, apprenticeships and partnerships with UHI and other local partners, in order to maximise local employment secured through the Development should be included in a Socio-Economic strategy for the Development. This should include specific targets around apprenticeship numbers and quantify financial commitments.
AA04	The Project has already engaged with Outer Hebrides Tourism (also known as Visit Outer Hebrides), and is committed to developing a Tourism Support Strategy, through which it can – in consultation with Outer Hebrides Tourism and other relevant stakeholders – support existing tourism initiatives and, where appropriate, collaborate to explore new opportunities for tourism on the islands, in particular in the area of ecotourism associated with renewable energy. Other specific initiatives the Project will include in such a strategy include: • consultation with local organisations to discuss opportunities to enhance the Multiuse Pathway along Barvas Moor Road that will be delivered as part of the Onshore Project; • opportunities to incorporate learning and visitor opportunities into the Operations and Maintenance Base; Project Phase Measure Introduced Securing Mechanism • potential for information stops along the west coast of Lewis to showcase the area's cultural heritage and biodiversity, subject to consultation with CnES and further planning approval if required.	While the principle of a Tourism Support Strategy is sound, it is not believed the specific initiatives proposed reflect sectoral and business engagement, or are in their nature proportionate to mitigation of impact. This mitigation could be strengthened through stronger commitment on industry involvement in approval of the Tourism Support Strategy, and an indication of the quantifiable resources that would be allocated to the Tourism Support Strategy. The Outer Hebrides Tourism Leadership Group should play a key role in the process of development and approval of the strategy.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS (SOCIO ECONOMIC)

1.83 The assessment broadly identifies the correct impacts, although there is a risk that effects (both beneficial and adverse) are being under-estimated.

1.84 From the economic development perspective, the mitigation measures lack the level of specificity required to provide confidence that beneficial effects will be realised locally. Without binding commitments on workforce development and location of O&M jobs, local supply chain content and utilisation of local ports during all phases of the project. The potential economic benefits for the Western Isles remain aspirational, have significant dependencies, and are at risk of not being secured.

1.85 The Comhairle strongly recommends that the Marine Directorate seek to reduce this risk through conditions associated with the Section 36 consent and/or Marine Licence. In particular, consideration should be given to how mitigation measures M042, 48, 49 and AA04 can be strengthened.

1.86 In addition, it is recommended that additional mitigation measures are required now, rather than being left to the onshore application:

- Workforce Accommodation Strategy
- Transport and Traffic Management Plan

1.87 Our recommendation is that the following be requested through this process:

1.88 The Developer must provide a comprehensive Socio-Economic Strategy, underpinned by the principles of Community Wealth Building, in consultation with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and to be agreed with the Comhairle. This will detail:

1. Actions and targets to build capacity within the local workforce, including training programmes, apprenticeships and partnerships with UHI and other local partners, in order to maximise local employment secured through the Development.
2. Local Procurement Protocol - Actions and targets to support local supply chain engagement and development, including through progressive procurement policies, in order to retain spend locally during the Development.
3. How Northland Power will work with its Tier 1 and Tier 2 contractors in respect of (1) and (2)
4. Proposals for local Community Benefit funding, and the community and stakeholder engagement proposals in the development and governance of community benefit funding.
5. Workforce Accommodation Strategy, which looks at opportunities for positive legacy benefits to arise.
6. Tourism Support Strategy
7. Arrangements for monitoring and reporting the implementation of the Socio-Economic Strategy.

1.89 A Transport and Traffic Management Plan is also required.

1.90 Once agreed, the development shall be carried out in line with the Socio- Economic Strategy.

7 CONCLUSION (SOCIO ECONOMIC)

1.91 It is recommended that the methodology be reviewed to provide a more comprehensive picture of impacts associated with the totality of the scheme, which can then be disaggregated into offshore and onshore components of the project.

1.92 Spiorad na Mara has the potential to deliver socio economic benefit to the Western Isles, particularly during the O&M phase. However, this, along with mitigation of adverse impact to tourism, construction and other key existing sectors, will only be realised if clear, enforceable and SMART commitments are secured through consent.

1.93 The Comhairle therefore urges the Scottish Government to use all available levers to strengthen mitigation and community benefit arrangements to reflect the scale and significance of the development. In this, we would seek that the developer ensure that the commitments made are

delivered in collaboration with the Comhairle and other stakeholders and in a meaningful and effective way.

Comhairle Economic Development – Primary Industries
Environmental Impact Assessment Report:
Chapter 25: Summary of Offshore Mitigation / Statement of Offshore EIA Commitments, Volume 2a

1.94 A003- Disruption Agreements will be implemented to coordinate and agree appropriate co-operation and establish evidence-based disruption payments to fishermen, where identified as significant within the EIA. This is for during the pre-construction, construction, and decommissioning stages.

1.95 This measure is secured in Section 36 Consent and/or Marine Licence via the condition for an FMMCP to be submitted to MD-LOT for approval. Spiorad na Mara EIA Chapter 25: Summary of Offshore Mitigation/Statement of Offshore EIA Commitments, Volume 2a.

1.96 Relevance to commercial fisheries assessment states "Provides a fair and transparent mechanism to compensate fishers for demonstrable and evidence-based disruption, supporting socio economic resilience and minimises conflict."

1.97 *Comment- It has not been possible to judge the effectiveness of the mitigation here as more details are required. Specifically, what would the agreed "appropriate co-operation" be. In a previous meeting held in Stornoway to discuss the development and the effects on commercial fishing a number of suggestions were made to mitigate against the negative effects from the development and support the local fishing industry.*

1.98 *These were;*

- *Creation of a lobster hatchery and stock enhancement.*
- *Support for the local community quota scheme – to enable diversification into other fisheries, ensuring benefits remain with local fishers.*
- *Diversification examples including reseeding scallops in Loch Roag and fishing using disco-scallop pots.*
- *Local port development – proposals to consider expanding Carloway pier for the operation and maintenance period to maximise local benefits, rather than relying solely on Stornoway.*
- *Research and training – support for marine research, monitoring, and college training initiatives (e.g., OFLO courses, STEM scholarships).*
- *Scallop hatchery proposals – to restock local grounds including loch Roag.*
- *Fisheries Fund – the existing council fund for new entrants could be bolstered by developer contributions and additional services could be offered such as funding for support vessels required by the development.*

1.99 *Had these measures been detailed as options to mitigate against the disruption it would then be clear what could be specifically done to mitigate against the effects and therefore judge the effectiveness of the mitigation. However, without specifics, it is not possible to determine if these mitigations will indeed reduce the impact. This is also true for the RAG tables and although some mitigations will be useful in reducing impact, it cannot be fully determined as effective without precise and explicit detail.*

1.100 *The stating of compensation to fishers for demonstratable evidence – based disruption again remains too vague to determine its success but on the face of it does not go far enough to mitigate the loss. There will be loss of habitat for the stocks which breed here and with such a large area in question that will no doubt have a huge effect on the remaining stock levels out with the development area. With specified stocking, hatchery, and diversification programs this could clearly and definitively be mitigated against.*

1.101 *There is also the possibility that despite the best intentions the development creates problems that the modelling did not predict and the actual effects from the development are worse than predicted.*

Adopting the above measures could help to mitigate against these by assisting in areas out with the development to ensure the local fleet does remain economically resilient.

1.102 *Investment in the local pier and harbour infrastructure would also support economic resilience within the industry and help reduce conflict during all phases of development. It would be greatly beneficial to create a new pier in the Northwest area at the northern end of the development as the developments closest two piers will be Carloway and the Port of Ness which are both well used facilities with little space to manage additional traffic. A pier created between these two facilities would also assist the local fleet and allow smaller vessels access to areas that would not usually be available to them with safe havens so much further away. Infrastructure such as this would have many benefits for years to come and would be welcomed widely over short-term compensation for loss of landings.*

1.103 *The penalization of vessels that enter the closed areas has been stated as a fine of £50,000. With such a hefty fine for entering the closed areas and the way the development is constructed there will be large areas that will attract such a fine in multiple locations across the area. Therefore, it is unlikely that many would take the chance to fish in the development area with such a considerable risk for little reward and therefore it is unlikely that the area will be fished again. This is a huge area of inshore fishing grounds to be lost to fishing and therefore the issues around displacement and increased effort in other areas will become more problematic.*

1.104 *Another issue with compensation of fishers for demonstrable and evidence-based disruption is that it does not address the loss to the supply chain of the catch that would be landed to the fish buyers and the local processors and the added value of these landings to the local economy. These losses cannot be easily mitigated for by compensating the fisherman for the loss of landings, therefore more needs to be done to assist the industry to mitigate for the effects to the local commercial fishing industry and its supply chains.*

<u>Environmental Impact Assessment Report Chapter 24:
Summary of Likely Significant Residual Effects, Volume 2a
24.8 CHAPTER 12: FISH ECOLOGY Table 24.7: Summary of assessment of residual effects for Fish Ecology</u>

1.105 When reviewing the Underwater noise and vibration activity and impact section, the temporary stress shift (TSS) effects on Atlantic salmon have been deemed to be affected in a Moderate (Potentially Significant) way. Further environmental mitigation is added (A006)- which states; *The Underwater Noise Piling Strategy will be developed to incorporate the percussive piling installation sequencing and periods of continuous quiet time as outlined in Appendix 12.3: Overview of Percussive Piling Fish Ecology Mitigation, Volume 2c.* This then reduces the effect to -Minor (Not Significant).

1.106 *We do not believe that this environmental mitigation will bring this effect to not significant. This along with other factors mentioned in the EIA can be detrimental to Salmon and seatrout navigating back to their respective rivers and lochs to spawn. With such a huge strain on wild salmon and sea trout, more need to be done to mitigate the negative effects of the development on these species. It is suggested that the developer works closely with local estates and custodians of the rivers where these fish are migrating to and ensure that the negative effects would be fully mitigated against. This could be done very simply with assistance to add fish counters, implement a hatchery program to support these systems to remain healthy and stocked further mitigating against the possible negative effects of the development.*

<u>Chapter 21- Commercial Fisheries – Figures</u>

1.107 It is important to note that, like the use of ICES blocks that do not show an entirely accurate picture, that the use of AIS (Automatic Identification System) cannot be fully relied upon. The reason for this is that most vessels have their AIS switched off so others cannot see where they are fishing. Therefore, when using AIS tracking to evidence fishing activity in an area it will not give an accurate picture. Evidenced at Figure 21-6 Mapping of inshore fishing grounds with the amended static fishing gear area

extended to cover all the cable corridor and the wider array area. Also, large areas on either side of the development are now understood to be important static gear areas to our local fleet. Under 10m vessels also do not have a requirement to have the tracking switched on which may change in the future however this highlights the importance of local consultation and not relying on data provided through tracking. This is also the case with landing data as it can easily be distorted from representing the actual data of what is being caught and where.

1.108 The minute of the meeting held in Stornoway discussing the development and commercial fisheries, on the fourth of September 2025 is included below for reference.

Meeting Minutes
Commercial Fisheries Consultation – Spiorad na Mara
Date: 4 September 2025
Location: Stornoway Business Hub

Attendees:

[Redacted]	Fisherman, and Vessel Owner
[Redacted]	Fisherman, and Vessel Owner
[Redacted]	Economic Development Officer, Western Isles Council
[Redacted]	Fisherman, and Vessel Owner
[Redacted]	, Fishing Industry Representative (FIR)
[Redacted]	Western Isles Fishermen's Association
[Redacted]	Outer Hebrides Regional Inshore Fisheries Group
[Redacted]	Spiorad na Mara Community Liaison Officer
[Redacted]	Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO)
[Redacted]	Commercial Fisheries EIA Consultant

1. <u>Project overview and update</u>
   - [R presented project slides providing an update on Spiorad na Mara.
   - The project is located 5–13km off the west coast of Lewis, with a potential capacity of ~900MW, enough to power 1.2 million Scottish homes, and reduce CO_2 emissions by 1.7 million tonnes annually
   - Timeline milestones were reviewed: construction targeted for 2028 with operations commencing by 2031, for an anticipated 35-year operating life
   - Updates since PC1:
     - Offshore array reduced in size with maximum 60 turbines (down from 65).
       Landfall confirmed north-east of Barvas, cable search area reduced, and Stornoway identified as the preferred O&M base.
     - Offshore cable installation may involve up to 12 array cables routed either directly to shore or via an offshore substation. Where burial is not possible, cable protection (rock placement, concrete mattresses) will be used.
   - [raised concerns about cable protection and the need to safeguard fishing gear. It was noted that a gear snagging protocol would allow fishers to leave gear and claim expenses.
   - [R confirmed one geophysical bathymetric survey had been undertaken to date.
   - [R asked about heat emissions from cables and potential attraction of species such as scallops. [R confirmed this will be considered in the fish, shellfish, and benthic ecology impact assessments.
   - Discussions covered turbine layout spacing (minimum 900m) and whether fishers would operate gear in the array area. Consensus was that fishing will continue within the array, post-construction.
   - Concern was expressed over the ambitious 2030 construction start and potential access restrictions during works.

2. Commercial fisheries overview

[R presented fisheries baseline slides.

- Local landings (ICES rectangle 45E3) are valued at ~£4 million annually. Lobster is the primary species targeted across the project area, while nephrops (caught east of Lewis), scallops, and razor clams are not significant within the site.

Fishers confirmed:

- Lobster is the key target species and particularly important across the project, brown crab was historically more important, though catches have declined.
- Tangle netting for turbot, monkfish, and skate occurs from ~5–6nm outward. Crawfish only occur in shallow waters. Monofilament nets remain prohibited inside 6nm.
- Seasonal patterns:
  - Potting effort around the Butt of Lewis occurs year-round, whereas along the west coast fishing is typically April–September, with a seasonal closure from 1 Oct.
  - Seasonal closure at the Flannan Isles opens 1 April and closes 1 Oct.
- Recently, >14m vessels are excluded inside 6nm, opening inshore grounds to smaller vessels.
- Netting grounds exist within the southwest portion of the cable search area, particularly May–August.

[R presented the inshore fishing grounds map which shows key grounds based on AIS and plotter data. The fishers agreed that this map under-represents the activity, and that the areas throughout the export cable area of search should be green and is prime lobster ground. The areas inshore from the array area should also be green, including immediately north of Loch Roag, with no navigational channels in place to restrict fishing.

[raised concerns about heavy metal contamination from turbines affecting shellfish quality. [R confirmed this issue would be fed back to project ecologists.

3. Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan (FMMCP)

The group discussed potential mitigation and support measures:

- Lobster hatchery and stock enhancement – supported in principle.
- Community quota schemes – to enable diversification into quota whitefish fisheries, ensuring benefits remain with local fishers.
- Diversification examples: reseeding scallops in Loch Roag and fishing using disco-scallop pots [Red .
- Local port development – proposals to consider expanding Carloway pier for O&M to maximise local benefits, rather than relying solely on Stornoway. This was compared with aquaculture, where mainland processing limited local benefits.
- Research and training – support for marine research, monitoring, and college training initiatives (e.g., OFLO courses, STEM scholarships).
- Scallop hatchery proposals – to restock local grounds such as Loch Roag.
- Fisheries Fund – [Re highlighted an existing council fund for new entrants, which could be bolstered by developer contributions.
- Community quota – consensus support for buying licences to lease to new entrants. Requests were made for significant quota allocations (e.g., 1,000 tonnes of mackerel).

Operations within the array: [confirmed COLREGS apply, and fishing near turbines would be permitted but not within 50m. Safety zones of 500m apply during construction, with penalties up to £50k for breaches.

Monitoring: [R noted monitoring of fisheries activity will feed back into the FMMCP through a Commercial Fisheries Working Group. [Re[confirmed that by end of 2026 all vessels will carry tracking (iVMS), allowing real-time assessment of displacement.

4. Other notes

- Ongoing scientific work includes razor clam electrofishing licences in Broad Bay and seasonal closures in the Sound of Barra.
- The Sound of Barra scallop fishery (1 May – 24 August) continues to produce premium quality scallops under the seasonal mobile gear ban (since 1984).

5. Meeting close

[R confirmed that the mitigation table from the FMMCP would be distributed to those in attendance and welcomed feedback and comments to each mitigation measure proposed. [R highlighted that the FMMCP is a live document and applicable throughout the lifetime of the project.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ag Obair Còmhla Airson nan Eilean

Douglas Harman CMLI
Landscape Planning

Spiorad na Mara Offshore windfarm – Landscape, Seascape and Visual comments

[Redacted]

To:

From:

Date: 27th May 2026

Nature of proposal: Offshore wind farm development to comprise up to 60 wind turbine generators with a blade tip height up to 338.4m, and associated infrastructure.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report provides comments concerning the landscape, seascape and visual impacts, and the associated policy compliance, of a Section 36 application for a proposed offshore wind farm development comprising up to 60 wind turbine generators with a blade tip height of up to 338.4 metres, together with associated infrastructure (hereafter referred to as the "proposed development"), to be located off the north-west coast of the Isle of Lewis.

1.2 Informed by field survey work, these comments are provided on behalf of Western Isles Council by Douglas Harman Landscape Planning (DHLP). [Redacted] is an experienced Landscape Architect and a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.

1.3 As an overview, these comments:

- appraise the scope and findings of the applicant's Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA);
- describe the site, its setting, and the associated landscape/coastal and visual sensitivities;
- identify and evaluate any likely significant seascape, landscape and visual effects; and
- appraise the landscape-related policy compliance of the proposed development.

2. REVIEW OF APPLICANT'S SLVIA

Development scenarios

2.1 As the applicant requires flexibility in respect of Wind Turbine Generator selection (to ensure that opportunities to utilise newer, safer, or more cost-effective technology are not precluded), the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) presents two bounding scenarios that define the key maximum design parameters for assessment. In summary, these comprise:

- up to 44 of the largest offshore Wind Turbine Generator type, with a maximum blade tip height of 338.4 m above Mean Sea Level (MSL), a minimum blade clearance of 30 m above MSL, and associated foundations; and
- up to 60 of the smallest offshore Wind Turbine Generator type, with a maximum blade tip height of 293.8 m above MSL, a minimum blade clearance of 30 m above MSL, and associated foundations.

2.2 The SLVIA therefore assesses the maximum adverse scenario (i.e. 44 turbines up to 338.4 m) for each receptor, establishing the maximum potential adverse impact. Consequently, impacts of greater adverse significance would not arise under any alternative development scenario. With regard to the Offshore Substation Platform, this is a structure that might be needed to house electrical components that allow the electrical voltage to be changed so that it can connect to the national grid onshore.

2.3 A separate application for the Project's onshore elements (the OTW Project), including all infrastructure landward of Mean Low Water Springs within the Onshore Transmission Works Boundary, will be submitted in due course. This will provide a full description of the onshore elements of the Project and include an assessment of the associated likely significant effects. Nevertheless, the SLVIA has considered the additive interactions between the Offshore Project and the OTW Project in order to determine whether there is potential for any change to the assessment outcomes arising from the combined effects of both elements of the Project.

Overview of SLVIA findings

2.4 Forming part of an EIAR, the applicant's SLVIA considers the effects of the Offshore Project with respect to seascape, landscape and visual receptors and is contained within Chapter 18, Volume 2a of the EIAR. The Offshore Project includes the wind turbine generators, associated foundations, the array cables and offshore substation. The assessment considers the effects associated with construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases on:

- Visual receptors/views;
- Coastal (or Seascape) character;
- Landscape character;
- Special Landscape Qualities of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA; and
- Navigation and aviation lighting.

2.5 Of particular relevance, the SLVIA considers how local residents and visitors may experience views of the Offshore Project during all project phases from a range of viewpoints. These include coastal settlements, roads, elevated locations and coastal viewpoints, recreational walking and cycling routes, visitor attractions such as beaches, historic sites and nature reserves, and caravan and camping sites. The SLVIA also assesses the potential effects of the Offshore Project on Regional Coastal Character, Landscape Character, and any relevant landscape planning designations, such as National Scenic Areas.

2.6 In addition to a detailed SLVIA report, the assessment is supported by the following appendices:

- SLVIA Methodology;
- Assessment of Effects on Viewpoints;
- Assessment of Effects on Coastal Character;

- Assessment of Effects on Special Landscape Qualities; and
- Visibility of Aviation Warning Lights.

2.7 The spatial scope of the SLVIA is defined as a 60 km radius from the Array Area of the Offshore Project. In support of the assessments set out above, the SLVIA is accompanied by a comprehensive suite of Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) figures. Associated mapping of landscape and coastal character, landscape-related designations, and key visual receptors is also provided. The viewpoint assessment has been undertaken from 42 locations, nearly all of which are supported by photomontages, with some also supported by night-time visualisations.

Significant effects

2.8 As a set out in table 18-36 of the SLVIA, the applicant predicts a very large number of significant effects on sensitive landscape, seascape and visual interests. In summary, those that are likely to be subject to long-term significant effects are:

Visual receptors/view - significant effects occurring during the daytime at viewpoints:

1 - Butt of Lewis/Rubha Robhanais;
2 - Cross/Cros;
3 - North Galston/Gàbhsann;
4 - Melbost Borve/Mealabost Borgh;
5 - Shader/Siadar an Rubha Core Path;
6 - Upper Shader/Siadar Uarach;
7 - Clach an Truiseil;
8 - Upper Barvas/Barabhas Cemetery;
9 - Upper Barvas/Barabhas;
10 - Barvas/Barabhas Beach;
11 - North of Brue/Brù;
12 - Loch na Muilne;
13 - Barvas/Barabhas;
14 - Arnol/Àrnoil Blackhouse;
15 - Arnol/Àrnoil Village;
16 - Bragar/Bhràdhagair Beach;
17 - Sheiling near Loch Urghag
18 - Shawbost/Siabost Core Path;
19 - A858 Abhainn Arnol/Àrnoil;
20 - Bragar/Bhràdhagair;
21 - A857 (south of Barvas/Barabhas);
23 - Shawbost/Siabost;
24 - Dalbeg/Dhail Beag Beach;
25 - Dalmore/Dail Mhor Beach;
26 - Beinn na Cloich;
28 - Doune Carloway/Càrlabhagh;
29 - Bosta/Bostadh;
30 - Gallan Head/Àird Uig;
31 - Valtos;
32 - Reef Beach;
33 - Forsnabhal;
34 - Camas na Clibhe;
36 - Carishader/Cairsiadar;
37 - Callanish/Calanais;
38 - Mangersta/Mangurstadh Head;
39 - Mealaisbhal; and
41 - Sgalabhal.

Significant effects occurring to Coastal Character Areas (CCAs):

- CCA2 Eoropie/ Eòrapaidh;
- CCA3 Borve/Borgh, Shader/Siadar an Rubha and Galston/Gàbhsann low rocky coast;
- CCA4 Barvas Sands/Barabhas Sands and Àird Bharabhais;
- CCA5 Bragar/Bhràdhagair and Port Arnol/Àrnoil;
- CCA6 Loch Shiaboist;
- CCA7 Dalbeg/Dhail Beag and Dalmore/Dail Mhor coast to Aird Laimishader/Àird Laimisiadair;
- CCA11 Bernera Islands;
- CCA14 An Caolas including Reef Beach and Cliff Beach/Camas na Clibhe;
- CCA15 Gallan Head/Gallan Beag; CCA17 Mangersta/Mangurstadh Head; and

- CCA17 Mangersta/Mangurstadh Head.

Significant effects occurring to Landscape Character Types (LCTs):

- Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides (LCT 322); and
- Prominent Hills and Mountains (LCT 326).

Significant effects occurring to the Special Landscape Qualities of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA:

Sub area 1 – The Outer Northwest Lewis/Leòdhas Coastline and Sub-area 2 – Lewis/Leòdhas Coastal Cnoc and Lochan:

- 'The very edge of Europe'
- 'A rich variety of exceptional scenery'
- 'A great diversity of seascapes'
- 'Intervisibility between landscapes'
- 'The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture'

Sub-area 2 also has an additional SLQ for which likely significant effects are predicted:

- 'Extensive machair and dune systems with expansive beaches'

Sub area 4 - The Lewis/Leòdhas Hills and Mountains

- 'The wild mountainous character'

Significant effects occurring during the night-time at Viewpoint:

1 - Butt of Lewis/Rubha Robhanais;
2 - /Cros;
4 - Melbost Borve/Mealabost Borgh;
5 - Shader/Siadar an Rubha Core Path;
6 - Upper Shader/Siadar Uarach;
7 - Clach an Truiseil;
8 - Upper Barvas/Barabhas Cemetery;
9 - Upper Barvas/Barabhas;
10 - Barvas/Barabhas Beach;
11 - North of Brue/Brù;
12 - Loch na Muilne;
13 - Barvas/Barabhas;
14 - Arnol/Àrnoil Blackhouse;
15 - Arnol/Àrnoil Village;
16 - Bragar/Bhràdhagair Beach;
17 - Sheiling near Loch Urghag;
18 - Shawbost/Siabost Core Path;
19 - A858 Abhainn Arnol/Àrnoil;
20 - Bragar/Bhràdhagair;
21 - A857 (south of Barvas/Barabhas);
23 - Shawbost/Siabost;
24 - Dalbeg/Dhail Beag Beach;
25 - Dalmore/Dail Mhor Beach;
26 - Beinn na Cloich;
28 - Doune Carloway/Càrlabhagh;
29 - Bosta/Bostadh;
30 - Gallan Head/Àird Uig;
31 - Valtos;
32 - Reef Beach;
33 - Forsnabhal; and
34 - Camas na Clibhe.

Significant effects occurring during the night-time to CCAs:

- CCA2 Eoropie/ Eòrapaidh;
- CCA3 Borve/Borgh, Shader/Siadar an Rubha and Galston/Gàbhsann low rocky coast;
- CCA4 Barvas Sands/Barabhas Sands and Àird Bharabhais;
- CCA5 Bragar/Bhràdhagair and Port Arnol/Àrnoil;

- CCA6 Loch Shiaboist;
- CCA7 Dalbeg/Dhail Beag and Dalmore/Dail Mhor coast to Aird Laimishader
- CCA11 Bernera Islands;
- CCA14 An Caolas including Reef Beach and Cliff Beach/Camas na Clibhe;
- CCA15 Gallan Head/Gallan Beag; and
- CCA17 Mangersta/Mangurstadh Head.

Scope and adequacy of LVIA

2.9 Overall, the approach to the SLVIA is considered to accord with relevant guidance, and its scope is generally regarded as appropriate for informing a robust policy appraisal of the anticipated landscape, seascape and visual effects. The assessment is supported by a comprehensive suite of illustrative figures and well-presented photomontages, with the SLVIA and associated appendices together providing a thorough evaluation of the anticipated effects on landscape character, seascape and visual amenity.

2.10 In identifying likely significant effects, the SLVIA generally adopts a proportionate and balanced assessment methodology, and the conclusions reached are, in most instances, agreed with. Where there is any divergence in opinion, this is explained further in the following section of these comments.

3. APPRAISAL OF SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

Context

3.1 In assessing effects, it is important to recognise that, with a maximum blade tip height of up to 338.4 m above MSL, the proposed turbines are exceptionally large. By way of indicative comparison, the Shard in London—Western Europe's tallest building — is approximately 306 metres high. While the urban context of the Shard differs significantly from the rural and coastal setting of the proposed development, the comparison nevertheless provides a useful indication of the potential scale of the turbines. Furthermore, at approximately 5 km from the coastline at their closest point, the turbines would be situated in relatively close proximity to the coast. In this context, there is very limited, if any, precedent or understanding of how turbines of this scale would appear within such sensitive seascape settings.

Overview of study area

3.2 The proposed development is located off the north-west coast of Isle of Lewis and the SLVIA study area covers the Isle of Lewis, the majority of Isle of Harris, and the surrounding seascape and islands, including the Flannan Isles. The study area therefore represents the northern extent of the Outer Hebrides and includes a varied and distinctive coastal and upland landscape character.

3.3 The Isle of Lewis and the Isle of Harris form a single landmass, divided geographically by mountainous terrain in southern Lewis and northern Harris. Despite being connected, each area maintains its own cultural identity and distinct landscape character. Northern Lewis is characterised by expansive, low-lying peat moorlands, while southern Lewis and northern Harris comprise rugged upland landscapes and prominent mountains, creating a dramatic southern backdrop to the study area.

3.4 The SLVIA study area exhibits a high degree of visual diversity, resulting from the interaction of landform, coastline, settlement patterns, weather conditions and surrounding seas. The contrast between broad peatland plateaus, rocky coastlines, crofting settlements and elevated mountainous terrain contributes to a varied and distinctive landscape setting. Visual character is further influenced by changing light and weather conditions associated with the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Minch to the east.

3.5 Crofting landscapes form a key component of the baseline, characterised by managed grasslands, rectilinear field patterns and dispersed settlement clusters. These areas contrast strongly with the surrounding open moorlands, which are generally simple in appearance, sparsely settled and shaped by natural landform and water features. Rocky moorland areas display limited human influence and are defined by exposed rock outcrops interspersed with peatland.

3.6 The coastline and surrounding seascape strongly influence visual amenity throughout the study area. Coastal views frequently incorporate extensive seascape elements, reflecting the close relationship between settlement patterns and the coast. Along the western coast of Lewis, between the Butt of Lewis and Bragar, the coastline is generally open, exposed and large -scale in character, with expansive Atlantic views and a strong sense of remoteness and exposure. The coastal edge is typically backed by crofting settlements and moorland hinterland.

3.7 The beaches of the Isle of Lewis and wider Outer Hebrides are widely recognised for their scenic quality and form an important component of the area's landscape/seascape character, recreational value and tourism appeal. Beaches such as Eoropie, Dalbeg, Shawbost, Reef Beach and Bosta Beach are noted for their extensive white sands, turquoise waters, dune systems and dramatic Atlantic setting, often drawing comparisons with more tropical coastal environments despite their exposed northern location. These coastal landscapes contribute significantly to the identity of the islands and are valued both by local communities and visitors from around the world for recreation, walking, surfing, photography and wildlife appreciation.

3.8 Settlement within the northern coastal areas is predominantly linear and associated with crofting communities located along the A857 and A858 transport corridors. Key settlements include Ness, Port of Ness, Cross, Barvas, Arnol, Bragar, Shawbost and Carloway. These settlements are generally small in scale and closely associated with the coastal landscape.

3.9 South of Bragar, the coastline becomes increasingly complex and fragmented, with a more enclosed character created by rocky inlets, headlands, islands and upland landform. Views in this area are often framed by bays, sea lochs and rugged topography, creating a more varied and contained visual experience. Open panoramic views are generally limited to prominent headlands such as Gallan Head and Mangersta Head. Settlement becomes increasingly sparse within this more remote coastal environment.

3.10 Historic and contemporary lighthouse structures also form notable visual landmarks along the coastline, including the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse, the Flannan Isles Lighthouse and Tiumpan Head Lighthouse, which contribute to the cultural and maritime character of the coastal landscape.

Significant Effects on Landscape Character

3.11 The SLVIA predicts significant effects on the Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides (LCT 322) and Prominent Hills and Mountains (LCT 326).

3.12 The Boggy Moorland Landscape Character Type (LCT) covers extensive inland areas of northern Lewis and is characterised by large-scale, gently undulating peat moorlands interspersed with numerous lochs, slow-moving watercourses and occasional low hills. The landscape has a simple and expansive composition with relatively few built features, giving rise to a strong sense of openness, remoteness and wildness. Its predominantly undeveloped character, together with muted colours, broad horizontal form and sparse settlement pattern, contributes to a distinctive upland landscape with extensive panoramic views across the moorland and towards the coast.

3.13 Although much of the LCT is not formally designated for its scenic qualities, parts of its southern extent fall within nationally recognised landscape and wild land designations. The area also contributes to the recreational and experiential qualities associated with long-distance routes and to the wider perception of the Outer Hebrides as a remote and highly scenic environment.

3.14 While the proposed development would not physically alter the LCT, significant indirect effects on landscape character would arise through the introduction of extremely large -scale turbine structures into views from the western and north-western areas of the moorland. Visibility would extend across broad areas of the western peatlands, particularly within approximately 20 km of the turbine array, where the development would form a highly prominent feature within the seaward backdrop.

3.15 As such, the proposed development would, within approximately 20 km of the turbine array, substantially and adversely affect several of its key defining characteristics. The extensive presence of very large offshore turbines would weaken perceptions of the area's remote upland character and diminish the simple, sparsely developed landscape pattern presently defined by shielings, township boundary dykes and expansive open moorland. The introduction of highly prominent vertical structures across the seaward horizon would also disrupt the strong horizontal emphasis, openness and sense of vast scale that currently characterise the Boggy Moorland landscape, thereby reducing its perceived remoteness, wildness and visual simplicity. In addition, the development would introduce a marked increase in perceived human influence within a landscape presently valued for its limited visual complexity and its undeveloped relationship between land, sea and sky.

3.16 The Prominent Hills and Mountains LCT forms the upland spine along the eastern edge of south Lewis and is characterised by dramatic individual peaks, pronounced summits, long ridges and steep slopes rising prominently from the surrounding landscape. The LC T displays a massive vertical scale, with rugged rock outcrops, buttresses, gullies and exposed upper slopes contrasting strongly with the lower heather moorlands and adjacent coastal crofting landscapes. The largely uninhabited nature of the uplands, combined with their rugged landform and strong relationship with surrounding seascapes, contributes to a highly distinctive landscape character defined by drama, grandeur and a strong sense of remoteness and wildness.

3.17 Much of the LCT lies within nationally important landscape and wild land designations, including the National Scenic Area (NSA), Harris–Uig Hills Wild Land Area and Eisgein Wild Land Area. These designations recognise the exceptional scenic quality, perceived naturalness and expansive intervisibility associated with the mountains and surrounding seascapes. The mountains are particularly valued for their dramatic transition from sea level to mountain summits, panoramic views, recreational opportunities and contribution to the iconic landscape character of Lewis and Harris.

3.18 Significant indirect effects on landscape character would arise through the introduction of extensive large-scale turbine structures within the seascape context of the mountains, particularly in views northwards from prominent summits and ridgelines. Visibility would extend across elevated areas of the LCT, particularly within approximately 20–30 km of the turbine area, where the proposed development would form a prominent and competing feature within the seaward backdrop to the mountains.

3.19 Consequently, the proposed development would substantially and adversely alter several of its defining characteristics, particularly within the northern parts of the mountain range where there is a strong visual relationship with the surrounding seascape. The extensive presence of very large offshore turbines would erode the perception of the open remote upland character and diminish the dramatic juxtaposition between rugged mountain landforms and the undeveloped seascape that currently contributes to the area's sense of grandeur and wildness. The introduction of prominent vertical turbine structures across the northern horizon would compete visually with the distinctive peaks, ridgelines and skylines that presently dominate views, reducing the perceived naturalness, remoteness and scenic quality of the landscape. The development would also introduce a substantial increase in perceived human influence within panoramic views currently valued for their expansive scale, rugged simplicity and strong undeveloped relationship between mountain, coast and sea.

3.20 Effects would be greatest within the northern extent of the LCT, where the mountains have a stronger visual association with the seascape to the north and where turbines would appear more prominent within the backdrop to key summits and elevated viewpoints. Effects would generally reduce with increased distance southwards into the Harris mountains, where the proposed development would appear more distant and less visually influential within wider panoramic views.

Significant effects on Coastal/Seascape Character

3.21 Across CCAs 2, 4–7, 11, 14, 15 and 17 of the west and north-west Lewis coast, the operational phase of the proposed development would introduce a very large-scale, engineered offshore windfarm array into a seascape currently defined by strong naturalness, simplicity, and long-range openness to the Atlantic. While the physical coastal landforms, crofting patterns, machair systems, islands, skerries, rocky moorland and cliffed headlands would remain unchanged, the perceptual and experiential qualities of the coastal environment would be materially and in places fundamentally altered through the introduction of a dominant offshore visual presence within key seaward views.

3.22 A consistent effect across all CCAs is the reduction in perceived seascape simplicity, openness, and enjoyment of the coastline as a wild and visually uninterrupted Atlantic edge. The existing experience of expansive, largely empty horizons—where land, sea and sky interact in a simple natural composition—would be replaced by a continuous engineered offshore plane of turbines extending across key seaward views. This would diminish the clarity of distance, depth and separation between coastal elements and the open sea, and would reduce the sense of freedom, immersion and visual clarity that currently contributes strongly to the enjoyment of these seascapes.

3.23 This includes the loss of the distinctive "edge-of-the-world" experience associated with exposed Atlantic-facing coasts, particularly in CCAs 2, 15 and 17, and also in island-framed systems such as CCA11: Bernera Islands and machair-coastal systems such as CCA14: Caolas/An Caolas (Reef

Beach and Cliff Beach). These seascapes are currently strongly valued for their perceived remoteness, openness, and lack of offshore development, qualities directly reflected in the scenic attributes of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA.

3.24 The most significant effects occur along exposed coastal edges and key viewpoints in CCAs 4 –7, 11, 14, 15 and 17, where seaward views are wide, direct and structurally defined by headlands, coves, cliffs and interlocking coastal forms. In these areas, the proposed development would introduce an offshore industrial presence that becomes a dominant detracting element in the seascape. This would erode the sense of remoteness, wildness and natural exposure that currently defines these coasts, particularly in open Atlantic-facing landscapes such as CCA15: Gallan Head/Gallan Beag and CCA17: Mangersta/Mangurstadh Head. The introduction of rotating turbine forms would further intensify this effect by introducing visible motion into a seascape currently experienced as driven only by natural forces such as wind, tide and wave.

3.25 A key structural effect across all CCAs is the weakening of the role of headlands, islands, skerries, coves and loch-backed beaches as primary organising elements in the perception of coastal landscape. Headlands, which currently provide rhythm, enclosure and sequential unfolding of views, would be visually overtopped or visually competed with by turbine towers and rotor sweeps that extend above their perceived scale. Intervening islands and offshore rock features, particularly prominent in CCA11 Bernera Islands and CCA14 Caolas/An Caolas, would lose effectiveness as intermediate spatial markers, as the turbine array forms a continuous elevated offshore plane that visually bridges over these elements. Similarly, coves, machair-backed beaches and inlets—strongly expressed in CCA14 Reef and Cliff Beaches and CCA4–7 coastal systems—would experience a reduction in perceived intimacy and enclosure, weakening scenic qualities associated with shelter, natural containment and quiet visual enjoyment of the coastline.

3.26 Across CCAs 4–7, 11, 14 and parts of 2, this results in a perceptual shift in which the sea is no longer read as an open, empty and largely uninterrupted natural expanse, but instead as a structured offshore field dominated by human-made vertical elements. This leads to a partial collapse of layered seascape depth, where foreground coastal detail, mid-distance islands and skerries, and distant horizon are no longer experienced as distinct spatial zones but are visually compressed into a single dominant offshore plane. This significantly reduces perceived scenic quality and diminishes the enjoyment derived from reading and understanding natural coastal structure.

3.27 In CCA7 Dalmore/Dalbeg and Bragar–Port Arnol, and CCA5 Bragar and Port Arnol, effects are particularly pronounced due to highly indented coastlines, enclosed coves and strong framed views from beaches. Here, turbine visibility would significantly interrupt visual containment provided by headlands, extending beyond enclosing coastal forms and reducing the sense of seclusion and enjoyment within bays and beaches. In CCA14 Caolas/An Caolas, Reef Beach and Cliff Beach systems, the machair-backed coastline and island-framed views would experience a strong reduction in scenic quality, particularly the qualities of shelter, enclosure and natural visual balance that underpin visitor and local enjoyment of these landscapes. In CCA11 Bernera Islands, the complex archipelagic seascape would lose part of its layered clarity, as turbines visually compete with islands as structuring distance markers across Loch Ròg An Ear and Loch Roag/Ròg, reducing the ease with which the seascape is read and appreciated.

3.28 In CCA6 Loch Shiaboist and surrounding crofting and moorland systems, effects are moderated by topographic enclosure, but open seaward views from loch-backed basins would still be altered by a continuous offshore turbine presence, weakening the contrast between inland loch

landscapes and open Atlantic space that contributes to scenic enjoyment. In CCA2 Eoropie/Eòrapaidh, although separation distances are greater and screening is stronger, the open beach experience would still be affected by the introduction of turbines on an otherwise empty horizon, partially reducing enjoyment of remoteness and natural seascape simplicity.

3.29 In CCA15 Gallan Head/Gallan Beag and CCA17 Mangersta/Mangurstadh Head, the effects are particularly acute in open cliff-top views. These locations currently provide some of the most powerful scenic experiences in the study area, characterised by dramatic cliffs, sea stacks, expansive Atlantic horizons and strong sensations of wildness and exposure. Here, turbines would introduce a structured industrial horizon that significantly reduces scenic integrity and diminishes the experiential enjoyment of vast, uninterrupted natural seascapes.

3.30 Across all CCAs, moderate effects are present in more enclosed or topographically constrained inland moorland and crofting hinterlands, where ridges, cnoc-and-lochan terrain and loch basins partially restrict views. In these areas, turbine visibility is more intermittent or filtered, and while scenic quality is less directly affected, the Offshore Project still contributes to wider perceptions of offshore development presence, reducing the sense of complete natural separation.

3.31 Minor or negligible effects are limited to locations with no meaningful seaward visibility, typically within fully enclosed inland moorland pockets or where local topography entirely obstructs outward views. In these areas, scenic quality and enjoyment of the landscape remain largely unchanged.

3.32 In conclusion, the operational phase would result in a pervasive very large -scale offshore visual influence across all CCAs, giving rise to substantial adverse effects on seascape character and visual experience. The proposed development would lead to a marked loss of seascape simplicity, a significant weakening of the natural spatial hierarchy, and a pronounced erosion of key scenic qualities including remoteness, wildness, openness, naturalness and the distinctive "edge-of-the-world" character associated with the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. Most significantly, the development would fundamentally diminish the appreciation and enjoyment of these coastlines through the introduction of a dominant and extensive engineered presence into views currently valued for their simplicity, clarity and powerful sense of natural Atlantic exposure. In doing so, it would materially compromise both the intrinsic character and the experiential qualities of the north-west coast seascape.

Significant effects on Views and Visual Amenity

3.33 The SLVIA identifies widespread significant visual effects across the northwest coast of Lewis, with the strongest and most dominant effects concentrated along the exposed coastal corridor between Melbost Borve, Shader, Ballantrushal and Barvas. Across much of the study area, the turbines would introduce a very large-scale and highly intrusive industrial element into seascapes currently characterised by open horizons, undeveloped coastal views and small-scale crofting landscapes.

3.34 The assessment demonstrates a clear geographic pattern, with the most substantial visual effects occurring where receptors experience direct westward or north-westward views across open sea toward the array, particularly at relatively close range where the turbines occupy a large proportion of the horizontal field of view (HFoV). Effects reduce progressively inland and northward as distance increases and intervening landform provides partial screening, although significant effects remain evident at a very large number of highly sensitive tourism, recreational, heritage and residential viewpoints.

3.35 A recurring theme throughout the assessment is the contrast between the very large scale of the proposed turbines and the intimate character of the crofting landscape. The existing landscape is described as low-lying, open and sparsely settled, with croft houses, dry-stone walls, moorland, beaches and exposed coastline forming the dominant visual character. The beaches and coastal edge are extremely important to the recreational and cultural experience of northwest Lewis, valued for walking, quiet enjoyment, wildlife appreciation and expansive undeveloped coastal scenery. Against this setting, the turbines would appear exceptionally large, visually prominent and, in some locations, dominant. Blade movement is also identified as an important factor, introducing constant motion into views that are currently largely static and undeveloped.

3.36 The strongest visual effects are concentrated around Melbost Borve, Shader, Clach an Truiseil and Barvas. At Viewpoint 4 (Melbost Borve), all 44 WTGs and the OSP would be visible only 9.6 km offshore, occupying 44° of the HFoV. The assessment concludes that the proposed development would occupy the central part of the seaward outlook and become a defining component of the coastal panorama. The turbines would be visible from foundations to blade tips and would contrast strongly with the small-scale crofting landscape and low headlands. Due to the close proximity and open coastal exposure, the visual effect is assessed as Major.

3.37 A similar pattern is identified at Viewpoint 5 (Shader), where the turbines would be only 8 km offshore and occupy approximately 50° of the HFoV. The assessment states that the array would occupy "nearly all of the visible seascape horizon". The seaward outlook is currently largely free of offshore structures and the turbines would therefore become the dominant visual feature in the view. The OSP is also described as a substantial industrial structure positioned centrally within the array. Residents, walkers and visitors are considered highly sensitive receptors, resulting in another Major effect. The surrounding coastline and beaches are also important for informal recreation and enjoyment of open coastal views, increasing receptor sensitivity.

3.38 At Viewpoint 6 (Upper Shader), although slightly inland, the development would remain highly prominent because the gently sloping landform allows extensive westward visibility across the sea. All 44 WTGs and the OSP would be visible approximately 9.1 km offshore and occupy 51° of the HFoV. The assessment emphasises that the turbines would occupy a substantial proportion of the seaward outlook and contrast strongly with the surrounding crofting settlement pattern, becoming a major and defining visual component within everyday residential views.

3.39 The assessment also identifies substantial effects at culturally and historically sensitive viewpoints. At Viewpoint 7 (Clach an Truiseil), the standing stone and surrounding landscape currently overlook an undeveloped western seascape. Here, the WTGs would occupy approximately 55° of the HFoV at around 8.5 km offshore. The assessment repeatedly emphasises the scale of the turbines relative to the traditional landscape setting and the introduction of industrial structures into views associated with heritage appreciation and tourism. Although some turbines would be partially obscured by landform, the proposed development would still become a dominant component of the western panorama and the effect is assessed as Major.

3.40 The Barvas area represents another concentration of dominant visual effects. At Viewpoint 8 (Upper Barvas Cemetery), the turbines would occupy approximately 67° of the HFoV, one of the widest extents identified in the assessment. The cemetery occupies an elevated position with panoramic views toward the coast and sea, which form an important component of the wider panorama. Although some turbines would be partially screened by dunes and landform, the array would remain highly visible and occupy a very large proportion of the northwestern outlook. The visual effect is therefore assessed as Major.

3.41 A similar conclusion is reached at Viewpoint 9 (Upper Barvas), where all 44 WTGs and the OSP would be visible approximately 9.9 km offshore. The turbines would occupy around 60° of the HFoV and become a defining visual element above the bay and open sea. The assessment again highlights the contrast between the industrial scale of the proposed development and the smaller-scale crofting settlement pattern that characterises the area. These viewpoints demonstrate that the proposed development would become a dominant and highly noticeable feature not only at the immediate coast but also across inland transition areas where the sea remains an important element of local views.

3.42 Further north around Butt of Lewis, Cross and North Galston, visual effects remain significant but generally become less dominant due to increased viewing distances and greater screening by landform and buildings. At Viewpoint 1 (Butt of Lewis), all 44 WTGs and the OSP would still be visible approximately 20.7 km offshore. Although the greater distance reduces the magnitude of change to Medium, the effect remains Significant (Major-Moderate) because the location is an important tourism destination with a strong seaward orientation and highly sensitive visitors. The assessment notes that the offshore wind farm would introduce large -scale industrial infrastructure into an otherwise undeveloped marine setting.

3.43 At Viewpoints 2 (Cross) and 3 (North Galston), the turbines would remain noticeable and prominent within the western outlook, although intervening houses and landform would obscure parts of the array and reduce overall dominance. Even so, the assessment notes that blade movement visible above rooflines and between buildings would continue to draw attention to the development and reinforce the contrast between the large offshore structures and the surrounding small-scale crofting settlements.

3.44 Across the assessment, several visual effects are consistently identified regardless of viewpoint location. One of the most common is the occupation of substantial sections of the sea horizon by the turbine array. At the closest coastal viewpoints, the turbines frequently occupy between 40° and 70° of the HFoV, becoming a major new component of panoramic coastal views. Another recurring effect is the visibility of turbines from foundations to blade tips, particularly at closer locations such as Melbost Borve, Shader and Clach an Truiseil, increasing the apparent scale and prominence of the development.

3.45 The Offshore Substation Platform is also identified as an important visual influence. At viewpoints including Melbost Borve, Shader, Upper Shader and Upper Barvas, the OSP would appear as a substantial industrial structure positioned centrally within the array. Although smaller than the turbines, it would reinforce the industrial character of the proposed development and the perception of large-scale infrastructure within previously undeveloped seascapes.

3.46 The assessment repeatedly highlights the sensitivity of residential, tourism and recreational receptors. Residents are considered highly sensitive because of the permanence and frequency of views from homes and local roads. Walkers, cyclists and visitors are similarly regarded as highly sensitive because appreciation of scenery, beaches and coastal character forms an important part of their experience. The beaches along the northwest coast of Lewis are valued not only for recreation but also for their remoteness, openness and uninterrupted seaward views. This is particularly important at heritage and tourism locations such as Butt of Lewis, Clach an Truiseil, Bosta Beach, Callanish and the Hebridean Way, where the undeveloped coastal setting contributes significantly to visitor experience and landscape character.

3.47 The assessment demonstrates a clear spatial pattern of visual effects across the northwest coast of Lewis. The most substantial and dominant effects occur along the exposed coastal corridor between Melbost Borve, Shader, Ballantrushal and Barvas, where the proposed development would be viewed at relatively close range across open sea horizons. In these areas, the turbines would occupy very large proportions of the seaward panorama and become defining components of everyday coastal views. The combination of close proximity, broad horizontal spread, high turbine visibility and strong receptor sensitivity results in a concentration of Significant (Major) effects.

3.48 The viewpoints experiencing the strongest effects include Melbost Borve (Viewpoint 4), Shader (Viewpoint 5), Upper Shader (Viewpoint 6), Clach an Truiseil (Viewpoint 7), Upper Barvas Cemetery (Viewpoint 8) and Upper Barvas (Viewpoint 9). These viewpoints share several characteristics: open westward or northwestward views toward the sea, highly sensitive residential, recreational or heritage receptors, and sufficient proximity for the turbines to appear large and visually prominent. At many of these locations, the WTGs would be visible from foundations to blade tips and occupy between approximately 44° and 67° of the HFoV, creating a strong sense of visual dominance across the seascape.

3.49 Further north around Butt of Lewis, Cross and North Galston, visual effects remain significant but progressively less dominant because of greater viewing distances and increasing screening by landform and settlement. Nevertheless, the assessment still identifies substantial visual change because the Offshore Project would introduce large-scale moving structures into seascapes that are currently largely undeveloped. Even where parts of the array are screened, blade movement above rooflines and across open horizons would continue to draw visual attention toward the development.

3.50 A consistent conclusion throughout the assessment is that the proposed development would fundamentally alter west-facing coastal and seaward views across much of northwest Lewis. Key visual effects include the occupation of substantial sections of the sea horizon by turbines, the introduction of movement across previously undeveloped seascapes, and the strong contrast between the industrial scale of the Offshore Project and the smaller-scale crofting landscapes and beaches that characterise the area. The assessment indicates that these changes would adversely affect the experience of people using and enjoying the coastline and beaches for recreation, tourism and appreciation of the undeveloped coastal environment. The OSP would further reinforce this industrial character at several viewpoints where it would appear as a substantial structure located centrally within the array.

3.51 The assessment also highlights the importance of receptor sensitivity in determining significance. Residents, walkers, cyclists and visitors are consistently identified as highly sensitive receptors because of their strong focus on landscape and coastal views. This is particularly relevant at tourism and heritage viewpoints such as Butt of Lewis and Clach an Truiseil, where appreciation of open coastal scenery forms an important component of visitor experience and landscape character.

3.52 Although no detailed assessment of sequential routes has been undertaken, the very large number and geographic extent of significant visual effects identified across the northwest coast of Lewis indicate that the proposed development would, in general, significantly affect views experienced across large areas of the landscape. The widespread visibility of the turbines across settlements, coastal roads, beaches and recreational areas suggests that visual amenity for residents, travellers and visitors would be materially compromised in many locations.

3.53 Overall, the assessment concludes that the proposed development would become a highly prominent and often visually dominant feature across substantial sections of the northwest Lewis coastline. Although visual effects would reduce gradually inland and with increasing distance from the coast, significant and frequently pronounced visual effects would remain widespread due to the exceptional scale of the turbines, their extensive horizontal spread and the open nature of coastal and seaward views. The assessment indicates that the introduction of large-scale industrial structures across the sea horizon would fundamentally alter the composition and visual character of many coastal views, replacing currently open, undeveloped and uninterrupted panoramas with a prominent or dominant engineered presence. Consequently, the visual experience and enjoyment of beaches, coastal walks and wider recreational activities would be materially compromised, as would views experienced by a large number of residents and road users across a wide area.

Significant effects on the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA

3.54 The assessment of the proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm concludes that the most significant adverse effects on the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA would occur along the north and northwest coast of Lewis, particularly within the Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline and the Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan sub-areas. These landscapes are considered among the most sensitive parts of the NSA because they strongly express the area's defining Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs), including remoteness, wildness, dramatic Atlantic scenery, and the strong relationship between land and sea. The proposed development, located approximately 5–13 km offshore, would introduce large-scale industrial structures into views that are currently characterised by open horizons, undeveloped seascapes, and a strong sense of naturalness.

3.55 The SLVIA identifies several SLQs that would experience significant adverse effects. These include the "very edge of Europe" experience, the diversity of seascapes, the rich variety of exceptional scenery, the close interplay between nature and settlement, and the strong links between landscape and history. The assessment explains that the offshore turbines would become dominant visual features that compete with the natural landforms and interrupt the appreciation of expansive Atlantic views. Their movement, uniform shape, height, and lighting would contrast sharply with the irregular and undeveloped coastline, reducing perceptions of remoteness and wildness. The report also notes that aviation and navigation lighting would introduce visible night-time development into areas currently valued for dark skies and tranquillity.

3.56 The greatest effects are identified within the Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline sub-area, where the report concludes that there would be a "Significant (Major-Moderate to Major) adverse effect" on the appreciation of the "very edge of Europe" quality. This landscape is valued for its uninterrupted views westward across the Atlantic Ocean and for the overwhelming sense of exposure, isolation, and distance from human influence. The assessment explains that the offshore wind farm would interrupt the open sea horizon and diminish the sense of anticipation associated with travelling toward the remote Atlantic coast. The turbines would become visible before the coastline itself is reached and would repeatedly draw attention away from the natural scenery. As a result, the perception of the area as an isolated Atlantic frontier would be compromised.

3.57 The Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan landscape would also experience significant adverse effects, assessed as "Major-moderate adverse." This area is highly valued for its intricate pattern of rocky knolls, lochans, fragmented coastline, and constantly changing views between enclosed and open landscapes. The report explains that the experience of travelling through this landscape depends

upon gradual reveal, intimacy of scale, and the contrast between sheltered inland areas and expansive coastal views. The offshore turbines would alter these experiences because glimpses of the wind farm would repeatedly appear through gaps in the landform, becoming a consistent visual reference point throughout the journey. The turbines would also appear visually dominant in relation to the small-scale crofting settlements and traditional human features that currently remain subordinate to the surrounding landscape.

3.58 The SLVIA indicates that the integrity of the NSA would be compromised because the proposed development would fundamentally compromise many key characteristics and SLQs that underpin this nationally important landscape designation. The integrity of the NSA depends upon the combination of undeveloped Atlantic horizons, dramatic coastal scenery, strong naturalness, dark skies, remoteness, and the dominance of natural processes over visible human infrastructure. The assessment repeatedly states that these qualities are closely interconnected and rely upon the absence of large-scale development. By introducing extensive offshore infrastructure into previously open seascapes therefore, the proposed development would reduce the sense of remoteness and weaken the relationship between the land, sea, and sky that defines the NSA. The turbines would become competing focal points within key views, disrupting the scenic composition of the landscape and diminishing experiential qualities such as anticipation, discovery, and isolation. Although some inland and mountainous areas of the NSA were assessed as experiencing effects that were not significant, the SLVIA concludes that the most sensitive coastal landscapes would experience major adverse effects that undermine the coherence and scenic qualities central to the NSA designation.

Significant effects during the nighttime

3.59 The viewpoint assessment identifies the most significant visual effects from the proposed development at coastal viewpoints along the northwest coast of Lewis, particularly where receptors experience open Atlantic views, dark skies and strong perceptions of remoteness. The assessment concludes that the greatest effects arise at viewpoints closest to the proposed development and at locations where the full extent of aviation and navigation lighting is visible across the horizon.

3.60 The most significant effects are identified at VP23 (Shawbost), VP4 (Borve) and VP13 (Barvas), where both aviation warning lights and yellow navigation lights would be visible over a broad horizontal arc. At VP23, the nearest turbines would lie between 8 km and 18.7 km from the viewpoint, making this the closest viewpoint to the proposed development. Although the red aviation lights are assessed as relatively faint, the yellow navigation lights would appear brightest from this viewpoint and would be comparable to the brightest stars visible in the night sky. The assessment notes that the flashing and linear spread of lights across the horizon would increase their perceptibility, particularly in otherwise dark coastal conditions.

3.61 At VP4 (Borve), which is one of only two viewpoints where all aviation and navigation lights are potentially visible, a significant number of both red and yellow lights would be perceptible under good visibility conditions. The yellow navigation lights associated with the nearest turbines would appear similar in brightness to the brightest stars, while the aviation lights would range from the brightness of middling stars to lights only just detectable by the fully dark-adapted eye. VP13 (Barvas) would experience similar effects, with lights spread more extensively along the horizon due to the viewing angle.

3.62 Significant effects are also identified at VP30 (Gallan Head), a location recognised for its dark skies and association with the Hebridean Dark Skies Festival. Although the turbines would be more distant at between 14.6 km and 34.1 km, the elevated and exposed nature of the viewpoint means all lights would potentially be visible. The assessment notes that the aviation lights would generally appear as faint stars, but the yellow navigation lights would remain comparable in brightness to the stars of Orion's Belt. The report highlights the sensitivity of this viewpoint due to its dark sky qualities and limited existing light pollution.

3.63 At VP32, also within the NSA, aviation lights would be visible but generally fainter than at Gallan Head due to the lower elevation of the viewpoint and partial screening by local landforms. Navigation lights are not currently predicted to be visible from this location, although the report notes that relatively small turbine relocations could alter this outcome.

3.64 The least significant effects are identified at VP37 (Callanish), despite the acknowledged sensitivity of the location due to the presence of the Callanish Stones. Most of the turbine lighting would be screened by local hills, no navigation lights would be visible, and only three aviation lights are predicted to be detectable under excellent visibility conditions. Existing lighting from the BASF facility near Callanish would also reduce visibility of the aviation lights through contrast effects.

3.65 Overall, the assessment concludes that the most significant night-time visual effects would occur at coastal viewpoints nearest the proposed development and in locations valued for dark skies, tranquillity and open Atlantic horizons. While the aviation warning lights are generally assessed as relatively faint and comparable to middling or faint stars, the yellow navigation lights would appear more prominent and would contribute most strongly to the cumulative night-time effects experienced from the northwest Lewis coastline.

4 POLICY COMPLIANCE APPRAISAL

Material considerations

4.1 The appraisal of landscape and visual effects of the proposed development (see Section 4) are made in context of the following landscape-related material considerations, as set out in the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Scotland's National Marine Plan (SNMP) 2015, and the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (OHLDP) 2018:

- NPF4 Policy 4 Natural Places
- NPF4 Policy 11
- Scotland's National Marine Plan - General Policy 7 (GEN7) Landscape/Seascape
- Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (2020)
- Draft Updated Sectoral Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (2025)
- OHLDP - Policy EI 8: Energy and Heat Resources
- OHLDP - Policy NBH1: Landscape

4.2 The assessment identifies widespread and, in many locations, major adverse effects on landscape character, coastal character, visual amenity and the special qualities of nationally designated landscapes. In policy terms, these findings give rise to significant tensions with several elements of the relevant national and local development plan framework relating to landscape, seascape and visual protection.

4.3 In relation to NPF4 Policy 4 – Natural Places, the preceding appraisal provides overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would result in significant adverse effects on nationally important South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. The SLVIA concludes that the proposed development would erode key scenic qualities associated with remoteness, wildness, openness, naturalness, dark skies and undeveloped Atlantic horizons. It further identifies substantial adverse effects on the integrity and appreciation of the NSA, particularly within the Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline and Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan landscape areas. These conclusions indicate a clear tension with Policy 4, which seeks to protect the character, integrity and special qualities of nationally designated landscapes and avoid unacceptable adverse impacts on their scenic qualities.

4.4 The findings also raise significant concerns in relation to NPF4 Policy 11 – Energy. While this policy provides strong support for renewable energy development, it also requires careful consideration of impacts on landscape and visual amenity, communities, tourism and cumulative effects. The assessment identifies widespread Significant (Major) visual effects across substantial sections of the northwest Lewis coastline, including effects on residents, road users, tourism receptors, recreational users and heritage visitors. The proposed development would become a highly prominent and frequently dominant feature across many coastal views, materially compromising visual amenity and the experience of beaches, coastal walks and recreational landscapes. The scale and geographic extent of these effects suggest a substantial degree of conflict with the policy requirement to ensure that significant landscape and visual impacts are appropriately addressed.

4.5 In relation to Scotland's National Marine Plan – GEN7 Landscape/Seascape, the assessment identifies extensive adverse effects on seascape character, coastal views and visual amenity. GEN7 requires marine developments to minimise adverse impacts on landscape, seascape and visual amenity, including effects on coastal character, designated landscapes and cumulative seascape experience. The assessment concludes that the proposed development would fundamentally alter the visual composition and experiential qualities of many west-facing coastal and seaward views, replacing open and undeveloped Atlantic horizons with a dominant engineered offshore presence. The assessment also identifies a substantial weakening of natural spatial hierarchy, erosion of scenic integrity and adverse effects on the appreciation of remoteness and wildness. These findings indicate substantial tension with the objectives of GEN7.

4.6 The conclusions of the assessment are also materially relevant to the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (2020) and the Draft Updated Sectoral Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (2025), both of which recognise the sensitivity of coastal and island landscapes to large-scale offshore wind development. The assessment demonstrates that the exceptional scale of the turbines, their close proximity to the coastline and the extensive geographic spread of visibility would result in significant seascape and visual effects across sensitive Atlantic-facing landscapes and designated coastal areas. The findings therefore engage directly with policy concerns relating to, impacts on scenic quality, coastal character, dark skies and recreational experience.

4.7 At the local level, the assessment indicates significant tension with Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan Policy NBH1 – Landscape. Policy NBH1 requires development to relate appropriately to landscape character, maintain landscape integrity and avoid unacceptable significant landscape and visual impacts, particularly within National Scenic Areas and Wild Land Areas. The assessment identifies significant adverse effects on both the Boggy Moorland and Prominent Hills and Mountains Landscape Character Types, including erosion of remoteness, disruption of openness and horizontal scale, increased perception of human influence and

competition with distinctive skylines and coastal panoramas. The assessment also concludes that the integrity of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA would be materially compromised. These findings suggest substantial conflict with the core objectives and policy tests contained within NBH1.

4.8 Similarly, the findings are relevant to OHLDP Policy EI 8 – Energy and Heat Resources, which supports renewable energy proposals where unacceptable adverse effects on landscape, visual amenity, tourism and natural heritage can be avoided or satisfactorily addressed. The assessment identifies widespread significant effects on visual amenity, tourism and recreational receptors, together with substantial adverse effects on nationally important scenic landscapes. The extent, scale and severity of the identified effects therefore indicate that the proposed development gives rise to significant policy concerns under EI 8 in relation to landscape fit, visual impact and effects on the scenic and experiential qualities of the receiving environment.

4.9 Overall, while the proposed development aligns with broader national policy support for renewable energy generation and offshore wind deployment, the assessment identifies extensive and, in many instances, detrimental effects on landscape character, seascape character, visual amenity and nationally important scenic qualities. The findings therefore indicate substantial tension and, in several respects, likely conflict with those elements of the policy framework concerned with safeguarding landscape, seascape and visual interests, particularly within nationally designated and highly sensitive coastal environments.

Conclusion

4.10 The variety of highly distinctive natural and cultural features of this part of the Isle of Lewis and the wider Outer Hebrides make a substantial contribution to quality of life, not only for local residents but also for the many visitors drawn to the islands from across the UK and internationally. The combination of expansive coastal scenery, remote moorlands, rugged uplands, historic settlements, and distinctive crofting landscapes creates a strong sense of place and cultural identity that is widely valued and recognised.

4.11 The highly scenic beaches, dramatic Atlantic coastline, traditional crofting townships, and historic landmarks collectively support recreation, tourism, and outdoor activities, while also contributing to community wellbeing and cultural continuity. Visitors are attra cted by the islands' perceived remoteness, tranquillity, and scenic quality, with beaches such as Eoropie, Dalbeg, Reef Beach, Shawbost, and Bosta Beach forming key visitor destinations and important visual and recreational assets. These seascapes and landscapes provide opportunities for walking, wildlife watching, surfing, photography, and appreciation of the natural environment, reinforcing the Outer Hebrides' reputation as an internationally valued tourism destination.

4.12 Cultural heritage features, including historic crofting patterns, archaeological remains, and prominent lighthouses, further strengthen the connection between people and place. Together, the natural and cultural qualities of the islands play an important role in supporting local identity, tourism, recreation, and the wider experience of living in and visiting the Outer Hebrides.

4.13 This appraisal concludes that the proposed development would result in widespread significant adverse effects on landscape, coastal character, visual amenity, and the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA, particularly along the northwest coast of Lewis. Although the development would not physically alter the landscape, the introduction of extremely large-scale offshore turbines within open Atlantic views would substantially reduce perceptions of remoteness, wildness, openness, and naturalness that define the Boggy Moorland and Prominent Hills and Mountains

landscape character types, as well as the NSA's special landscape qualities. Across exposed coastal character areas, the turbines would form a dominant engineered presence on previously undeveloped horizons, weakening the "edge-of-the-world" experience, reducing scenic simplicity, and disrupting the perceived natural relationship between land, sea, and sky.

4.14 Visual effects would be strongest around Melbost Borve, Shader, Clach an Truiseil, and Barvas, where turbines would occupy substantial portions of the sea horizon and become prominent or dominant features in residential, recreational, and heritage views. The assessment also identifies significant night-time effects arising from aviation and navigation lighting, particularly in dark-sky coastal areas, further increasing perceptions of industrialisation within highly valued scenic and remote landscapes.

4.15 Taking into account the extensive geographical extent of the predicted significant effects and the number of landscape, seascape, and visual receptors affected, there is overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character, quality, and enjoyment of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. On that basis, it is considered not to accord with relevant landscape-related planning policies.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS BOARD 23 JUNE 2026
COMHAIRLE 25 JUNE 2026

26/00107/CONSG – SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT – MARINE DIRECTORATE CONSULTATION ON APPLICATIONS FOR S36 CONSENT AND MARINE LICENCES ASSOCIATED WITH THE OFFSHORE WORKS FOR THE SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WINDFARM, TO THE NORTHWEST OF ISLE OF LEWIS

Report by the Chief Executive

PURPOSE

1.1 To determine the view of the Comhairle in respect of a consultation request received from the Scottish Ministers, on 16 March 2026 in respect of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report and the applications made to them to construct and operate the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The Comhairle is not the determining authority. Scottish Ministers have consulted the Comhairle on consent applications and the associated Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report submitted to it, for the construction and operation of a fixed-bottom offshore wind farm, with a potential expected capacity of around 900MW. The turbine area is located some 6km – 13km from the north-west coast of the Isle of Lewis. Two design options are considered: 44 turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 338.4m above mean sea level (MSL), or 60 turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 293.8m above MSL. The application also includes either an offshore substation or an onshore substation, with associated array cables to landfall or export cables, depending on the option pursued.

2.2 A 5-year construction period is anticipated for the Offshore Project, with work programmed between April and October to utilize optimal weather conditions. Construction working hours would be expected to be up to 24 hours, 7 days a week. Offshore works would include site preparation followed by foundation installation and subsequently turbine and offshore Substation Platform (if required) installation, offshore cable installation, and landfall cable horizontal directional drilling. Construction works for offshore and onshore elements are anticipated to overlap with the Onshore project construction taking place across all five years.

2.3 The consent applications comprise an application under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for consent to construct and operate a generating station, and two applications under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 for marine licences covering the offshore generating station and related transmission infrastructure. The EIA Report assesses the likely significant effects of the proposed development on the wider environment.

2.4 The response of the Comhairle is focused on matters within its remit and/or area of interest, including the principle of development in this location, seascape, landscape and visual effects, cultural heritage, airborne noise, and the local economy, including tourism and commercial fisheries.

2.5 Scottish Ministers have also consulted NatureScot, SEPA, Historic Environment Scotland and other relevant authorities or stakeholders on the EIA Report, with their consultation responses addressing matters within their respective interests e.g. habitats and species, ornithology, marine ecology and aviation, among others. At the time of writing the views of other consultees and contributors is not known.

2.6 In summary, the recommended view of the Comhairle is informed by the undernoted conclusions in relation to the assessment of the identified topics against the relevant policy context as set out in Appendix 2 to this Report, which includes the National Marine Plan 2015, the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy 2020 and the Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy 2025, the Offshore Wind Policy Statement 2020 and National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).

- Principle of Development – the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy identifies 15 Plan Options as the preferred strategic locations for the sustainable development of offshore wind and marine renewables as referenced in the National Marine Plan. The proposed windfarm is located within the site identified as Plan Option N4. However, inclusion as a Plan Option in the Sectoral Marine Plan does not negate the need to consider whether or not the Project as proposed would be acceptable in its location.
    - The Sectoral Marine Plan clearly states that 'The Plan will guide the relevant consenting bodies when making decisions on individual licence and consent applications but should not be considered as pre-determining those decision-making processes.'
    - In terms of matters of specific interest to the Comhairle, the Sectoral Marine Plan identifies potential adverse visual impacts and landscape/seascape character impacts (as the most significant risk), potential impacts on commercial fishing, navigational safety, recreational angling, potential impacts to the tourism sector associated with visual landscape and seascape issues, and potential noise impacts to the local population. The Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan (2025) and its Sustainability Appraisal identify similar key environmental risks. The Sectoral Marine Plan confirms that, as part of any decision making on the suitability of Plan Option N4, these would need careful consideration, and mitigation where possible.
    - The ScotWind leasing round far surpassed the Scottish Government's identified maximum potential capacity of 10GW, with some 27.6GW of supply being identified from 20 developments. Consequently, whilst recognising the importance of maximising renewable energy generation, it is considered that this should not be at any cost and, further, that failing to grant consent for the current development proposed for site N4 would not jeopardise the achievement of the energy supply targets in the Sectoral Marine Plan.
    - It is concluded that in relation to key considerations, as set out in the following assessment, that the significant adverse effects of the proposed development on Landscape, Seascape and Visual and on Cultural Heritage cannot be effectively mitigated, and the resulting harm from these effects alone would be so great that the Principle of Development of an offshore windfarm at this location is not acceptable. Further, the contention that NPF4 has established the principle of development of a windfarm in this location in the marine environment is not accepted.
- Landscape, Seascape, and Visual – the Comhairle has engaged the advice of a Chartered landscape professional to examine the submitted landscape, seascape, and visual impact assessment. The examination largely concurs with the assessment, in that the predicted significant effects, and the number of landscape, seascape, and visual receptors affected, are across an extensive geographical area and there is overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character, quality, and enjoyment of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.
    - On that basis, it is considered that the proposal is not appropriately located and would not accord with relevant landscape-related planning policies, including NPF4 Policy 4 – Natural Places and Policy 11 - Energy, National Marine Plan Policy GEN7 - Landscape/ Seascape, and OHLDP Policy NBH1 – Landscape and EI 8 – energy and Heat Resources. This in turn supports the recommended view that the development is not appropriately located.
    - Further, the significance of effect is so great that it fails to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989 which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent,

to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty of the countryside, and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.

- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage – the Comhairle has examined the Cultural Heritage assessment and concludes that the assessment in terms of terrestrial effects is deficient. In terms of the baseline assessment it is clear that aspects of cultural history and the relationship of this with the marine environment have not been engaged with appropriately. Further, that the assessment of terrestrial likely effects of the proposal on the setting of terrestrial heritage assets and places are seriously underestimated.
    - By way of example, the setting assessment is comprised of 43 designated and 3 undesignated historic environment assets, as a representative sample of important sites along the west coast of Lewis, which were considered under the criteria of distance from the development, turbine blades theoretically visible and coastal setting significance. Of these sites, only two (out of 46) were considered by the developer as likely to experience a medium magnitude of change, resulting in in a moderate adverse significance of effect. For the remainder, the magnitude of change was considered low or negligible, resulting in minor or negligible adverse significance of effects, which are 'not significant' in EIA terms.

    - This is considered to be a surprising conclusion, as the proposed development would be a dominant intrusion into, for what is the most part, a natural landscape/seascape. The findings of the examination of the EIA Report support the recommended view that the development is not appropriately located. It is considered that the proposed development would cause serious harm to the historic environment and would not accord with National Marine Plan Policy GEN6 – Historic Environment, NPF4 Policy 7 – Historic Assets and Places, OHLDP NBH4 – Built Heritage, NBH5 - Archaeology, and NBH6 – Historic Areas.

    - Further, the significance of effect is so great that it fails to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989 which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.
- Offshore Airborne Noise –Comhairle Environmental Health has reviewed the assessment and express a number of concerns about the methodology used and the lack of clarity of the assessment within the EIAR and the robustness of its findings. Most of the concerns raised relate to potential construction phase impacts (percussive piling and drilling), the assessed significance of their effects given the identified concerns with aspects of the methodology used and lack of clarity regarding the assessment process and findings of significance. Consequently, it is concluded that the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposed development would comply with the relevant policy requirements of National Marine Plan Policy GEN13 – Noise, NPF4 Policy 23 – Health and safety, and OHLDP Policy PD6 – Compatibility of Neighbouring Uses. Further, the assessments do not currently provide sufficient detail or clarity to allow full confidence that the mitigation measures relied upon in the EIAR are clearly defined, secured, and capable of being effectively implemented to protect human health.
- Commercial Fisheries – Comhairle Economic Development (Primary Industries) reviewed the EIAR and advise that the assessment fails to provide confidence in mitigation of effects and does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposal would not result in significant adverse effects on commercial fishing and angling, or that such effects would be capable of appropriate and effective mitigation. As a consequence, it is considered that the proposal would not accord with National Marine Plan Policies GEN 1, GEN 4, FISHERIES 1, FISHERIES 2, FISHERIES 3, and WILD FISH 1, and NPF 4 Policy 29 – Rural development.

- Socio Economics - the assessment has been reviewed by Comhairle Economic Development and is considered broadly to identify the correct impacts; however it is considered that the methodology used is inconsistent, and in the case of tourism, there is a lack of engagement with the tourism sector, with the data adopted being out of date, which calls into question the reliability of the findings. Assumptions in the EIA regarding what is classified as 'minor' before and after mitigation require further scrutiny and it is noticeable that nearly all effects are ultimately deemed to be 'Not Significant in EIA terms'. Further, the mitigation measures currently identified are deficient in relation to workforce accommodation and traffic and transport and, more generally, not sufficiently specific or robust, which puts the potential benefits to the Western Isles at significant risk. The advice of Comhairle Economic Development is that in the event that Scottish Ministers are minded to grant consent for the proposal, it is recommended that the socio-economic methodology be independently reviewed, to provide a more comprehensive picture of impacts associated with the totality of the scheme, which can then be disaggregated into offshore and onshore components of the project and, [if possible], conditions are used to secure and strengthen these mitigation measures, including in relation to the provision of a comprehensive Socio-Economic Strategy.

2.7 A review of the above topic chapters of the EIAR indicate that the submission does not meet the EIA requirements, principally on account of the EIAR not enabling a systematic assessment of the project as a whole. In addition, in relation to Cultural Heritage, Airborne Noise, Commercial Fisheries and Socio-Economics, as indicated above, the methodology for the assessments and the resultant findings are not considered sufficiently robust to enable confidence in the conclusions reached. Consequently, overall, it is considered that the submitted EIAR fails to identify the significant environmental effects of the project as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Having regard to the examination of relevant parts of the EIA Report and the consultation responses received (as detailed in Appendix 8 to this Report) it is recommended that the Comhairle:

- **Raises strong concerns about the adequacy of the EIA Report, in relation to the assessment of the significant positive and negative environmental effects of the project as a whole, and specifically in relation to the historic environment, offshore airborne noise, and socio-economic and recreation impacts, including commercial fisheries.**

- **Raises an Objection to all three applications, in relation to the principle of the development of the proposed offshore windfarm at the proposed location and, as a consequence of its location, scale and nature, its likely significant adverse effects on seascape, landscape, and visual amenity, and on the historic environment resources of the planning authority area. These significant adverse effects are such that they are considered to outweigh any positive contribution to renewable energy generation and climate change targets.**

- **Considers that the significance of effect is so great that the proposed development would fail to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989, which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty of the countryside, and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest, and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.**



Contact Officer:	[Redacted] Telephone: 01870 604990 Email: [Redacted]
Appendix 1:	Location Plans
Appendix 2:	Policy Context
Appendix 3:	Legislative Context
Appendix 4:	Regulating Offshore Wind Farm Development in Scottish Waters
Appendix 5:	Application Details
Appendix 6:	Habitat Regulations Appraisal Process
Appendix 7:	Pre-Application Consultation
Appendix 8	Consultations
Background Papers:	None

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	**Implications/None**
Financial	None
Legal	If Scottish Minister determine a Public Local Inquiry is required Legal resource will be required
Staffing	If Scottish Minister determine a Public Local Inquiry is required Planning resource will be required
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	**Implications/None**
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	None
Environmental Impact	None corporately
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

Application summary

5.1 The applications that are the subject of this Report are informed by a Planning Statement and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report. The applications were submitted to the Scottish Ministers on 2 March 2026. Scottish Ministers subsequently consulted the Comhairle as an 'appropriate planning authority' as required by Regulation 16 of The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 and the 'relevant planning authority' under Regulation 18 of The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (the EIA Regulations).

5.2 The applicant is seeking:

- Section 36 consent under The Electricity Act 1989, consent for the generating station and offshore transmission infrastructure;
- Section 36A declaration under The Electricity Act 1989 extinguishing public rights of navigation so far as they pass through the locations in the sea where the structures forming the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm are to be situated;



- Marine licences under The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 with respect to prescribed marine licensable activities during the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of the offshore part of the development.

5.3 If consented, the development would generate and transmit renewable electricity to the national electricity transmission network. The applicant has a connection agreement with Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) for a connection to the grid network on mainland Scotland via SSEN's Alternating Current Substation and High-Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Converter Station (referred to as the SSEN Lewis Hub). The applicant is responsible for the construction and operation of the Onshore Transmission Works connecting to the SSEN Lewis Hub. These onshore works will be subject of a planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, to the Comhairle as the planning authority. The applicant is seeking to deliver electricity to the National Electricity Transmission System from the early 2030s.

SITE CONTEXT AND PROPOSAL

Description of site and its context

Application Site

6.1 The Offshore Project is for a fixed-bottom wind farm with a potential expected capacity of around 900MW to be situated off the northwest coast of Isle of Lewis. The Array Area combined with the Offshore Cable Area of Search is defined as the Offshore Project Boundary.

6.2 The distance from the shore to the Array Area would be approximately 5km -13km and from the shore to the Turbine Area some 6km – 13km.

6.3 The site is approximately 161 km^2 in size. The Offshore Project consists of three areas:

- The Array Area is defined as the total area within which the offshore wind turbine generators ('the Turbines'), associated foundations, array cables and the Offshore Substation Platform (if required) would be located.
- The Turbine Area is a reduced area within the Array Area, within which all surface piercing infrastructure would be located. This is an area of approximately 140 km^2.
- The Offshore Cable Area of Search is approximately 47km^2 would accommodate the Array Cables to Landfall or the Export Cables along with the Horizontal Directional Drilling Exit Pit Area.

6.4 The water depths across the Array Area range from 37m - 67m with the southwest corner of the Array Area reaching 72m.

Context

6.5 The Array Area and Offshore Cable Area of Search are located off the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis, with the proposed landfall area situated to the north of Barvas, to the northwest of the cemetery, towards the coast.

6.6 Within the area of the coast closest to the proposed site are many designated and non-designated heritage assets. The designated heritage assets include several Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments and one Conservation Area. The non-designated heritage assets include numerous monuments, places and other assets included in the Historic Environment Record for the area. There are also a number of cemeteries located within this coastal area. The site, while outwith the boundary of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA) is within 11km (approximately 6.8 miles) from it and therefore there would be intervisibility.

6.7 The applicant has drawn a distinction between the Offshore Project (which is the subject of the applications that form the basis of the consultation and this Report) and the Onshore Transmission Works Project, which is the subject of a separate planning application. The Onshore Transmission Works Project would include the infrastructure associated with the transmission of electricity from the offshore wind turbines to the grid connection point at the Lewis Hub High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) convertor station near Stornoway.

6.8 Only limited details of the Onshore Transmission Works Project have been included in the submission for these applications and the EIAR. Comments on this approach and consideration of its procedural compliance with recent case law are included below.

Description of development

6.9 The submitted Planning Statement and Chapter 3 of the EIA Report describes the proposed development. The Offshore Project comprises the Turbines, their foundations, Offshore Cables, Offshore Substation Platform (if required), and Landfall.

6.10 The Turbine parameters include:

- Up to 44 of the largest offshore Turbine type, with a maximum blade tip height of 338.4m above mean sea level (MSL), with a minimum 30m blade clearance above MSL, and associated foundations;
- Up to 60 of the smallest Turbine type, with a maximum blade tip height of 293.8m above MSL, with a minimum 30m blade clearance above MSL, and associated foundations.

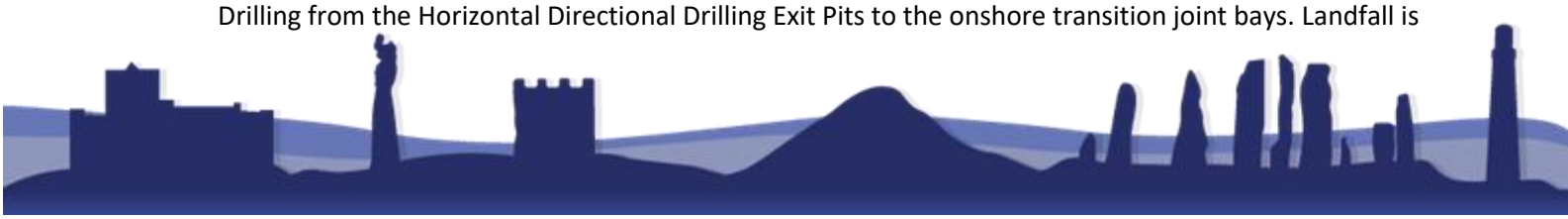
6.11 Indicative layouts have been used for the Turbines and Offshore Cable layouts within the EIAR, which take into account known constraints and opportunities. During the design process, consideration was given to a 'fanned' layout of Turbines and a 'grid' layout, which optimises the available space and is the highest density layout. A 'grid' layout was selected for assessment in the EIAR, as a worst case for potential effects associated with the seascape, landscape and visual, as this presents a less organic layout to the coastline.

6.12 In terms of foundation design, a structured feasibility-led process identified multi-leg jacket foundations with driven (using percussive piling), or drilled-and-grouted pin piles, as the most appropriate for the majority of the site, with hybrid multi-leg jacket Gravity Base Systems concepts retained as contingency solutions for specific installation or supply chain risks.

6.13 The EIAR considers two electricity transmission scenarios for delivery of either an Offshore Substation Platform or a Landfall Substation. Only one of these two scenarios will be delivered. The Landfall Substation option would limit the engineering work required offshore. However, the Offshore Substation Platform would reduce the number of Offshore Cables required at Landfall to two, as opposed to twelve with a Landfall Substation. Twelve cables would result in a higher level of complexity and technical risk associated with the construction works.

6.14 The Offshore Substation Platform (if required) would be located within the Turbine Area, although the exact location would be determined during detailed design. The Offshore Substation Platform topside would house the electrical equipment necessary for stepping up the voltage from the Array Cables. It would also include supporting functions such as storage, communications (including masts), and may feature a helipad. Up to 12 Array Cables (dependent on the final layout and configuration) would enter the Offshore Substation Platform from the Turbines, and up to 2 Export Cables would exit the Offshore Substation Platform.

6.15 The Landfall cable and substation include for the installation of Export Cables via Horizontal Directional Drilling from the Horizontal Directional Drilling Exit Pits to the onshore transition joint bays. Landfall is



the interface between the Offshore Project and the Onshore Transmission Works Project, and the offshore cable (either Array Cable to Landfall or Export Cable) comes ashore at a coastal cliff at Barvas via Horizontal Directional Drilling.

6.16 The Offshore Cable Area of Search was designed for the location of the Offshore Cables that connect the Turbines or Offshore Substation Platform to Landfall. Following a technical feasibility analysis, a smaller Offshore Cable Area of Search was identified encompassing only the most northern part of the original Area, to minimise impact on commercial fisheries.

Construction phase

6.17 An indicative construction programme is included within the submission. A 5-year construction period is anticipated for the Offshore Project, with work programmed between April and October to utilize optimal weather conditions. Construction working hours would be expected to be up to 24 hours, 7 days a week. Construction works for offshore and onshore elements are anticipated to overlap.

6.18 In terms of Offshore works, site preparation would take place in Years 1-3, April to September (Q2-Q3), with foundation installation in Years 2 and 3, the Turbines and Offshore Substation Platform (if required) installation in Years 3, 4 and 5, and Offshore cable installation in Years 3 and 4. Landfall Horizonal Directional Drilling installation would take place from Q3 in Years 2, across all Year 3 and up to Q3 in Year 4. The Onshore project construction would take place across all five years and during all quarters.

6.19 During construction, the Turbines would be marked by lights that are visible from 2 nautical miles (nm) from all angles. It is intended that the site will be marked as a buoyed construction area.

6.20 Permanent lighting location and characteristics would be dependent on the final Turbine layout and determined in consultation with key stakeholders. All marking and lighting would meet relevant regulations and guidance, including for aviation and maritime.

Operation and Maintenance

6.21 The overall Operation and Maintenance strategy would be finalised once the Offshore Project design is fixed and a location for the onshore Operational and Maintenance base has been confirmed. Options for the Operational and Maintenance base are currently being considered, and work has been undertaken to assess Scottish port capabilities to meet the Offshore Project's requirements, although Stornoway Port is the preferred location. The submission therefore outlines the reasonably foreseeable schedule and unscheduled maintenance activities for the Project.

6.22 All offshore infrastructure, including the Turbines, foundations, cables and any required Offshore Substation Platform and their ancillary infrastructure would be included in monitoring and maintenance programmes. Operational and Maintenance activities may be required at any time during the lifecycle of the Offshore Project and vessels would be required for this. Anticipated vessel requirements have been provided as part of the application submissions.

Decommissioning

6.23 At the end of the Offshore Project's operational lifetime, it is anticipated that all structures located above the seabed would be fully removed. Decommissioning would generally follow the reverse sequence of construction, using similar types and numbers of vessels and equipment. While the duration is expected to be comparable to the construction phase, the programme may shorten depending on technological advances and best practice at the time of decommissioning.

6.24 Prior to construction, a decommissioning programme would be required to be prepared, supported by appropriate financial security, in line with obligations under The Energy Act (2004) and the Scotland

Act (2016). An indicative decommissioning process has been prepared to support the current applications.

Safety Zones

6.25 During construction, safety zones of 500m radius would be sought for the installation/construction of all offshore infrastructure. Before any commissioning activities take place, a safety zone with a radius of 50m would be established around each constructed Turbine or Offshore Substation Platform (if required), and their associated foundation structures. This measure would ensure the safety of personnel and equipment during the final stages of construction.

6.26 An Outline Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan has been submitted as part of the application. It is intended that it would be updated post consent, as more information becomes available and would be agreed upon with relevant stakeholders prior to construction.

MAIN ISSUES

Principle of Development

7.1 The development of a commercial offshore wind farm as proposed would reflect UK and national policies and help to meet the ambitious targets for the growth of renewable energy, as outlined in numerous policy documents (see Appendix 2 to this Report). Further, the National Marine Plan states that the Plan Option areas identified in the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy 2020 are considered the preferred strategic locations for the sustainable development of offshore wind and marine renewables.

7.2 The Project proposal is located within the Sectoral Marine Plan North Region, as Plan Option N4, in accordance with Policy RENEWABLES 1 of the National Marine Plan. The proposal would have a generating capacity of 900MW, which would accord with the maximum 1GW capacity identified within the Sectoral Marine Plan. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar responded to the draft SMP development process in March 2020 lending support to the North region Plan Options, including Plan Option N4.

7.3 In terms of matters of specific interest to the Comhairle, the Sectoral Marine Plan identifies the potential for adverse visual impacts and landscape/seascape character impacts (as the most significant risk), and potential impacts on commercial fishing, navigational safety, recreational angling, the tourism sector associated with visual landscape and seascape issues, and potential noise impacts to the local population.

7.4 The Sectoral Marine Plan confirms that, as part of any decision making on the suitability of Plan Option N4, these would need careful consideration, and mitigation where possible. For some adverse effects, potential mitigation measures would be limited but could include the selection of smaller turbines to reduce visual impact.

7.5 The Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan (2025) broadly reflects similar issues in its consideration of Option Areas (formerly called Plan Options). The related Sustainability Appraisal identifies potentially significant adverse effects for each Option Area. Those relating to N4 include effects on landscape and coastal character and on visual receptors, including from the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area, effects on historic environment features and their settings, and effects on population and human health.

7.6 Whilst the site is located within Plan Option N4, a preferred strategic location, this does not negate the need to consider whether or not the Project as proposed would be acceptable in this location. The Sectoral Marine Plan states that it is intended to guide the relevant consenting bodies when making



decisions on individual licence and consent applications, but it also goes on to state that it should not be considered as pre-determining those decision-making processes.

7.7 The ScotWind leasing round far surpassed the Scottish Government's target of 10GW of potential energy supply, with some 27.6GW of supply being identified from 20 developments. Consequently, whilst recognising and accepting the importance of maximising renewable energy generation, it is considered that this should not be at any cost and, further, that the failing to grant consent for the current development proposed for site N4 would not jeopardise the achievement of the energy supply targets in the Sectoral Marine Plan.

7.8 It is recognised that the Comhairle has previously expressed support for the establishment of an offshore wind farm in this location. However, that was at Sectoral Marine Plan formulation stage, prior to the project being designed and its scale and consequential effects being fully appreciated.

7.9 Further, the contention within the application submissions that NPF4 has established the principle of development of a windfarm in this location in the marine environment is not accepted. NPF4 forms part of the terrestrial Development Plan and relates to development on, over or under land. The Offshore Project does not include an application for planning permission. As such, whilst the provisions of NPF4 are an important material consideration, and the need for large-scale offshore renewable energy is not disputed, the principle of the proposed development in this location has not been established under NPF4.

7.10 Moreover, even if the proposal were to be considered a National Development, NPF4 clearly indicates that such a designation is not intended to describe how projects should be designed, matters to consider, or impact assessments and mitigation to be applied. It also states that decision makers for applications for consent for national developments should take into account all relevant policies.

7.11 Overall, it is concluded that in relation to key considerations, as set out in the following assessment, that the significant adverse effects of the proposed development on Landscape, Seascape and Visual and on Cultural Heritage cannot be effectively mitigated, and the resulting harm from these effects alone would be so great that, notwithstanding any potential socio-economic benefits or positive impacts on climate change, the Principle of Development of an offshore windfarm at this location is not acceptable.

Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact

7.12 The advice provided by the Landscape Consultant commissioned by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is set out within Appendix 8A to this Report. The assessment reflects that advice.

Overview of SLVIA findings

7.13 Overall, the approach to the Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA) within the EIAR is considered to accord with relevant guidance, and its scope is generally regarded as appropriate for informing a robust policy appraisal of the anticipated landscape, seascape and visual effects. The assessment is supported by a comprehensive suite of illustrative figures and well-presented photomontages, with the SLVIA and associated appendices together providing a thorough evaluation of the anticipated effects on landscape character, seascape and visual amenity.

7.14 The applicant predicts a very large number of significant effects on sensitive landscape, seascape and visual interests. In identifying likely significant effects, the SLVIA generally adopts a proportionate and balanced assessment methodology, and the conclusions reached are, in most instances, agreed with.

Context

7.15 In assessing effects, it is important to recognise that, with a maximum blade tip height of up to 338.4m above MSL, the proposed turbines are exceptionally large. By way of indicative comparison, the Shard in London—Western Europe's tallest building — is approximately 306 metres high. While the urban context of the Shard differs significantly from the rural and coastal setting of the proposed development, the comparison nevertheless provides a useful indication of the potential scale of the turbines. Furthermore, at approximately 6km from the coastline at their closest point, the turbines would be situated in relatively close proximity to the coast. In this context, there is very limited, if any, precedent or understanding of how turbines of this scale would appear within such sensitive seascape settings.

Policy compliance appraisal

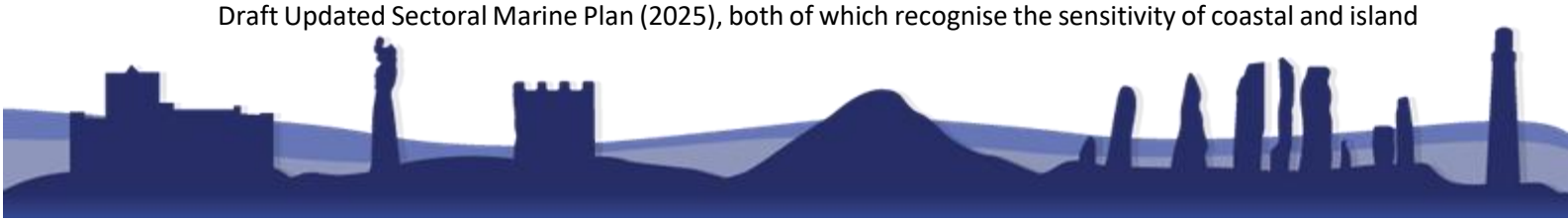
7.16 The EIAR assessment identifies widespread and, in many locations, major adverse effects on landscape character, coastal character, visual amenity and the special qualities of nationally designated landscapes. In policy terms, these findings give rise to significant tensions with several elements of the relevant national and local development plan framework relating to landscape, seascape and visual protection.

7.17 In relation to NPF4 Policy 4 – Natural Places, the appraisal provides overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would result in significant adverse effects on nationally important South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. The SLVIA concludes that the proposed development would erode key scenic qualities associated with remoteness, wildness, openness, naturalness, dark skies and undeveloped Atlantic horizons. It further identifies substantial adverse effects on the integrity and appreciation of the NSA, particularly within the Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline and Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan landscape areas. These conclusions indicate a clear tension with Policy 4, which seeks to protect the character, integrity and special qualities of nationally designated landscapes and avoid unacceptable adverse impacts on their scenic qualities.

7.18 The findings also raise significant concerns in relation to NPF4 Policy 11 – Energy. While this policy provides strong support for renewable energy development, it also requires careful consideration of impacts on landscape and visual amenity, communities, tourism and cumulative effects. The assessment identifies widespread Significant (Major) visual effects across substantial sections of the northwest Lewis coastline, including effects on residents, road users, tourism receptors, recreational users and heritage visitors. The proposed development would become a highly prominent and frequently dominant feature across many coastal views, materially compromising visual amenity and the experience of beaches, coastal walks and recreational landscapes. The scale and geographic extent of these effects suggest a substantial degree of conflict with the policy requirement to ensure that significant landscape and visual impacts are appropriately addressed.

7.19 In relation to Scotland's National Marine Plan – GEN7 Landscape/Seascape, the assessment identifies extensive adverse effects on seascape character, coastal views and visual amenity. GEN7 requires marine developments to minimise adverse impacts on landscape, seascape and visual amenity, including effects on coastal character, designated landscapes and cumulative seascape experience. The assessment concludes that the proposed development would fundamentally alter the visual composition and experiential qualities of many west-facing coastal and seaward views, replacing open and undeveloped Atlantic horizons with a dominant engineered offshore presence. The assessment also identifies a substantial weakening of natural spatial hierarchy, erosion of scenic integrity and adverse effects on the appreciation of remoteness and wildness. These findings indicate substantial tension with the objectives of GEN7.

7.20 The conclusions of the assessment are also materially relevant to the Sectoral Marine Plan and the Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan (2025), both of which recognise the sensitivity of coastal and island



landscapes to large-scale offshore wind development. The assessment demonstrates that the exceptional scale of the turbines, their close proximity to the coastline and the extensive geographic spread of visibility would result in significant seascape and visual effects across sensitive Atlantic-facing landscapes and designated coastal areas. The findings therefore engage directly with policy concerns relating to impacts on scenic quality, coastal character, dark skies and recreational experience.

7.21 At the local level, the assessment indicates significant tension with Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan Policy NBH1 – Landscape. Policy NBH1 requires development to relate appropriately to landscape character, maintain landscape integrity and avoid unacceptable significant landscape and visual impacts, particularly within National Scenic Areas and Wild Land Areas. The assessment identifies significant adverse effects on both the Boggy Moorland and Prominent Hills and Mountains Landscape Character Types, including erosion of remoteness, disruption of openness and horizontal scale, increased perception of human influence and competition with distinctive skylines and coastal panoramas. The assessment also concludes that the integrity of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA would be materially compromised. These findings suggest substantial conflict with the core objectives and policy tests contained within NBH1.

7.22 Similarly, the findings are relevant to OHLDP Policy EI 8 – Energy and Heat Resources, which supports renewable energy proposals where unacceptable adverse effects on landscape, visual amenity, tourism and natural heritage can be avoided or satisfactorily addressed. The assessment identifies widespread significant effects on visual amenity, tourism and recreational receptors, together with substantial adverse effects on nationally important scenic landscapes. The extent, scale and severity of the identified effects therefore indicate that the proposed development gives rise to significant policy concerns under EI 8 in relation to landscape fit, visual impact and effects on the scenic and experiential qualities of the receiving environment.

7.23 Overall, while the proposed development aligns with broader national policy support for renewable energy generation and offshore wind deployment, the assessment identifies extensive and, in many instances, detrimental effects on landscape character, seascape character, visual amenity and nationally important scenic qualities. The findings therefore indicate substantial tension and, in several respects, likely conflict with those elements of the policy framework concerned with safeguarding landscape, seascape and visual interests, particularly within nationally designated and highly sensitive coastal environments.

Conclusion on seascape, landscape and visual impact

7.24 The variety of highly distinctive natural and cultural features of this part of the Isle of Lewis and the wider Outer Hebrides make a substantial contribution to quality of life, not only for local residents but also for the many visitors drawn to the islands from across the UK and internationally. The combination of expansive coastal scenery, remote moorlands, rugged uplands, historic settlements, and distinctive crofting landscapes creates a strong sense of place and cultural identity that is widely valued and recognised.

7.25 The scenic beaches, dramatic Atlantic coastline, traditional crofting townships, and historic landmarks collectively support recreation, tourism, and outdoor activities, while also contributing to community wellbeing and cultural continuity. Visitors are attracted by the islands' perceived remoteness, tranquillity, and scenic quality, with beaches such as Eoropie, Dalbeg, Reef, Shawbost, and Bosta forming key visitor destinations and important visual and recreational assets. These seascapes and landscapes provide opportunities for walking, wildlife watching, surfing, photography, and appreciation of the natural environment, reinforcing the Outer Hebrides' reputation as an internationally valued tourism destination.



7.26 Cultural heritage features, including historic crofting patterns, archaeological remains, and prominent lighthouses, further strengthen the connection between people and place. Together, the natural and cultural qualities of the islands play an important role in supporting local identity, tourism, recreation, and the wider experience of living in and visiting the Outer Hebrides.

7.27 The appraisal concludes that the proposed development would result in widespread significant adverse effects on landscape, coastal character, visual amenity, and the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA, particularly along the northwest coast of Lewis. Although the development would not physically alter the landscape, the introduction of extremely large-scale offshore turbines within open Atlantic views would substantially reduce perceptions of remoteness, wildness, openness, and naturalness that define the Boggy Moorland and Prominent Hills and Mountains landscape character types, as well as the NSA's special landscape qualities. Across exposed coastal character areas, the turbines would form a dominant engineered presence on previously undeveloped horizons, weakening the 'edge-of-the-world' experience, reducing scenic simplicity, and disrupting the perceived natural relationship between land, sea, and sky.

7.28 Visual effects would be strongest around Melbost Borve, Shader, Clach an Trushal, and Barvas, where turbines would occupy substantial portions of the sea horizon and become prominent or dominant features in residential, recreational, and heritage views. The assessment also identifies significant night-time effects arising from aviation and navigation lighting, particularly in dark-sky coastal areas, further increasing perceptions of industrialisation within highly valued scenic and remote landscapes.

7.29 Taking into account the extensive geographical extent of the predicted significant effects and the number of landscape, seascape, and visual receptors affected, there is overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character, quality, and enjoyment of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. On that basis, it is considered not to accord with relevant landscape-related planning policies, including NPF4 Policies 4 – Natural Places and 11 - Energy, National Marine Plan Policy GEN7 – Landscape/ Seascape and OHLDP Policies NBH1 – Landscape and EI 8 – Energy and Heat Resources.

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

7.30 The comments of the Comhairle's Archaeology Service are set out in Appendix 8 to this Report. The assessment below reflects and expands upon those comments.

Marine Environment

7.31 The EIAR sets out the appropriate policy and guidance in relation to assessment of known archaeological and the potential for unknown archaeological and palaeo-environmental assets and deposits within the proposed Array Area and the Offshore Cable Area of Search.

7.32 The baseline data for the offshore development is presented in the Marine Archaeology Desk Based Assessment. This comprises of a good overview of the geological and palaeo-landscape history of the Offshore Project Boundary and wider area, covering the glacial, post glacial environment's up to the Holocene epoch. It also summarises the geophysical survey results identifying anomalies that will require consideration in terms of mitigation.

7.33 The assessment of the Marine Archaeological Study Area is presented in the Assessment of Geophysical and Hydrographic data and review of Geotechnical data. It is comprised of appropriately referenced data on known archaeological assets and the archaeological assessment of geophysical/geotechnical and hydrographic survey data. However, it is noted that there is a survey data gap of approximately 2.5km along the eastern nearshore area of the Offshore Cable Area of Search. The archaeological potential for this area is currently uncertain and therefore potential development impacts have not

been assessed. Further survey with archaeological assessment of geophysical data will be required for this area.

7.34 From a number of anomalies identified from the geophysical survey data, five have been assigned archaeological exclusion buffer zones, three of which have been assigned an archaeological potential rating of medium. Assessment of geophysical/geotechnical data identifies the potential for quaternary palaeoenvironment and archaeological deposits to be present in certain areas. Further archaeological assessment of survey data can provide valuable information on the processes of glacial history that leads into the climatic amelioration of the Late palaeolithic and Early Holocene periods (Annex 15.1.2 - Archaeological Assessment of Geophysical and Hydrographic Data, Volume 2c).

7.35 The embedded offshore mitigation measures outlined in EIAR Table 15-15, should ensure that direct impacts on assets or palaeo-landscapes will be mitigated based on Protocol for Archaeological Discoveries and through condition for a program of archaeological works that could include but is not limited to, further survey and reporting, micro-siting, recording or sampling.

Terrestrial Environment

➢ *Methodology*

7.36 The Desk Based Assessment also provides an archaeological and historical overview of the chronological periods of the Outer Hebrides from the first known occupation up until the recent past. However, this study does not reflect the standard required to present a clear and detailed understanding of the archaeology and history of the Outer Hebrides (as far as responsibly possible). This part of the Desk Based Assessment gives a generic response that fails to draw out important detail regarding Outer Hebridean archaeology and history. This is a fundamental error. The fact that the marine environment has been an almost constant feature to many aspects of cultural history seems to have been not engaged with fully.

7.37 While it is accepted that archaeological evidence of engagement with the marine environment is limited for earlier periods of prehistory, it is still clear that the marine environment was exploited and that trade networks existed from the Early Neolithic onwards, not to mention the routes of travel and communications developed from the first populations to arrive in the Outer Hebrides, during the Mesolithic period.

7.38 The overriding trend for settlement in the Outer Hebrides is for multi period reuse of locations over millennia, subsequently early structures and deposits are buried beneath later sites or sand accretion. Most of these sites are located in machair environments for agricultural soils and ease of access to the coast.

7.39 The Iron Age period in the islands, in contrast to the mainland, persisted over a long period (circa 800 BC until the arrival of the Norse). Throughout this period the marine environment is intrinsically linked to these changing social and political cultures which are reflected in land based archaeological remains. These comprise notably of multi period settlement remains, broch sites, many located near the coast, early church sites either through structural remains or place name evidence, and Norse sites identified through excavation or inferred from burials and chance finds.

7.40 A number of anomalies and errors have been identified with the Desk Based Assessment, including:

- in relation to the importance of the sea and access to the coast, the likelihood of Barvas being the nearest Norse site to the development, the intrinsically close social and cultural links that many of the communities have with the historic graveyards located along the coast has not been identified;



- it is not clear why Gearrannan Conservation Area (a designated heritage asset) has been omitted from the Desk Based Assessment and any subsequent assessment.

7.41 The EIAR includes an assessment of the effects on setting to onshore archaeological assets from the offshore development. It is disappointing, however, that although reference is made to the Historic Environment Scotland (HES) guidance (Managing Change in The Environment – Setting 2016), from the assessment within the EIAR, the role of setting and what is meant by setting in relation to the significance of a heritage asset seems not to be fully appreciated.

7.42 NPF4 defines setting as: 'Setting' is the way the surroundings of a historic asset or place contribute to how it is understood, appreciated and experienced. The HES guidance advises: Both tangible and less tangible elements can be important in understanding the setting. Less tangible elements may include function, sensory perceptions or the historical and scenic associations of places or landscapes.

7.43 The setting of a historic asset can incorporate a range of factors, not all of which will apply to every case. These include:

- current landscape context;
- views to, from and across or beyond the historic asset or place;
- key vistas (for instance, a 'frame' of natural features that give the historic asset or place a context, whether intentional or not);
- the prominence of the historic asset or place in views throughout the surrounding area, bearing in mind that sites need not be visually prominent to have a setting;
- aesthetic qualities;
- character of the surrounding landscape;
- general and specific views including foregrounds and backdrops;
- views from within an asset, outward over key elements in the surrounding landscape;
- relationships with other features, both built and natural;
- non-visual factors such as historical, place name, or scenic associations, or sensory factors;
- a 'sense of place': the overall experience of an asset which may combine some of the above factors.

7.44 Factors to be considered in assessing the impact of a change on the setting of a historic asset or place include:

- whether key views to or from the historic asset or place are interrupted;
- whether the proposed change would dominate or detract in a way that affects our ability to understand and appreciate the historic asset;
- the visual impact of the proposed change relative to the scale of the historic asset or place and its setting;
- the visual impact of the proposed change relative to the current place of the historic asset in the landscape;
- the presence, extent, character and scale of the existing built environment within the surroundings of the historic asset or place and how the proposed development compares to this;
- the magnitude of the proposed change relative to the sensitivity of the setting of an asset – sometimes relatively small changes, or a series of small changes, can have a major impact on our ability to appreciate and understand a historic asset or place. Points to consider include:
    - the ability of the setting to absorb new development without eroding its key characteristics;
    - the effect of the proposed change on qualities of the existing setting such as sense of remoteness, current noise levels, evocation of the historical past, sense of place, cultural identity, associated spiritual responses;
    - cumulative impacts: individual developments may not cause significant impacts on their own, but may do so when they are combined.



7.45 In addition, the EIAR has scoped out from the assessment potential onshore effects during construction period. Due to their temporary nature, the EIAR considers that these are not likely to be significant. This approach to the assessment of effects is not supported, particularly as, in this case, the construction period would last some five years. Rather, it is suggested that it would have been appropriate for these potential impacts to be considered as part of the EIA assessment process, which allows for the consideration of impacts of a temporary or reversible nature, and enables these to be considered as part of an overall assessment of significance of effect.

- *Setting impacts*

7.46 The setting assessment in the EIAR is comprised of 43 designated and 3 undesignated historic environment assets, as a representative sample of important sites along the west coast of Lewis, which were considered under the criteria of distance from the development, turbine blades theoretically visible and coastal setting significance.

7.47 Of these 46 sites, only two were considered likely to experience a medium magnitude of change, resulting in in a moderate adverse significance of effect. For the remainder, the magnitude of change was considered low or negligible, resulting in minor or negligible adverse significance of effects, which are 'not significant' in EIA terms.

7.48 This is considered to be a surprising result, particularly given the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan (2025), which identified the potential for significant (moderate and/or major) adverse effects for historic environment features and their settings. It indicates that, 'for development taking place within 15km of the coastline, there can be less potential for the avoidance of significant effects on the setting of coastal historic environment features leading to higher significance of effect' (para 5.1.58). Table 11 states that, 'due to the proximity to the coastline and adjacent land, the development of offshore wind in N4 has the potential to significantly affect the setting of coastal nationally important historic environment features. Such sites include stone circles, burial cairns and brochs on Lewis.'

7.49 The proposed development would be a dominant intrusion into, for what is the most part, a natural landscape/seascape. The Isle of Lewis has had extremely limited industrial development and much of the present landscape relates to low impact crofting activity and is a palimpsest of the past historic environment. Sites such as Cnoc na Moine Cairn, Clach an Trushal and Arnol Blackhouse are good examples where the concept of impacts on setting have not been fully regarded.

7.50 Importantly the reason for this absence seems to be the lack of detailed understanding of Outer Hebridean archaeology and history, presented in the Desk Based Assessment that forms part of the EIAR. Both these prehistoric sites (Cnoc na Moine Cairn and Clach an Trushal) are single assets that are part of wider Neolithic ritual landscapes, and it seems implausible that the seascape was not a significant part of physical and spiritual world. With regards to Arnol Blackhouse, the views across the landscape reflect the differing cultures that have occupied the land along this western seaboard. The views across this multi period historical landscape are key vistas which are integral to the blackhouses cultural significance.

7.51 Further examples where the importance of the site has not been fully understood are Dùn Stuigh and St Peter's Church, Pabay Mor. The location of both sites is integral to the seascape. The Dùn clearly projects its prominence over the entrance to the interior of Loch Roag from the open sea, as well likely being a defensive structure as well. While St Peter's is likely a medieval structure, it is built into an earlier settlement mound and place name evidence of the island 'Pabbay' strongly suggest an Early Christian origin; potentially founded by Irish missionaries or their followers. The tradition for

establishing churches on remote islands was to transpose the teachings of St Anthony in remote desert isolation to that of isolation in the ocean. Here then we see that the view outward across the sea is a key element of the site.

7.52 For the Calanias Ritual landscape area we see ancient monuments interact with historic and modern settlements; however, these all occupy the lower levels. The surrounding ridge line has extremely limited intrusion in terms of a communications mast. The introduction turbine hubs and blades along the ridge would add an aspect of intrusion into this area. Given that Calanais is the main archaeological tourist attraction on the Isle of Lewis and its association with celestial phenomena making it an attraction in the day and at night; there is the potential for attributed value by the public to be impacted. This has not been reflected to any degree in the assessment.

7.53 In addition:

- The justification for excluding Pabbay Beag from further assessment is not supported.
- The EIA Report considers sites that are low or much diminished to be of a lesser value; however, this should not necessarily detract from the contribution made by setting to the importance or special qualities of the site.
- The photomontages for Arnol clearly demonstrate a development dominating the landscape/seascape; this also the case from the viewpoints that represent Reef beach and from Forsnaval. In the last example the development dominates the cluster of islands in west Loch Roag, let alone the heritage assets that are located on them.
- The finding that the Moderate Adverse combined effect of the offshore and onshore projects on the Category C listed Barvas Free Church would be Not Significant in EIA terms does not accord with the assessment methodology and is disputed.

Conclusion on archaeology and cultural heritage

7.54 Overall, the assessment within the EIAR of the potential effect on the marine historic environment is supported and, subject to appropriate mitigation, the likely residual effects are considered acceptable.

7.55 In contrast, the assessment within the EIAR of the potential effects on the setting of terrestrial heritage assets and places is considered inadequate. There are errors, omissions and anomalies within the Desk Based Assessment and, as a result, it is considered that the likely impacts on setting are not fully understood and have not been satisfactorily assessed.

7.56 It is clear that the limited distance of this development from the coast will negatively impact the general character of the west side of the Isle of Lewis. The exceptional preservation of the cultural heritage remains that span over at least 6 millennia are linked into the present-day culture of the island's communities and are an important asset in terms of tangible and intangible heritage, cultural engagement, and sense of place.

7.57 For the reasons set out above, it is considered that this development is not appropriately located and the likely resulting effects of the proposal on the setting of terrestrial heritage assets and places are seriously underestimated. Consequently, the proposed development would cause serious harm to the historic environment and would not accord with National Marine Plan Policy GEN6 – Historic Environment, NPF4 Policy 7 – Historic Assets and Places, OHLDP NBH4 – Built Heritage, NBH5 - Archaeology, and NBH6 – Historic Areas.

Offshore Airborne Noise

7.58 The comments from Comhairle Environmental Health are included in Appendix 8 to this Report and the assessment below reflects these comments. The response considers matters within the remit of Comhairle Environmental Health, namely public health protection, environmental nuisance and amenity considerations.

7.59 A number of concerns have been expressed about the methodology used and the lack of clarity of the assessment within the EIAR and the robustness of its findings. Most of the concerns raised relate to potential construction phase impacts and the assessed significance of their effects.

7.60 It is recommended that:

- the baseline noise survey assessments are repeated to reflect the time of construction operations.
- a marine-specific assessment approach is used rather than BS 5228-1. Such an approach should be based on methodologies and evidence appropriate to offshore environments and should demonstrably reflect the characteristics of offshore piling activities and their potential to affect onshore human receptors.

7.61 In addition, construction-phase percussive piling noise using variable hammer energy scenarios is modelled within the EIAR, with results presented in Tables 19-23 to 19-27. While the use of variable hammer energy is acknowledged as reflective of offshore construction practice, the role of these assumptions in informing the assessment conclusions is not sufficiently clear for the purposes of informed decision-making. Clarification is required of whether the conclusion of 'not significant' construction-phase effects in Table 19-27 is robust under continuous 100% hammer energy piling, together with confirmation on whether any reliance is placed on reduced or variable hammer energy as an embedded or secured mitigation measure?

7.62 In relation to the results in Tables 19-23, 19-24, 19-25 and 19-26, the information in the four tables is logically structured and systematically organised. However, the results are not clear in practical or assessment terms for several reasons, including in relation to an explanation of significance, the distance measurements, the use of A-weighted LAeq.T, and the absence of a clear 'worst-case' summary.

7.63 There is also a lack of clarity about how the three percussive piling zones referenced in Table 19-28 are derived from, or relate to, the Maximum Design Scenario described in Table 19-21 including:

- the spatial definition and extent of each zone;
- the basis for adopting a zonal approach for airborne percussive piling noise; and
- how these zones relate to the predicted noise levels and significance conclusions presented earlier in Chapter 19?

7.64 The statement at paragraph 19.8.1.16 referring to further mitigation does not provide the level of certainty normally required to conclude that major or moderate significant adverse effects on human health will not occur. Reliance on post-consent discussion with MD-LOT is not equivalent to secured mitigation.

7.65 Further, as currently presented, it is not fully clear that the conclusions in Tables 19-29 and 19-44 are robust under all reasonably foreseeable construction scenarios, nor that potential moderate or major adverse effects on human health can be confidently ruled out at the point of consent. There remains uncertainty around:

- worst-case exposure scenarios;
- reliance on variable or reduced hammer energy;
- the role of zoning in mitigation; and
- the extent to which post-consent measures are relied upon.

7.66 As such, it is not possible to be fully confident currently that moderate or major adverse effects on human health would not occur under all reasonably foreseeable construction scenarios. Accordingly,

further clarification is advised before full weight is placed on the stated residual 'not significant' conclusions.

7.67 In addition, the measures in Chapter 25, Table 25-14 (summary of environmental management and mitigation measures relevant to the Proposed Development) do not currently provide sufficient detail or clarity to allow full confidence that the mitigation measures relied upon in the EIAR are clearly defined, secured, and capable of being effectively implemented to protect human health.

7.68 It is also considered that the information in Chapter 25, Table 25-14, should be clarified and, where necessary, supplemented, to clearly distinguish between:

- embedded mitigation forming part of the assessment,
- future management measures, and
- mitigation to be secured through consent conditions or licensing.

7.69 In addition, in terms of the operational phase of the development, it is considered that the scoping-out of operational infrasound and low-frequency noise (LFN), as presented in Table 19-5, should be re-examined. While this approach has been based largely on onshore evidence, the increasing availability of data from operational offshore wind farms, offshore-specific sound propagation conditions, and the scale of modern turbine designs warrant a review of whether the original assumptions remain valid.

7.70 This issue should be reassessed at a proportionate screening level, using available offshore operational evidence, to demonstrate whether infrasound and LFN continue to be appropriately controlled. Such a re-examination should clearly explain why these noise components are not expected to give rise to adverse effects on human health, taking into account offshore conditions and receptor distances.

7.71 This clarification would assist in demonstrating that potential human health impacts associated with operational infrasound and low-frequency noise have been fully considered and that the scoping-out position remains robust and justified.

Conclusion on offshore airborne noise

7.72 Overall, given the identified concerns with aspects of the methodology use and lack of clarity regarding the assessment process and findings of significance, it is concluded that the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposed development would comply with the relevant policy requirements of National Marine Plan Policy GEN13 – Noise, NPF4 Policy 23 – Health and safety, and OHLDP Policy PD6 – Compatibility of Neighbouring Uses.

Commercial fisheries

7.73 The comments made by the Comhairle's Primary Industries Officer are included in Appendix 8 of this Report and the assessment below reflects those comments.

7.74 In terms of commercial fisheries, as with the use of ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas) blocks that do not show an entirely accurate picture, it is important to note that the use of AIS (Automatic Identification System) cannot be fully relied upon, highlighting the importance of local consultation.

7.75 Mitigation A003 proposes that Disruption Agreements would be implemented to coordinate and agree appropriate cooperation and establish evidence-based disruption payments to fisherman, where identified as significant within the EIA. It has not been possible to assess the effectiveness of this measure without further details, specifically, of the agreed 'appropriate co-operation'.



7.76 A number of suggested measures were put forward at a meeting held with the fishing community in Stornoway. Had similarly specific measures been identified as options within the EIAR, the proposed mitigation would have been clear, and it would have been possible to assess its effectiveness. Appropriate mitigation measures such as investment in the local pier and harbour infrastructure would support economic resilience within the industry and help to reduce conflict during all phases of the development.

7.77 The risk of fines within the large and multiple areas of safety zones is likely to deter fishing within the development area, which would result in a huge area of inshore fishing grounds being lost to fishing, with consequent issues of displacement. Further, the proposed compensation arrangements would not address the loss to the supply chain and the added value of these lost landings to the local economy.

7.78 The effectiveness of Mitigation Measure A0006 (Underwater Noise Piling Strategy) and the consequent conclusion of a Not Significant effect on Atlantic Salmon is disputed. The effect of piling and other factors mentioned in the EIA can be detrimental to Salmon and seatrout navigating back to their respective rivers and lochs to spawn. With such a huge strain on wild salmon and sea trout, it is considered that more would need to be done to mitigate the negative effects of the development on these species.

7.79 Notwithstanding the concerns expressed above, should the Scottish Ministers be minded to grant consent, it is suggested that the developer works closely with local estates and custodians of the rivers where these fish are migrating to ensure that the negative effects would be fully mitigated. This could be done with assistance to add fish counters, implement a hatchery program to support these systems to remain healthy and stocked, further mitigating against the possible negative effects of the development.

Conclusion on Commercial Fisheries

7.80 For the above reasons, it is concluded that the assessment within the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposal would not result in significant adverse effects on commercial fishing and angling, or that such effects would be capable of appropriate and effective mitigation. As a consequence, it is considered that the proposal would not accord with National Marine Plan Policies GEN 1, GEN 4, FISHERIES 1, FISHERIES 2, FISHERIES 3, and WILD FISH 1, and NPF 4 Policy 29 – Rural Development.

Socio-Economic, Tourism and Recreation

7.81 The comments made by Comhairle Economic Development are included in Appendix 8 to this Report and the assessment below reflects those comments. It should be noted that the Comhairle does not employ a dedicated economist and has not undertaken technical analysis of the economic impacts assumed within the EIA. It is recommended that the Marine Directorate consider commissioning an independent economist to interrogate assumed employment and GVA impacts, and to further analyse areas within the methodology and assumptions made.

7.82 In brief, it is considered that the assessment broadly identifies the correct impacts, although there is a risk that effects (both beneficial and adverse) are being under-estimated. It is recommended that the methodology be reviewed to provide a more comprehensive picture of impacts associated with the totality of the scheme, which can then be disaggregated into offshore and onshore components of the project.

7.83 Spiorad na Mara has the potential to deliver socio-economic benefit to the Western Isles, particularly during the Operational and Maintenance phase. However, this, along with mitigation of adverse impact to tourism, construction and other key existing sectors, will only be realised if clear, enforceable and



SMART (specific, measurable, achievable/attainable, relevant and time-based) commitments are secured through consent.

7.84 Therefore, notwithstanding the concerns expressed above, should the Scottish Ministers be minded to grant consent, it is recommended that that they are urged to use all available levers to strengthen mitigation to reflect the scale and significance of the development. In this, we would seek that the developer ensure that the commitments made are delivered in collaboration with the Comhairle and other stakeholders and in a meaningful and effective way.

7.85 Currently, the mitigation measures lack the level of specificity required to provide confidence that beneficial effects will be realised locally. Without binding commitments on workforce development and location of Operational and Maintenance jobs, local supply chain content and utilisation of local ports during all phases of the project, the potential economic benefits for the Western Isles remain aspirational, have significant dependencies, and are at risk of not being secured.

7.86 It is strongly recommended that the Scottish Ministers seek to reduce the risk of not securing potential economic benefits through conditions associated with the Section 36 consent and/or Marine Licence. In particular, consideration should be given to how mitigation measures M042, M048, M049 and AA04 can be strengthened.

7.87 In addition, it is recommended that additional mitigation measures are required now, rather than being left to the onshore application:

- Workforce Accommodation Strategy.
- Transport and Traffic Management Plan.

7.88 It is also recommended that the developer must provide a comprehensive Socio-Economic Strategy, underpinned by the principles of Community Wealth Building, in consultation with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and to be agreed with the Comhairle. Once agreed, the development shall be carried out in line with the Socio- Economic Strategy. This Strategy will detail:

1. Actions and targets to build capacity within the local workforce, including training programmes, apprenticeships and partnerships with UHI and other local partners, in order to maximise local employment secured through the Development.
2. Local Procurement Protocol - Actions and targets to support local supply chain engagement and development, including through progressive procurement policies, in order to retain spend locally during the Development.
3. How Northland Power will work with its Tier 1 and Tier 2 contractors in respect of (1) and (2) above.
4. Proposals for local Community Benefit funding, and the community and stakeholder engagement proposals in the development and governance of community benefit funding.
5. Workforce Accommodation Strategy, which looks at opportunities for positive legacy benefits to arise.
6. Tourism Support Strategy.
7. Arrangements for monitoring and reporting the implementation of the Socio-Economic Strategy.

Conclusions on Socio-Economic, Tourism and Recreation

7.89 Whilst the assessment is considered broadly to identify the correct impacts, it is considered that the methodology used is inconsistent, which calls into question the reliability of the findings. It is recommended that the methodology be reviewed, to provide a more comprehensive picture of impacts associated with the totality of the scheme, which can then be disaggregated into offshore and onshore components of the project.



7.90 Further, the mitigation measures currently identified are not sufficiently specific or robust, which puts the potential benefits to the Western Isles at significant risk. If the Scottish Ministers are minded to grant consent for the proposal, it is therefore also recommended that the conditions are used to secure and strengthen these mitigation measures, including in relation to the provision of a comprehensive Socio-Economic Strategy. Additional mitigation in relation to workforce accommodation and traffic and transport are recommended to be sought at this stage of the development process.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

7.91 The National Marine Plan Policy RENEWABLES 5 seeks to ensure that energy projects demonstrate compliance with EIA legislative requirements. In this case, it is considered that the submission does not meet these requirements.

7.92 For an EIA project, regulatory approval or consent cannot be granted for that project or development unless an environmental impact assessment has been carried out in respect of that project or development and, in carrying out such assessment, the Scottish Ministers must take the environmental information into account (Marine Works EIA Regulations 2017 Regulation 4 and Electricity Works EIA Regulations 2017 Regulation 3).

7.93 The relevant EIA Regulations specify that an environmental impact assessment is a process consisting, in part, of the preparation of an EIA Report by the developer, followed by the necessary consultation, publication, notification, and examination of the information within the EIAR, before the Scottish Ministers reach a reasoned conclusion on the significant effects of the works or development on the environment.

Procedural matters

7.94 In relation to the EIA Regulations, recent case law (Raeshaw Farms Limited v Scottish Ministers [2026] CSIH 10) has confirmed the need for a clear identification of what constitutes a 'project', as a fundamental requirement to enable a robust assessment of significant effects on the environment to be undertaken. In that case, the judgement concerned a windfarm and grid connection and highlighted the need to consider whether this constituted 'a single project for which an EIA Report that analysed the potentially significant cumulative effects of both aspects was required.' Not to do so was considered a material error.

7.95 The judgement refers to the need to consider the true nature and scope of the project, to determine whether the wind farm construction and grid connection were so closely connected as to form part of a single project. Further, although the grid connection was not included in the planning application, in that case, considerable weight had been placed on the wider benefits that would result from the operation of the windfarm once the grid connection was in place. The judgement considered it irrational to take these wider benefits into account without also taking account of any adverse impact that the development may have, to the extent that it was possible to do so.

7.96 Whilst the judgement relates to a planning application, the provisions of the EIA Regulations are similar across the different consenting regimes. In this case, it is clear from the documentary submissions that the offshore and onshore elements of the proposed development are considered by the applicant to be a single overall project, which has been subdivided into onshore and offshore elements to reflect the different consenting processes.

7.97 Scottish Government guidance in Circular 01/2015 (relationship between the statutory land use planning system and marine planning and licencing) makes it clear that the choice of application process rests with the developer, although it advises that in most cases, a single consenting process will be more efficient and effective and this approach is encouraged.



7.98 Nonetheless, even if a requirement for flexibility in the application process is such that separate applications are made (as in this case), it is considered that this does not negate the need to undertake an environmental impact assessment on the significant effects on the environment of the works or development as a whole.

7.99 The submission of the Offshore Project EIAR does not enable robust and systematic assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the project as a whole. Descriptions of the Onshore Project elements are limited in detail and, where undertaken, the assessment of combined likely effects reflects this, with findings that are by necessity less specific and based on anticipated impacts. This limits the ability to undertake a holistic assessment of the likely significant effects. For example, whilst a Combined Effects assessment (across different stages of the Offshore elements of the project) has been undertaken as Chapter 23 of the Offshore EIAR, the extent of the assessment of combined effects with Onshore elements is far more limited.

7.100 Reference is made to the Onshore element of the project being at an earlier stage of preparation, with details of onshore transmission works not publicly available at the time of the preparation of the Offshore EIAR. However, the Onshore element of the project has now reached planning application submission stage, resulting in a difference in submission date of roughly two months, which undermines the argument that it would not have been possible or practical to prepare a single accessible EIA Report for both elements of the project.

7.101 The artificial subdivision of the single project into two elements has caused issues with the methodology and assessment undertaken, as indicated above, particularly in relation to socio-economic impacts. Further, it has led to the Offshore EIAR presenting the potential wider benefits of grid connection without consideration of the potential adverse impacts that may result from the Onshore elements of the project.

Approach to assessment

7.102 Of those matters that fall within the remit and/or area of interest of the Comhairle, the approach followed in relation to the assessment of Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impacts is considered to be satisfactory and the information provided enables a conclusion to be reached on the significant effects of the development in these respects. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the other topic areas assessed.

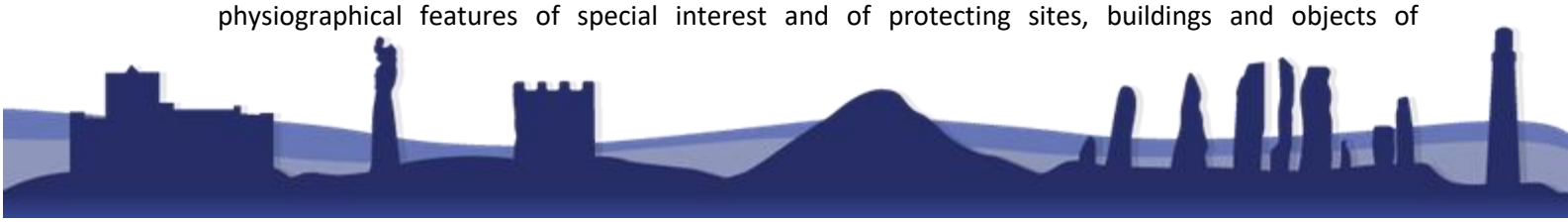
7.103 For the reasons above, strong concerns are raised about the assessment methodology used in relation to cultural heritage, airborne noise, commercial fisheries and socio-economic impacts, including recreation. These concerns are such that the findings of the assessments undertaken within the EIAR in relation to these topic areas are not considered robust and are not supported. Consequently, it is concluded that, in these respects also, the submitted EIAR does not meet the regulatory requirements.

Conclusion to EIA

7.104 The EIAR does not enable a systematic assessment of the project as a whole. In addition, in relation to Cultural Heritage, Airborne Noise, Commercial Fisheries and Socio-Economics, as indicated above, the methodology for the assessments and the resultant findings are not considered sufficiently robust to enable confidence in the conclusions reached. Consequently, overall, it is considered that the submitted EIAR fails to identify the significant environmental effects of the project as a whole.

OVERALL CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

8.1 The Electricity Act 1989 requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of preserving the natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of



architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects. In addition, in so far as possible, any injuries to fisheries or to the stock of fish in any waters should be avoided.

8.2 From the assessment of the identified topics against the relevant policy context as set out in Appendix 2 to this Report, it is concluded that:

- Principle of Development – the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy identifies 15 Plan Options as the preferred strategic locations for the sustainable development of offshore wind and marine renewables as referenced in the National Marine Plan. The proposed windfarm is located within the site identified as Plan Option N4. However, inclusion as a Plan Option in the Sectoral Marine Plan does not negate the need to consider whether or not the Project as proposed would be acceptable in its location.
    - The ScotWind leasing round far surpassed the Scottish Government's identified maximum potential capacity of 10GW, with some 27.6GW of supply being identified from 20 developments. Consequently, whilst recognising the importance of maximising renewable energy generation, it is considered that this should not be at any cost and, further, that the removal of N4 would not jeopardise the achievement of the energy supply targets in the Sectoral Marine Plan.
    - It is concluded that in relation to key considerations, as set out in the following assessment, that the significant adverse effects of the proposed development on Landscape, Seascape and Visual and on Cultural Heritage cannot be effectively mitigated, and the resulting harm from these effects alone would be so great that the Principle of Development of an offshore windfarm at this location is not acceptable. Further the contention that NPF4 has established the principle of development of a windfarm in this location in the marine environment is not accepted.

- Landscape, Seascape, and Visual – the Comhairle's examination largely concurs with the EIAR assessment, in that the predicted significant effects, and the number of landscape, seascape, and visual receptors affected, are across an extensive geographical area and there is overwhelming evidence that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character, quality, and enjoyment of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.
    - On that basis, it is considered that the proposal is not appropriately located and would not accord with relevant landscape-related planning policies, including NPF4 Policy 4 – Natural Places and Policy 11 - Energy, National Marine Plan Policy GEN7 - Landscape/Seascape, and OHLDP Policy NBH1 – Landscape and EI 8 – Energy and Heat Resources. This in turn supports the recommended view that the development is not appropriately located.
    - Further, the significance of effect is so great that it fails to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989 which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty of the countryside, and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.

- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage – the Comhairle has examined the Cultural Heritage assessment and concludes that the likely effects of the proposal on the setting of terrestrial heritage assets and places are seriously underestimated.
    - The findings of the Comhairle's examination of the EIA Report support the recommended view that the development is not appropriately located. It is considered that the proposed development would cause serious harm to the historic environment and would not accord with National Marine Plan Policy GEN6 – Historic Environment,



NPF4 Policy 7 – Historic Assets and Places, OHLDP NBH4 – Built Heritage, NBH5 - Archaeology, and NBH6 – Historic Areas.

- Further the significance of effect is so great that it fails to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989 which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.

- Offshore Airborne Noise - given the identified concerns with aspects of the methodology used and lack of clarity regarding the assessment process and findings of significance, it is concluded that the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposed development would comply with the relevant policy requirements of National Marine Plan Policy GEN13 – Noise, NPF4 Policy 23 – Health and safety, and OHLDP Policy PD6 – Compatibility of Neighbouring Uses.

- Commercial Fisheries - the assessment within the EIAR does not satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposal would not result in significant adverse effects on commercial fishing and angling, or that such effects would be capable of appropriate and effective mitigation. As a consequence, it is considered that the proposal would not accord with National Marine Plan Policies GEN 1, GEN 4, FISHERIES 1, FISHERIES 2, FISHERIES 3, and WILD FISH 1, and NPF 4 Policy 29 – Rural Development.

- Socio Economics - the assessment has been reviewed by Comhairle Economic Development and is considered broadly to identify the correct impacts; however it is considered that the methodology used is inconsistent, and in the case of tourism, there is a lack of engagement with the tourism sector, with the data adopted being out of date, which calls into question the reliability of the findings. Assumptions in the EIA regarding what is classified as 'minor' before and after mitigation require further scrutiny and it is noticeable that nearly all effects are ultimately deemed to be 'Not Significant in EIA terms'. Further, the mitigation measures currently identified are deficient in relation to workforce accommodation and traffic and transport and, more generally, not sufficiently specific or robust, which puts the potential benefits to the Western Isles at significant risk. Comhairle Economic Development advise that if the Scottish Ministers are minded to grant consent for the proposal, it is recommended that the socio-economic methodology be independently reviewed, to provide a more comprehensive picture of impacts associated with the totality of the scheme, which can then be disaggregated into offshore and onshore components of the project and conditions are used to secure and strengthen these mitigation measures, including in relation to the provision of a comprehensive Socio-Economic Strategy.

Recommendation

8.3 Consequently, having regard to the examination of relevant parts of the EIA Report and the consultation responses received (as detailed in Appendix 8 to this Report), it is recommended that the Comhairle:

- Raises strong concerns about the adequacy of the EIA Report, in relation to the assessment of the significant positive and negative environmental effects of the project as a whole, and specifically in relation to the historic environment, offshore airborne noise, and socio-economic and recreation impacts, including commercial fisheries.

- Raises an Objection to all three applications, in relation to the principle of the development of the proposed offshore windfarm at the proposed location and, as a consequence of its

location, scale and nature, its likely significant adverse effects on seascape, landscape, and visual amenity, and on the historic environment resources of the planning authority area. These significant adverse effects are such that they are considered to outweigh any positive contribution to renewable energy generation and climate change targets.

- Considers that the significance of effect is so great that the proposed development would fail to meet the requirement of The Electricity Act 1989, which requires the Scottish Ministers, in considering proposals for consent, to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty of the countryside, and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest, and to do what can reasonably be done to mitigate any such effects.



Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application – Consultation

Marine Conservation

Marine Conservation is content that the project has been subject to a robust review, including consideration of relevant Northern Ireland MPA sites for seabirds, with clearly identified pathways for likely significant effects, well-justified screening decisions, and clear conclusions in relation to adverse effects on site integrity.

Sea Fisheries Business Support

Sea Fisheries have reviewed the Scoping Report and are content that commercial fisheries are included.

“consultation will also be conducted with relevant commercial fisheries stakeholders. This is of particular importance, as smaller vessels are typically under-represented in commercial fisheries datasets. Therefore, this targeted consultation will be key to developing a full understanding of the actual level, type, and distribution of fishing activity in, and around, the Offshore Development Area of Search.”

Eilean Mo Ghaoil

To: Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team
Re: Section 36 Consent Application – Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Northwest of Lewis
Applicant: Spiorad na Mara Limited
Application references: 00011742 & 00011743

Name: The Secretary, Eilean Mo Ghaoil
[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Date: 6 May 2026

Eilean mo Ghaoil is a non-incorporated association formed specifically to represent the interests of residents in the west side of Lewis vicinity. To ensure the safety and privacy of our members, we are submitting this as a single collective response. We request that the Marine Directorate treats the individual identities of our members as 'commercially sensitive and private' to prevent unwanted contact or profiling by the developer.

We are writing to formally object to the proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, located approximately 5–13 km off the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis, comprising a 161 km^2 array with turbines up to 338.4 m in blade tip height. Genuinely unprecedented, **it would be the closest large-scale offshore wind farm to an inhabited coastline anywhere in the United Kingdom**.

Eilean mo Ghaoil is a grassroots community campaign group formed by residents of Lewis in response to a single, pressing concern: that the communities most directly affected by the proposed Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm had not been told about it. From the outset, our purpose has been straightforward, to ensure that people in our communities have access to accurate, factual information about this project, its unprecedented scale, and its implications for our seas, our wildlife, our culture and our way of life. Everything we have produced and shared has been grounded in Northland Power's own documentation and imagery. We submit this objection on behalf of a community that was not consulted, was not informed, and was not asked and that, having now been informed, has made its view overwhelmingly clear.

The EIAR does not adequately characterise or mitigate the ornithological, environmental, economic, cultural or community risks of this development. For the reasons set out in full below, it is our primary position that the application should be refused, or at minimum, formally suspended pending submission of the additional assessments identified.

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

This objection is made under the following legislative and regulatory framework, which collectively governs this application:

- Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, under which the generating station consent is sought, and under which Scottish Ministers have the power to refuse consent. Any consent granted is subject to Schedule 9 of the same Act, which imposes a duty on the licence holder to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest, and protecting sites of architectural, historic or archaeological interest, and to do so in formulating all relevant proposals.

- The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990, which govern the public notification and objection process for this application and confirm the right of members of the public to make representations to Scottish Ministers.

- The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ("the EIA Regulations"), which implement the EU EIA Directive for consents under sections 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989. Regulation 6 prohibits Scottish Ministers from granting consent for EIA development unless an environmental impact assessment has been undertaken. Scottish Ministers must reach a reasoned conclusion on the significant effects of the development on the environment and integrate that conclusion into their decision notice.

- The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, under which the Marine Licences for this application are sought. The Act imposes a duty on Scottish Ministers to protect and enhance the marine environment within Scottish territorial waters, and to promote economic investment only where that is consistent with those duties.

- The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, which apply EIA requirements to the marine licence elements of this application, running concurrently with the Electricity Works EIA Regulations.

- The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019): This Act, alongside National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), forms the statutory Development Plan. Under Section 25, decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. NPF4 Policy 1 (Climate and Nature Crises) and Policy 3 (Biodiversity) are primary considerations for this application.

- The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994: As the onshore developments affects the Lewis Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA), these Regulations require the Scottish Ministers (as the Competent Authority) to undertake an Appropriate Assessment. Consent may only be granted if it can be ascertained that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site.

- The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009: Specifically Section 44, which places a legal duty on Scottish Ministers to act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets and in the way it considers most sustainable.

This objection contends that the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR, February 2026) is procedurally and substantively flawed. It fails to satisfy the requirements of both sets of EIA Regulations in multiple respects identified below. Thus, Scottish Ministers lack a sufficient evidentiary basis to reach a valid reasoned conclusion that there are no significant adverse effects of the proposal. Consequently, they are precluded from determining the application in accordance with the EIA Regulations, rendering any grant of consent legally vulnerable to challenge.

We ask that each chapter of this objection be considered in full by Scottish Ministers.

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CHAPTER 1

LIVING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE GAELIC COMMUNITY

The Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) is fundamentally deficient as the living intangible cultural heritage of the Gaelic community has not been assessed. The applicant's failure to account for the unique linguistic, social, and spiritual connection between the Gàidhealtachd and its coastal and marine environment represents a significant procedural and cultural oversight. Without a dedicated assessment of these living practices, including oral traditions, place-names, and communal relationships with the sea, the project cannot be considered consistent with national heritage policies or international indigenous standards.

1.1 THE POLICY REQUIREMENT

The proposed Spiorad na Mara offshore windfarm raises serious concerns regarding impacts on Indigenous Peoples and cultural heritage as defined under **IFC Performance Standard 7 (PS7).** While PS7 is formally a requirement for projects financed by the International Finance Corporation or equivalent development banks, it represents the internationally recognised gold standard for the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights, and its principles are a material consideration under Scotland's international human rights obligations and the Scottish Government's own commitments to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Gàidheil na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles Gaels) clearly meet the IFC PS7 definition of Indigenous Peoples, which includes communities with:

- Self-identification as a distinct cultural group;
- Collective attachment to ancestral lands, marine areas, and natural resources;
- Distinct social, cultural, and economic institutions; and
- Unique language, traditions, and practices.

The Gaels' historical, cultural, and economic practices are intimately tied to land, nearshore waters, and marine resources, including seabird colonies, traditional fishing grounds, and other natural heritage areas. The proposed project lies within these areas of ancestral and traditional use, meaning that its development will directly impact these communities' cultural, economic, and spiritual connections.

PS7 mandates that projects must:

- Avoid adverse impacts on Indigenous land, resources, and cultural heritage wherever possible;
- Obtain Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) if impacts cannot be avoided;
- Maintain ongoing Informed Consultation and Participation (ICP) with Indigenous communities throughout the project lifecycle; and
- Minimise, restore, or compensate for unavoidable impacts in a culturally appropriate manner.

1.2 CONCERNS WITH THE SPIORAD NA MARA PROPOSAL

Whether the Gaels are categorised as 'Indigenous Peoples' under international definitions or as a 'National Minority' under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the procedural requirement for meaningful engagement and the protection of their unique cultural and economic relationship with the marine environment remains a mandatory consideration.

The project, in its nearshore location and with a large turbine array footprint, places turbines directly within critical marine areas historically and currently used for traditional livelihoods and subsistence activities. The tall turbines and expansive array will:

- Disturb marine ecosystems and seabird colonies relied upon for food and cultural practice;
- Disrupt customary fishing, foraging, and other marine resource activities, undermining collective attachment to ancestral resources; and
- Impact cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge, folklore, and local customs, which PS7 explicitly requires projects to respect and preserve.

No evidence has been provided that FPIC has been meaningfully sought or that genuine informed consultation, as distinct from the developer's own characterised consultation exercises, has taken place with affected Indigenous communities. The applicant's own Focus Group Summary Report acknowledges that a recurring theme in feedback was the perception that consultation was more of a public relations exercise than a genuine attempt to engage with community concerns.

Furthermore, the use of the Gaelic name "Spiorad na Mara" without community endorsement represents a form of cultural appropriation, a misuse of intangible cultural heritage and a failure to respect the Communal Value of the Gaelic language. Under the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS), cultural significance extends beyond physical assets to include the traditions, folklore, and meanings a community attaches to a place.

By commodifying local linguistic and spiritual concepts for commercial branding in a manner inconsistent with PS7 and international human rights standards, while failing to provide a robust assessment of the impact on the living Gaelic-speaking community, the applicant has engaged in a form of cultural extraction inconsistent with NPF4 Policy 7. This superficial adoption of Gaelic identity, without seeking communal consent or demonstrating respect for the Western Isles as a distinct cultural landscape, directly contradicts the Social Justice principles of NPF4 and undermines the intangible historic environment the applicant is duty-bound to preserve. The adoption of Gaelic branding to market a project that the community has not endorsed compounds rather than mitigates this concern.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, s.1 / Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 / Marine Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 —*** The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 requires Scottish Ministers to have regard to social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts when exercising their marine functions. Both sets of EIA Regulations require assessment of socio-economic and cultural effects. UNDRIP and IFC PS7 principles are material considerations under Scotland's international obligations. These frameworks require the impacts on the Gaelic community to be properly assessed before consent is granted.

Approving the project in its current form would:

- Be inconsistent with the principles of IFC PS7, including the right to FPIC and meaningful participation;
- Threaten the cultural, economic, and spiritual rights of the Gaels; and
- Set a precedent for exploitation of Indigenous cultural heritage without consent.

Given these serious and avoidable impacts, the Spiorad na Mara offshore windfarm should be refused, or at minimum relocated to offshore sites that do not intersect with Indigenous lands, traditional marine resource areas, or culturally significant waters.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4, Scottish Government 2023), Policy 7(a) states:

"*Development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place. The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impacts of change.*"

This is a mandatory policy requirement that Scottish Ministers must apply when determining this application. It does not limit the required assessment to designated physical assets, nor to archaeological or architectural significance. It requires an assessment based on an understanding of the cultural significance of historic assets and places, which is a fundamentally broader concept.

Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) explicitly recognises intangible cultural heritage, including oral tradition, customary use of land and sea, traditional ecological knowledge, and community spiritual practices, as deserving of protection and assessment in the planning process. HEPS identifies multiple dimensions of significance including evidential value, historical value, architectural value, and communal value: the meaning of a place to the people who created it, use it, or have a cultural connection with it. The assessment submitted with this application addresses evidential, historical and architectural value in respect of scheduled monuments and listed buildings. It does not address communal value in any meaningful way. It therefore does not comply with Policy 7(a).

1.3 THE NATURE OF THE DEFICIENCY

The cultural heritage assessment submitted with this application, comprising Chapter 15 of the EIAR and Appendix 15.2 (Offshore Cultural Heritage Settings Assessment), is conducted entirely within the framework of Historic Environment Scotland's guidance on the settings of designated physical heritage assets. That framework is concerned with whether the visual presence of the wind farm would affect how structures are experienced and appreciated as historical objects.

This approach entirely fails to recognise or assess a distinct and irreplaceable category of cultural significance: the living intangible cultural heritage of the indigenous Gaelic-speaking communities of the west coast of Lewis. This is not a mere 'data gap' that can be filled with supplementary information; it is the omission of an entire dimension of cultural significance that NPF4 Policy 7(a) expressly requires to be understood and assessed. Because this foundational assessment is absent, the EIAR is substantively non-compliant with the EIA Regulations. This is a terminal deficiency that cannot be remedied retrospectively, as it has deprived the public of their statutory right to be consulted on the full extent of the project's cultural impacts.

1.4 THE INDIGENOUS GAELIC COMMUNITY OF THE WEST LEWIS COAST

The villages of Siabost, Bràdhagair, Àrnol, Brù, Barabhas, Baile an Truiseil, Siadar and Borgh on the west coast of Lewis are the last remaining communities in Scotland where Scottish Gaelic is spoken as a majority community language in daily life. Gaelic is the living vernacular of ordinary life, transmitted from generation to generation without interruption across centuries.

This unbroken continuity of language is inseparable from an unbroken continuity of relationship with the land, the sea, and the cultural landscape of the west coast. The oral traditions, folklore,

place names, seasonal practices, and community rituals of these villages are living expressions of a culture that has persisted in this specific landscape for as long as recorded memory extends, and in all likelihood considerably longer.

The communal significance of this coastline to these communities is therefore of the highest possible order. It requires direct, sustained and linguistically appropriate engagement with the communities themselves, engagement that has not taken place.

The failure to conduct linguistically appropriate engagement in a community where Gaelic remains the primary vernacular constitutes a significant procedural deficiency. Under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, the Scottish Government has a statutory duty to 'promote and facilitate' the use of Gaelic. By extension, for the Scottish Ministers to determine an application based on a consultation process that did not facilitate engagement in the community's native language is a breach of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

In the context of the Western Isles, 'Meaningful Participation' (as required by IFC PS7) and 'Informed Consultation' (as required by the EIA Regulations) cannot be achieved if the technical details of the proposal were not presented in a manner that respects the linguistic rights and cultural norms of the Gàidhealtachd. This oversight ignores the Equality and Diversity standards inherent in the Scottish planning process and further demonstrates that the applicant has failed to understand or respect the 'Communal Value' of this landscape.

Furthermore, these villages occupy a receiving environment defined by a unique combination of landscape, heritage, and cultural identity. The 'Wildness' of this region is a primary asset that sustains local identity; the 'Sense of Place' provided by an open, non-industrial Atlantic horizon is the essential environmental context in which the Gaelic language has evolved. The proposed industrialisation introduces a dominant verticality representing an 'irreconcilable clash of character' with the traditional Gaelic cultural landscape. This 'Scale-Jump' threatens to fundamentally alter the 'Wildness Brand' that the community identifies with. In Gaelic terms, the relationship between the people (*muinntir*) and the land/sea (*am fearann/an fhairge*) is inseparable; therefore, the permanent industrialisation of the horizon constitutes a direct assault on the intangible heritage and cultural continuity of the Gàidhealtachd.

1.5 THE FAILURE TO ASSESS IMPACTS ON LIVING CULTURAL PRACTICES AT HISTORIC SITES

The EIAR identifies Teampall Eòin (SM3926) at Port Mhòr, Bràdhagair, and sites at Dail Mòr (Dalmore) as designated scheduled monuments and assesses their settings in terms of how views from those locations to the turbine array would be affected. In a failure to comply with Policy 7(a), the EIAR does not acknowledge that these sites are places of active, living cultural and spiritual significance to the communities beside which they stand, and their cultural significance cannot be understood without reference to the living community that continues to use them.

Funeral and burial practices associated with Teampaill Eòin in Cladh Bràdhagair (Bragar Cemetery), Cladh Dhail Mòr (Dalmore Cemetery) and Cladh Bharabhais (Barvas Cemetery, where cable landfall is proposed) continue to this day. These practices at these sites are living community rituals carried out by a Gaelic-speaking community for whom the relationship between the living, the dead, and this specific coastal landscape is a matter of ongoing cultural identity. The introduction of a 21st-century industrial array creates an "irreconcilable clash of character" that diminishes the communal and spiritual context of these sites that extends well beyond the sites' archaeological designations.

The turbines will be visible from these sites during every one of those practices for a minimum of 35 years. Policy 7(a) requires that assessments "identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change" based on an understanding of cultural significance. An assessment that ignores the ongoing use of these sites as burial sites, by a living community that has used them continuously for generations, is just an assessment of its architectural silhouette. By failing to address the "Communal Value" of these living history sites, and the profound "Scale-Jump" created by 338m turbines visible during sacred rites, the applicant has caused a significant and largely irreversible harm to the cultural integrity of the community.

The West Side of Lewis is a "Cultural Landscape" where the value of individual monuments is derived from a "dense network" of interconnected living history. This network - including the Arnol Blackhouse, Gearrannan Blackhouse Village, and Dun Carloway, relies on an authentic, rugged Atlantic setting that would be fundamentally degraded by an industrial backdrop. Once the setting of these burial site, heritage assets and the wider landscape character is altered at this scale, the harm is likely to be long-lasting and, in practical terms, irreversible

1.6 THE REQUIREMENT UNDER HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND POLICY AND UNESCO PRINCIPLES

Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) reflects the Scottish Government's commitment to the principles of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). That Convention defines intangible cultural heritage to include oral traditions, social practices, rituals, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and requires that measures be taken to ensure the viability of such heritage, including its identification, documentation and protection.

The living cultural practices of the Gaelic-speaking communities of Siabost, Bràdhagair, Àrnol, Brù, Barabhas, Baile an Truiseil, Siadar and Borgh fall squarely within this definition. The applicant has made no attempt to identify, document or assess the impact of this project on that heritage. The decision-maker is being asked to apply Policy 7, which requires an understanding of cultural significance, in the absence of any information about the most distinctive and irreplaceable dimension of the cultural significance of this place.

1.7 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC THREAT TO CULTURAL CONTINUITY

The failure to assess the impact on the Gaelic extends to the economic resilience required to sustain a living Gàidhealtachd. This project represents a significant geographical imbalance: the environmental and cultural costs are borne entirely by the West Side, while high-value economic benefits are at risk of "benefit export" to off-island and international entities. This extractive model directly contradicts the Community Wealth Building mandates of NPF4 Policy 25, which requires that development projects contribute measurably to local economic resilience and retention.

Furthermore, the introduction of a large-scale industrial project threatens the stability of the local workforce through "labour displacement" and the "cannibalisation" of established sectors like hospitality, social care, and traditional land-based activities. For a fragile Gaelic-speaking community, this economic disruption is a direct cultural threat; when the economic foundations of the community are weakened, the social structures that support language transmission collapse. The magnitude of impact is significantly higher in an island environment where the sense of identity is intrinsically linked to a non-industrial landscape. By failing to ensure that economic value is retained locally, the applicant risks a "Socio-Economic Net Loss" that would accelerate the departure of the very people who maintain the living language.

This threat is not theoretical; young Gaelic-speaking families with children have stated that they will leave the area if the project goes ahead. This has been documented in BBC ALBA - Eòrpa, Series 31, *Spiorad na Mara* programme. The departure of young families from these already fragile communities would represent an irreversible blow to Gaelic language transmission, the very process by which this intangible cultural heritage survives from one generation to the next. No assessment of this risk has been conducted.

Despite these high stakes, no assessment of the risk to the linguistic and social integrity of these communities has been conducted by the applicant.

Approving this project in its current form would be inconsistent with the principles of IFC PS7 and UNDRIP, threatening the cultural, economic, and spiritual rights of the Gaelic community and setting a precedent for the exploitation of Indigenous cultural heritage without consent.

In summary, because the applicant has failed to provide the necessary information to understand the cultural significance of this place, as mandated by NPF4 Policy 7(a), HEPS, and the 2017 EIA Regulations, the Scottish Ministers lack the sufficient evidentiary basis required to reach a valid reasoned conclusion on the proposal's environmental and cultural effects. Consequently, the Ministers are procedurally precluded from granting consent, and the application must be refused.

CHAPTER 2.

CULTURAL HERITAGE : ARCHAEOLOGY

The proposed Spiorad na Mara offshore windfarm presents significant risks to the archaeological integrity and cultural heritage of the Isle of Lewis. This chapter evaluates the potential for direct and indirect impacts on physical heritage assets, focusing on the preservation of Scheduled Monuments and the surrounding archaeological landscape. It highlights critical failures in the applicant's assessment regarding the setting and significance of these protected sites.

2.1 IMPACTS ON SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

There are approximately 53 Scheduled Monuments in the coastal areas most directly affected by the N4 development plan, from Ness to Gallan Head, and more within the ZTV – for example those on the Point Peninsula and on North Rona.

NPF4 Policy 7 (h): *'Development proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported where significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of a scheduled monument are avoided; or exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a scheduled monument and its setting and impacts on the monument or its setting have been minimised.'*

Scotland's Marine Plan, 4.22: '*Marine planning should help to ensure that future marine activities and developments can be carried out in a way that respects the marine historic environment and the setting of important coastal heritage assets*.' **4.23**: '*Designated assets should be protected in situ within an appropriate setting'.*

LDP Policy NBH5: '*Development proposals that will adversely impact upon scheduled archaeological remains or the integrity of their settings will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where there is no practical alternative site and where there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.'*

UNESCO defines the setting of a monument thus: '*The setting of a heritage structure, site or area is defined as the immediate and extended environment that is part of, or contributes to, its significance*

and distinctive character. Beyond the physical and visual aspects, the setting includes interaction with the natural environment; past or present social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities and other forms of intangible cultural heritage aspects that created and form the space as well as the current and dynamic cultural, social and economic context.'

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) defines '*Setting*' as: *'the way the surroundings of a historic asset or place contribute to how it is understood, appreciated and experienced.'* HES has published a list of factors to consider when trying to assess the impact of a development upon the setting of a historic asset or place (Managing Change in the Historic Environment, Setting. HES, 2016). These are:

- *Whether key views to or from the historic asset or place are interrupted*
- *Whether the proposed change would dominate or detract in a way that affects our ability to understand and appreciate the historic asset*
  - *The visual impact of the proposed change relative to the scale of the historic asset or place and its setting*
  - *The visual impact of the proposed change relative to the current place of the historic asset in the landscape*
  - *The presence, extent, character and scale of the existing built environment within the surroundings of the historic asset or place and how the proposed development compares to this*
  - *The magnitude of the proposed change relative to the sensitivity of the setting of an asset – sometimes relatively small changes, or a series of small changes, can have a major impact on our ability to appreciate and understand a historic asset or place. Points to consider include:*

    - *The ability of the setting to absorb new development without eroding its key characteristics*
    - *The effect of the proposed change on qualities of the existing setting such as sense of remoteness, current noise levels, evocation of the historical past, sense of place, cultural identity, associated spiritual responses*
    - *Cumulative impacts: individual developments may not cause significant impacts on their own, but may do so when they are combined*

The EIAR anticipates significant effects to the setting of the designated archaeology and cultural heritage assets of Teampall Eòin, chapel, graveyard and settlement, Port Mhòr Bhràdhagair and Dùn Borgh Broch, as a result of the change of views to the seascape due to the construction and operation of the Offshore Project. However, given the scale and proximity of the N4 windfarm, every single one of the points above is a cause for concern for every archaeological site from Uig to Ness with a line of site to the turbines. This includes most if not all the Scheduled Monuments including the Calanais Stones, one of the most important monuments in Britain.

The conclusions of the EIAR that the magnitude of impact on the majority of Scheduled Monuments is Low is not supported by the evidence. The peaceful 'edge of Europe' setting of the monuments, with unobstructed views over the Atlantic ocean, is key to their appreciation. These views would be interrupted by the turbines; the turbines would dominate the settings of the historic assets, affecting our ability to understand and appreciate them; the magnitude of change would be extremely high, affecting key characteristics of the settings such as sense of remoteness, current noise and night-time light levels, sense of place, etc.

The development is without precedent anywhere in the United Kingdom. No offshore wind farm of this scale has been consented or built at this proximity to shore, let alone in proximity to a landscape with this concentration of nationally significant monuments. The assessment at no point acknowledges this unprecedented character. It applies the same methodology and the same significance thresholds that have been used for offshore wind farms at greater distance and with turbines of substantially lesser height. The result is a series of conclusions that effects on multiple heritage assets of national

importance are ‘not significant in EIA terms’ which are not credible when set against the physical reality of what is being proposed. Altering the settings of these monuments, giving them an industrial backdrop of mega-turbines with their associated noise, movement, vibration and shadow flicker would be a change of extremely HIGH magnitude, dominating the settings and the monuments themselves.

2.2 THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE MONUMENTS

The people who live in the surrounding land should also be considered as part of the context of the Scheduled Monuments. According to the UNESCO definition, they are an important part of the setting: ‘*Beyond the physical and visual aspects, the setting includes interaction with the natural environment; past or present social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities and other forms of intangible cultural heritage aspects that created and form the space as well as the current and dynamic cultural, social and economic context.*’

The west side villages of Lewis are some of the last majority Gaelic speaking communities in the world, with an indigenous population that is deeply rooted in place. There is an unbroken lineage with these sites in Gaelic culture and knowledge, language and familial history. Any corrosion of a culture that is already under pressure will leave behind a myriad of archaeological sites stripped of their human context. For an example of this we need look no further than the horizon, to Hiort/St Kilda, where archaeologists often struggle in vain to make sense of the various stone structures with no surviving member of the public to simply ask. The people who live on the west side of Lewis matter, and should not be disregarded.

2.3 INCOMPLETE EIAR CULTURAL HERITAGE SETTINGS ASSESSMENT

HES wrote to the Marine Directorate in December 2023 informing them that the site of Stac a’ Chaisteil (Dalmore/Gearreannan) was being considered for designation, and asking that the information be passed to the applicant so that the cultural heritage assessment could be undertaken in a fully informed manner. The site was designated as a Scheduled Monument in May 2024.

The EIAR fails to consider the impact on the setting of this Scheduled Monument (SM13786 ‘Dun, Stac a’ Chaisteil’), a coastal promontory fort on a sea stack in the midst of the N4 array area (NB2022045460). The monument is ‘*located on a sea stack partially attached to the mainland by a fallen and degraded promontory spine and surrounded by high vertical cliffs and broken bays*’ (HES).

HES describes the ‘Contextual characteristics (how a site or place relates to its surroundings and/or to existing knowledge of the past)’ thus: ‘*There are few comparable examples to Stac a' Chaisteil in the Western Isle; it is unusual because of its multiperiod phasing and very remote location. There is potential for comparative study of these sites on a local and national scale to better understand the function of such monuments, their interrelationship and the significance of their placing within the landscape, in particular in relation to our understanding of Iron Age social hierarchy, changing settlement patterns and systems of inheritance.*

The monument is located on a difficult to access coastal promontory to the northeast of Na Gearrannan/Garenin. The monument uses the natural topography as part of its defences and in the past this location may have been chosen also to give access to the sea.’

This nationally important monument is inseparable from its remote coastal setting with panoramic views across the Atlantic Ocean: its omission renders the EIAR assessment incomplete and so the planning application cannot lawfully be progressed to determination.

Teampall Eòin is one of the few Scheduled Monuments which the EIAR assesses to be significantly affected in EIA terms. Teampaill Eòin (SM3926) is a chapel, graveyard and settlement at Port Mhòr, Bràdhagair, situated on the west Lewis coast directly facing the proposed turbine array. The single photomontage produced for this site (VP16, Plate 3-1 of Appendix 15.2) is described as "*Looking south at the remains of Teampull Eòin.*" It shows the site with the viewer's back to the sea, and therefore with the turbine array entirely absent from the frame.

This methodology fundamentally misrepresents the visual experience of this site. Teampall Eòin is a coastal site. Its graveyard faces the sea. The people who use it — for burial, for remembrance, for the ongoing cultural practices described in a separate objection on intangible cultural heritage, face the sea when they are there. The photomontage that represents the visual impact of this project on this site has been taken in the one direction in which the project is invisible. NPF4 Policy 7(a) requires that the assessment "identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change." A photomontage taken looking away from the development conceals the visual impact. This does not comply with Policy 7(a).

2.4 THE SYSTEMATIC BIAS IN VIEWPOINT SELECTION

A pattern runs through the entire Appendix 15.2 that is impossible to ignore once identified. The plate captions tell the story clearly:

- Plate 3-1: "Looking south at the remains of Teampull Eòin" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-3: "Looking northeast at dùn on Loch Arnol" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-5: "Looking east toward the remains of the dùn at Loch an Dùna" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-8: "Looking south toward Calanais" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-10: "Looking south at Ceann a' Gharaodh" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-11: "Looking south at Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-14: "Looking north toward Luchruban" — away from the sea
- Plate 3-15: "Looking east at Barvas Church of Scotland" — away from the sea

The overwhelming majority of the site photography throughout the assessment looks inland, away from the proposed development. Where a seaward view is included — as at Plate 3-9, "Looking northwest from Calanais toward the location of the Turbine Area" — it is a wireline only, not a photomontage, and therefore does not show the visual reality of the turbines in the landscape.

This is not a balanced assessment of visual impact. It is a systematic programme of viewpoint selection designed to minimise the apparent visual impact of the development on heritage assets. The applicant has visited each site and taken photographs looking away from their own project. Failing to adequately assess the likely effects of the development on the settings of scheduled monuments contravenes NFF4 Policy 7a '*The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change*' and renders the EIAR incomplete: therefore, the application cannot be lawfully consented.

2.5 THE CALANAIS ASSESSMENT USES THE GEOMETRY OF THE STONES TO MINIMISE APPARENT IMPACT

The Calanais Standing Stones (SM90054) are among the most significant prehistoric monuments in Europe, comparable in international importance to Stonehenge. They sit approximately 18.5 kilometres from the array boundary, and should the development go ahead, turbines would dominate the skyline looking to the north and west from Calanais.

The assessment at paragraph 2.4.1.7 of Appendix 15.2 states that views from Calanais II to Calanais I "are aligned to the northwest and so any visibility of the offshore infrastructure would be peripheral in

the view and so WTGs would not be visible directly beyond Calanais I in this view." The single photomontage produced for the complex (VP37) is described as "looking south toward Calanais" — again, a direction in which the turbines are not visible.

The effect of this methodology is that the assessment consistently evaluates the Calanais complex from viewpoints that look away from, or at right angles to, the turbine array, and then concludes that the turbines are peripheral or absent. The assessment entirely fails to evaluate the experience of standing at Calanais and looking west or northwest toward the sea, the direction in which the turbines will be fully and prominently visible, rising to 338 metres above the horizon across a wide arc of the seascape.

There is no credible planning or heritage assessment methodology that would justify choosing the viewpoints that minimise visibility of a proposed development as the basis for concluding that impact is not significant. The Calanais Setting Document produced by HES and CnES, which the applicant references, identifies the importance of the wider landscape setting of the complex, including its relationship with the western horizon and the sea. The applicant has not assessed impact on that relationship. They have assessed impact on internal sightlines within the complex and concluded those are unaffected, while the relationship with the western seascape — which will be dominated by 338 metre turbines for the entire operational lifetime of the project — goes entirely unassessed. The application should not be considered until the impact on Calanais sightlines are adequately assessed in accordance with the Calanais Standing Stones Setting Document, 2014 (HES & CnES).

2.6 NON-SCHEDULED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Sites of regional or local importance, while lacking the same legal protection as Scheduled sites, are significant in the planning process. Destruction of these sites by development often necessitates archaeological evaluations or excavations. Considering the concentration of such sites on the West Side, the entire area can be viewed as a cultural landscape of considerable age. For example, like a giant Russian Doll it contains multitudes of sites from at least the Neolithic (although there are likely to be undiscovered Mesolithic sites) - there are existing standing examples in the area from every era up to the present day. These sites can be visited, and the surrounding area looks similar to how it did when the sites were in use. This is a rare thing in today's world, where increasingly every part of the world is built up and the past overwritten.

2.7 HIORT/ST KILDA

World Heritage Status is a legal designation made by UNESCO for sites judged to have '*cultural and natural heritage.. considered to be of outstanding value to humanity'*. These would include such sites as the Pyramids of Giza, the Taj Mahal, Angkor Watt and Hiort/St Kilda, which is in fact a dual world heritage site – once for the Natural Environment and once for the Cultural Heritage. There is no higher measure of importance in the world.

The developer states that *'Although there may be theoretical visibility from elevated areas of St Kilda/Hiort, at distances of >105 km the WTGs within the Array Area would not be distinguishable to the eye to any significant degree and that there would be no potential for significant effects on the Outstanding Universal Value of the St Kilda World Heritage Site at such long range.*' Hiort is clearly visible from high ground in Lewis, so it seems likely that the turbines will be equally visible from Hiort. All effects on this double World Heritage site should be assessed, whether considered significant by the developer or not. The application should not be considered until the impact on Hiort/St Kilda is adequately assessed.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The conclusion that these impacts are not significant in EIA terms is not supported by the evidence. The proposed development would give rise to severe visual effects and fundamentally alter how the

heritage assets of West Lewis are understood, appreciated and experienced, thereby substantially diminishing their heritage value. The impact would be transformative, permanent, and highly adverse.

No effective mitigation has been identified to address these effects. Furthermore, alternative solutions are available, and no overriding justification has been demonstrated for selecting this site.

CHAPTER 3.

ORNITHOLOGICAL RISK AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The ornithological assessment provided in the EIAR is fundamentally inadequate, and its conclusion of "no significant adverse effects" lacks scientific credibility. Based on the available data, the project is likely to result in significant adverse effects on the integrity of multiple Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The current modeling fails to account for the cumulative mortality risks posed to protected species within their primary foraging grounds and along established migration corridors.

3.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS LOCATION

This location is the primary marine foraging ground for breeding red-throated divers from the Lewis Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA); it lies within the documented foraging range of the world's largest gannet colony at St Kilda, approximately 100–105km to the south-southwest; it sits directly across the main UK departure corridor for Iceland-bound migrants including whooper swan and pink-footed goose; and it is surrounded by communities whose livelihoods, culture and environment have been inseparable from this stretch of sea for thousands of years.

The EIAR does not adequately characterise or mitigate the ornithological risks of this development. For the reasons set out below, the conclusion of 'no significant adverse effects' on the ornithological environment is not supported by the weight of evidence, and the application should be refused.

3.2 RELEVANT DESIGNATED SITES AND SPA CONNECTIVITY

3.2.1 LEWIS PEATLANDS SPA

The Lewis Peatlands SPA encompasses 58,984 hectares of blanket bog immediately inland of the proposed development. Its qualifying features include 80 breeding pairs of red-throated diver, approximately 9% of the British breeding population, as well as black-throated diver, golden eagle, merlin, golden plover, dunlin and greenshank. The peatlands of Lewis are directly adjacent to the proposed array, and the west coast inshore waters off Barvas and the surrounding townships constitute the primary marine foraging habitat for SPA-qualifying red-throated divers throughout the breeding season. Red-throated divers feed almost exclusively at sea within a limited foraging range, making them entirely dependent on the inshore waters that the proposed array would disrupt.

3.2.2 WEST COAST OF THE OUTER HEBRIDES PROPOSED SPA (pSPA)

The West Coast of the Outer Hebrides has been identified and proposed as a marine Special Protection Area specifically because of its importance as a foraging ground for breeding red-

throated divers from adjacent colonies, including the Lewis Peatlands SPA. The Scottish Government's Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment for this designation confirms that the west coast marine environment is critical to the conservation of these birds. Under JNCC guidance, proposed SPAs are provisionally afforded the same protection as formally classified SPAs while designation proceeds. The Spiorad na Mara array sits directly within the area identified for this pSPA designation, and any impacts on its qualifying features must be assessed with full legal weight accordingly.

3.2.3 ST KILDA SPA AND SEAS OFF ST KILDA SPA

St Kilda lies approximately 100–105km to the south-southwest of the proposed array, on a bearing of approximately 230°. The archipelago is home to the world's largest northern gannet colony, with over 59,000 breeding pairs confirmed in the 2023 drone census. It also supports the UK's largest Atlantic puffin colony (over 100,000 pairs), a significant fulmar colony (around 20,000 pairs in 2023, down sharply from 67,000 in 1999), and important populations of guillemot, razorbill, Leach's petrel and Manx shearwater. Both the St Kilda SPA (covering the breeding colony) and the Seas off St Kilda SPA (covering the marine foraging area) are formally designated under the UK Habitats Regulations.

Northern gannets have been recorded foraging up to 320km from their colony, and routinely make foraging trips well in excess of 100km. The array area lies within the documented foraging range of St Kilda gannets and within the foraging ranges of fulmar, puffin and guillemot. NatureScot's own conservation advice confirms that gannet, fulmar, guillemot and puffin from St Kilda SPA are sensitive to collision and displacement from offshore wind developments. The Habitats Regulations Assessment for this application must formally assess connectivity between the St Kilda and Seas off St Kilda SPAs and the proposed development, and must consider whether adverse effects on site integrity of these designations can be excluded.

NatureScot's own conservation and management advice for St Kilda records that guillemot at St Kilda SPA is in unfavourable condition (a 55% decline since 1992), fulmar is in unfavourable condition (a roughly two-thirds decline since 1999), and kittiwake has declined by approximately 90% since 1994. For species already in unfavourable condition at an SPA, the threshold for what constitutes an adverse effect on site integrity is necessarily more stringent, as any additional mortality further undermines already compromised conservation objectives.

3.2.4 OTHER RELEVANT SPAs

Multiple further SPAs for kittiwake, Arctic tern, guillemot, razorbill and other qualifying species have colonies whose breeding season foraging ranges extend into or near the array area. Given the proximity of the Barvas coast to the array and the very large turbine footprint (140km^2), NatureScot's GIS screening tool should be used to produce a definitive and comprehensive long-list of relevant SPAs for inclusion in the Habitats Regulations Assessment. This objection requests that the Marine Directorate confirms that all relevant SPAs have been properly screened before any determination is made.

3.3 COLLISION RISK TO SEABIRD SPECIES

With a 30m blade clearance above Mean Sea Level and blade tip heights of up to 338.4m, the rotor swept area of each turbine covers the entire height band from 30m to 338.4m, the primary flight zone for a wide range of protected seabird species foraging in the waters off the northwest Lewis coast.

3.3.1 KITTIWAKE

Kittiwake is a Red-listed species in the UK. It regularly forages at low heights over inshore waters, placing it directly within the lower portion of the rotor swept area. The EIAR's own Population Viability Analysis (PVA) assesses kittiwake collision impacts over 35 years. The assumptions underlying this PVA, particularly the baseline mortality rates and avoidance rates applied to a species already in steep decline, require independent scrutiny. Using stable-population mortality parameters for a demonstrably declining population will systematically underestimate the additional mortality burden imposed by turbine collisions.

3.3.2 HERRING GULL AND GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

Both species regularly forage in nearshore waters off the Barvas coast and fly at heights intersecting the rotor zone. The adequacy of avoidance rates applied to large gulls foraging at low altitude, particularly in the adverse weather conditions typical of the northwest Lewis coast, should be independently verified before the EIAR's conclusions are accepted.

3.3.3 ARCTIC TERN

Arctic tern is an Annex I species protected under the Birds Directive, a qualifying feature of several Scottish SPAs, and is in long-term serious decline. It has a very low reproductive rate, typically one chick per breeding attempt. The EIAR includes dedicated collision risk modelling and PVA results for this species (Tables 14-26 and 14-27 of Chapter 14). Given that even modest additional mortality may have population-level consequences for a declining species with such low productivity, the EIAR's conclusions for Arctic tern require robust independent scrutiny.

3.3.4 NORTHERN GANNET (ST KILDA SPA AND SEAS OFF ST KILDA SPA)

The Spiorad na Mara array lies within the routine foraging range of breeding gannets from St Kilda (59,000+ pairs), Sula Sgeir (11,230 pairs), and the Flannan Islands (5,280 pairs). Gannets are among the seabird species considered most vulnerable to collision with wind turbines. They forage by plunge-diving at high speed, often approaching the sea surface at steep angles which may reduce their ability to detect and avoid rotor blades.

The EIAR's cumulative effects assessment (Section 14.13) models gannet collision risk across four scenarios including with and without the Berwick Bank wind farm – itself indicative of the scale of uncertainty and cumulative burden on this species. The Habitats Regulations Assessment must specifically address whether the collision and displacement impacts on gannets from the St Kilda SPA and Seas off St Kilda SPA populations can be excluded from causing an adverse effect on site integrity.

3.3.5 FULMAR, PUFFIN, GUILLEMOT AND RAZORBILL (ST KILDA SPA)

These species all breed at St Kilda in very large numbers and all forage in waters that include the array area. All are assessed in the EIAR for displacement and in some cases collision (Tables 14-28, 14-31, 14-33, 14-35). As noted above, guillemot and fulmar at St Kilda SPA are already in unfavourable condition. The EIAR cannot lawfully conclude that there is no adverse effect on site integrity for these species without demonstrating that additional mortality from the Spiorad na Mara array will not further compromise their conservation status at the St Kilda SPA.

3.4 DISPLACEMENT AND BARRIER EFFECTS

3.4.1 RED-THROATED DIVER - LEWIS PEATLANDS SPA

Red-throated divers breeding on the Lewis Peatlands SPA are obligate marine foragers, commuting daily between freshwater breeding lochans on the peatlands and inshore coastal waters off the Barvas coast and surrounding townships. The proposed array, positioned 5–13km

offshore directly in front of these breeding territories, represents a major intrusion into their marine foraging habitat. Displacement from these inshore waters would force breeding birds to travel significantly further to find alternative feeding grounds, increasing energy expenditure during chick-rearing – the most energetically demanding phase of the breeding season – with likely consequences for productivity and the long-term viability of the Lewis Peatlands SPA population.

Research on red-throated divers in Lewis specifically has identified that offshore wind developments may displace birds from critical breeding and feeding habitat, and has noted the urgent need to quantify these effects in the marine environment before consenting proceeds. The precautionary principle demands that this need be addressed, not assumed away, in the Habitats Regulations Assessment for this application.

3.4.2 GREAT NORTHERN DIVER

Great northern diver is similarly sensitive to disturbance from marine structures and is known to avoid nearshore developments. The EIAR includes PVA modelling for this species (Tables 14-38 and 14-39). With a total biogeographic population of just 11,000 individuals, any sustained additional displacement mortality over a 35-year operational period must be treated with extreme caution.

3.4.3 RED-NECKED PHALAROPE - RSPB LOCH NA MUILNE, ARNOL

The red-necked phalarope (Phalaropus lobatus) is one of the rarest breeding birds in the United Kingdom. It is a Red-listed species of highest conservation concern, an Annex I species afforded special protection under the Birds Directive, and a Species of Principal Importance under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The entire UK breeding population numbers only around 30 pairs, almost entirely confined to the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland. Loch na Muilne in Arnol, on the west Lewis coast, supports a breeding population of this species, placing it among a tiny number of sites in the entire country of direct importance to the survival of red-necked phalarope as a UK breeding bird.

The species is acutely sensitive to disturbance at and around its breeding sites, and its breeding success is directly dependent on the integrity of the wetland habitat and the quiet, undisturbed character of the surrounding crofting landscape and seascape where it feeds. Its migration route runs directly through this project as it migrates in early August from the Northern and Western Isles to North America. The construction of an offshore wind farm of this scale, with sustained vessel noise, increased human activity and visual disturbance across multiple breeding seasons and migrations, in the waters directly adjacent to the Arnol coastline represents an unassessed threat to one of the most precious and irreplaceable concentrations of breeding birds in Scotland.

The EIAR contains no assessment of the impact of this development on the red-necked phalarope population at Loch na Muilne. That omission is not acceptable for a species of this rarity and this legal status.

3.4.4 BARRIER EFFECTS ON COMMUTING FLIGHTS

Red-throated divers from the Lewis Peatlands SPA make repeated daily flights between their freshwater breeding lochs and the inshore marine feeding areas off the Barvas coast. An array of up to 60 turbines, each up to 338.4m tall, positioned between 5 and 13km offshore, constitutes a substantial physical barrier directly across these commuting routes. Similarly, gannets flying northeast from St Kilda towards feeding areas off the west Lewis coast must pass through or around the array footprint. The EIAR does not adequately address barrier effects on routine commuting and foraging movements as a distinct impact pathway separate from displacement.

3.5 MIGRATORY SPECIES AND THE ICELAND CORRIDOR

The west coast of Lewis opposite the proposed array, is one of the principal UK departure and arrival points for birds migrating between Scotland and Iceland. This corridor is used by large numbers of individuals from populations with very limited global size, meaning any sustained turbine mortality could have measurable consequences at the population level.

3.5.1 WHOOPER SWAN

Whooper swan is included in the EIAR's Migratory Collision Risk Modelling Report (Appendix 14.4, Table 2) with a total biogeographic population of only 43,000 individuals. The entire Icelandic whooper swan population uses the Lewis coast as a primary departure and arrival corridor for their annual migration. However, the EIAR's methodology draws straight-line migration pathways between the UK and Iceland, which almost certainly underestimates the density of birds passing through the specific array footprint. Whooper swans migrate in concentrated flocks, often at night, along well-documented coastal corridors, the northwest Lewis coast is one of the most heavily used of these in the UK. With rotor blades beginning just 30 m above sea level and reaching to 338.4m, migrating swans flying at their typical overwater altitude, particularly in adverse weather when birds fly lower, will intersect the rotor swept area. A global population of 43,000 birds cannot sustain meaningful additional annual mortality over a 35-year operational lifetime without population-level consequences.

3.5.2 PINK-FOOTED GOOSE AND ICELANDIC GREYLAG GOOSE

Both species use the same northwest Lewis corridor for their Iceland-Scotland migration and are included in the EIAR's migratory modelling (biogeographic populations of 510,000 and 76,000 respectively). Pink-footed goose is a qualifying feature of several UK SPAs. The same methodological concerns regarding straight-line pathway modelling apply: the real-world concentration of migration through this specific coastal corridor will be substantially higher than the model assumes.

3.5.3 SVALBARD BARNACLE GOOSE AND SVALBARD LIGHT-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE

These species have exceptionally small total populations (43,500 and 13,400 respectively), are both SPA-qualifying, and are included in the EIAR's migratory modelling. For populations of this size, even a small number of turbine collisions per year, sustained over a 35-year operational period, is potentially significant at the population level. The EIAR's conclusions for these species must be subject to rigorous independent scrutiny.

3.5.4 ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING AND NOCTURNAL SPECIES

The EIAR identifies species potentially attracted to artificial lighting during hours of darkness (Table 14-22, Chapter 14). This constitutes an additional mortality pathway beyond that captured by standard collision risk models, and one that is particularly relevant at this location. Manx shearwater and Leach's storm petrel both breed at St Kilda in significant numbers and are active at sea at night; both are known to be fatally attracted to artificial lights. This pathway has not been adequately assessed or mitigated in the EIAR.

3.6 CONSTRUCTION PHASE DISTURBANCE

The EIAR's ornithological assessment is heavily weighted towards operational impacts. The proposed construction programme spans approximately five years from 2028/29 to 2032/33, encompassing multiple breeding seasons for all species discussed above. Percussive piling, high vessel traffic and underwater noise will cause disturbance within the inshore foraging zone used

by Lewis Peatlands SPA red-throated divers during the breeding season. Given that the array is positioned directly in front west side villages, at the closest point only 5km from shore, construction activities will be both visually and acoustically intrusive throughout this period. The adequacy of the construction phase ornithological assessment, and proposed mitigation including any seasonal restrictions on piling operations, must be subject to independent scrutiny and should form a specific condition of any consent.

3.7 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ASSESSMENT

The EIAR contains an extensive Cumulative Effects Assessment (Section 14.13). Several significant concerns arise:

- The ScotWind leasing round approved multiple additional wind farm sites in the Outer Hebrides and North Atlantic region, including the Havbredey floating wind project proposed approximately 35km northwest of Lewis by the same developer. It is not clear that all consented, proposed or seriously progressed developments have been captured within the CEA scope.
- The gannet cumulative assessment considers four separate scenarios, including with and without the Berwick Bank wind farm, reflecting significant uncertainty in the cumulative burden. The Marine Directorate should satisfy itself that the most precautionary scenario has been used as the basis for the HRA.
- Kittiwake is assessed cumulatively for both collision and displacement. Given that kittiwake is already in a state of catastrophic regional decline (a 90% fall at St Kilda since 1994 and no successful nesting in 2018 and 2019), any conclusion that cumulative impacts are acceptable for this species requires the highest level of scrutiny.
- The cumulative assessment does not adequately address the combined effect of this development and the broader ScotWind programme, and onshore developments on migratory species using the Lewis corridor, many of which face an increasingly developed Atlantic flyway.

3.8 ADEQUACY OF THE POPULATION VIABILITY ANALYSIS

The EIAR uses Population Viability Analysis (Appendix 14.5) modelled over a 35-year operational period as the primary tool for assessing population-level impacts. Several aspects require independent scrutiny:

- Baseline mortality rates used for declining species – including guillemot, fulmar and kittiwake, may not reflect current population trajectories. Applying stable-population mortality parameters to populations already in decline will systematically underestimate the additional burden of turbine mortality.
- Avoidance rates applied to species flying at night, in adverse weather, or at peak migration, when avoidance behaviour is known to be substantially reduced, may be inappropriately optimistic for this location given its position on a major migratory corridor and in frequently severe Atlantic weather.
- For species with very small total populations – great northern diver (11,000), whooper swan (43,000), Svalbard barnacle goose (43,500) and Svalbard light-bellied brent goose (13,400), worst-case PVA scenarios should carry greater weight than central estimates in the HRA.
- The PVA does not adequately integrate the cumulative mortality burden from all ScotWind developments and onshore developments on shared populations,

particularly for species like gannet and kittiwake that range across multiple proposed development areas.

3.9 POPULATION RECOVERABILITY

Several of the most severely affected species have very low reproductive rates, making them intrinsically vulnerable to sustained increases in adult mortality:

- Kittiwake: typically one to two chicks per year; 90% decline at St Kilda since 1994; no successful nesting on St Kilda's Hirta in 2018 or 2019.
- Red-throated diver: typically one to two chicks per year; highly sensitive to disturbance; SPA-qualifying population on Lewis.
- Great northern diver: typically one to two chicks per year; global population of only 11,000 individuals.
- Northern gannet: one egg per year; long-lived; slow to mature (five years to adulthood); population-level effects of sustained mortality may not become apparent for a decade or more.
- Atlantic puffin: one egg per year; IUCN Vulnerable; declining at St Kilda.
- Whooper swan: small clutch; long-lived; global population of only 43,000 birds.

The precautionary principle, which is embedded in the Habitats Regulations, demands that for all these species the threshold for demonstrating no adverse effect on site integrity is set and applied conservatively.

3.10 LEGAL AND PLANNING CONTEXT

The following legislative and regulatory frameworks are engaged by this application:

- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – all seabird species discussed above are fully protected.
- The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) and the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 – requiring Appropriate Assessment of likely significant effects on the Lewis Peatlands SPA, West Coast of the Outer Hebrides pSPA, St Kilda SPA and Seas off St Kilda SPA, as well as any other SPAs within foraging range of the array.
- The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 – imposing a duty on Scottish Ministers to protect and enhance the marine environment within Scottish territorial waters.
- The applicant has submitted a Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA) alongside the EIAR. This objection requests that the Marine Directorate undertakes a rigorous independent review of the RIAA – particularly its treatment of the Lewis Peatlands SPA, the West Coast pSPA, the St Kilda and Seas off St Kilda SPAs, and migratory species – and that NatureScot is formally consulted on the adequacy of the ornithological assessment before any determination is made. Given the scale of the development and its unique nearshore location, an independent peer review of the ornithological and HRA chapters of the EIAR should be commissioned.

3.11 CONCLUSION

The proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm poses unacceptable risks to a wide range of highly protected and globally significant seabird and waterbird populations. At its closest point only 5 kilometres from the west Lewis shore, making it the closest ScotWind development to any inhabited coastline in Scotland, the array occupies the primary marine foraging ground of the Lewis Peatlands SPA red-throated diver population, lies within the routine foraging range of the world's largest gannet colony and multiple other SPA-qualifying seabird populations at St Kilda, and sits directly across the principal UK migratory corridor to Iceland for species including whooper swan, whose entire Icelandic population passes through this stretch of coast.

The EIAR's conclusion of no significant adverse effects is not credible in the face of the cumulative ornithological risks identified in this chapter. For species already in unfavourable conservation condition, guillemot, fulmar and kittiwake at St Kilda; red-throated diver on Lewis, the threshold for demonstrating no adverse effect on site integrity is necessarily more stringent, and that threshold has not been met. For migratory species with very small global populations, whooper swan at 43,000, Svalbard barnacle goose at 43,500, Svalbard light-bellied brent goose at 13,400, the precautionary principle embedded in the Habitats Regulations demands that worst-case scenarios carry greater weight than central estimates, and the EIAR does not apply that principle.

The project in its current nearshore form is likely to result in adverse effects on the integrity of multiple SPAs and cannot be consented consistently with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. This ground alone is sufficient to warrant refusal. Deeper offshore locations, positioned well beyond the critical marine foraging zones of these SPA populations and clear of the nearshore migration corridor, would substantially reduce these risks while still enabling renewable energy generation. The applicant's own Havbredey floating wind proposal, sited approximately 35 kilometres further offshore by the same developer, demonstrates that such alternatives exist and are being actively pursued. The nearshore location of Spiorad na Mara is a choice, not a necessity, and it is a choice whose ornithological consequences are unacceptable.

CHAPTER 4.

ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY AND UNDERWATER NOISE IMPACTS

The assessment of marine mammal and benthic ecology provided in the EIAR is fundamentally inadequate. The applicant’s conclusion of "no significant adverse effects" lacks credibility when measured against the environmental sensitivity of the project area. Consequently, the project cannot be shown beyond reasonable scientific doubt to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of designated European sites.

4.1 THE EXCEPTIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THIS MARINE ENVIRONMENT

The waters of the Outer Hebrides are not an ordinary stretch of sea. A Scottish Government scientific report, commissioned specifically in relation to marine renewable energy developments off the west coast of Lewis, states that “The Outer Hebrides are probably the richest area of the UK for marine mammals, with around twenty species of cetacean recorded in the region over the

last thirty years, and that the area holds important breeding areas for both harbour seals and grey seals."

[SCOTTISH MARINE AND FRESHWATER SCIENCE VOL. 5 NO. 9 : HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/PUBLICATIONS/SCOTTISH-MARINE-FRESHWATER-SCIENCE-VOLUME-5-NUMBER-9-STRATEGIC-SURVEYS/PAGES/3/]

This report was written by the Scottish Government's own scientists in direct consideration of offshore renewable energy in these precise waters. The richness of this environment was known and documented before these turbines were proposed. It must now be the foundation of any honest assessment of this application.

Twenty-three marine mammal species have been recorded in the wider Hebridean area. Nine are regular year-round inhabitants: harbour porpoise, grey seal, harbour seal, bottlenose dolphin, common dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, Risso's dolphin, minke whale, and killer whale. These are not occasional visitors. They are present in every season, feeding, breeding, raising young, and navigating the same waters year after year. [https://www.hwdt.org/hebridean-marine-mammal-atlas]

This is not background biodiversity. The Inner Hebrides and Minches Special Area of Conservation was specifically designated to protect harbour porpoise in the waters around the Outer Hebrides. NatureScot confirms:

> "*The west of Scotland is home to a higher density of harbour porpoise than is found elsewhere. The Inner Hebrides and the Minches SAC was created to protect the animals in this region.*"

[WWW.NATURE.SCOT/PLANTS-ANIMALS-AND-FUNGI/MAMMALS/MARINE-MAMMALS/DOLPHINS-WHALES-AND-PORPOISES & https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/special-area-conservation/10508/sac-site-selection-harbour-porpoise.pdf]

It is the largest SAC for this species in Europe.
[HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/NEWS/PROTECTION-FOR-HARBOUR-PORPOISE/]

The seas off the east coast of Lewis are designated as a Marine Protected Area specifically for the Risso's dolphin - a species recorded in these waters every year, with mothers and calves documented within the MPA.

> *"Mothers with calves and groups consisting entirely of juveniles have also been recorded within the MPA. This suggests these waters are not only essential for feeding but may also be important for breeding, nursing and raising their young."*

[NORTH-EAST LEWIS MARINE PROTECTED AREA: HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/NATURE-CONSERVATION-MPA/10476/MPA-SITE-SUMMARY-ENGLISH.PDF]

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust's photo-identification programme has identified over 300 individual minke whales in these waters since 1990 - some returning year after year for nearly three decades, establishing sighting histories that are the longest recorded for this species in Europe.
[MINKE WHALE LONGEST KNOWN HISTORY OF SIGHTINGS IN EUROPE: HTTPS://WWW.HWDT.ORG/CATALOGUE-MINKE-WHALE]

Basking sharks - already listed in the developer's own risk assessments - are regular summer visitors. NatureScot states that:

> "*in Scottish waters, large seasonal aggregations occur in shallow coastal areas during* summer*, particularly within the Sea of the Hebrides.*"

[HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/DOC/SHARKS-AND-SKATES-SCOTLAND-REPORT-BASKING-SHARK-CETORHINUS-MAXIMUS]

The Monach Isles, within the wider Outer Hebrides shelf, support the largest grey seal breeding colony in Europe and tracking data confirms that the shelf waters west of the Outer Hebrides, the precise location of this development, are critical foraging habitat for these seals.

*"This IMMA encompasses the continental shelf waters between the Outer Hebrides and the continental shelf edge, and includes the Monach Isles. This area is particularly important for grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*), with the Monach Isles supporting the largest breeding colony in Europe, and ~6.5% of global pup production. These rich and productive waters also support a diverse range of additional marine mammal species. These include species associated with the continental shelf slope (sei whales (*Balaenoptera borealis*), fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*), sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*), northern bottlenose whales (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*), long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*), Atlantic white-sided dolphins (*Lagenorhyncus acutus*), common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*)), as well as species associated with the shelf itself (humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), white-beaked dolphins (*Lagenorhyncus albirostris*), harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*), bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), grey seals, and harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*)). Minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), killer whales (*Orcinus orca*), and Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*)"*

[MONACH ISLES AND OUTER HEBRIDES WESTERN CONTINENTAL SHELF IMMA: HTTPS://WWW.MARINEMAMMALHABITAT.ORG/FACTSHEETS/MONACH-ISLES-AND-OUTER-HEBRIDES-WESTERN-CONTINENTAL-SHELF-IMMA/]

This is a place of extraordinary, internationally significant marine life. It is the kind of habitat that, were it anywhere else in the world, would be the subject of the strongest possible protection. Any honest assessment of this application must start from that baseline.

> *"This combined research has identified the area as providing important habitat for many other species of cetacean, including harbour porpoise, minke whales, humpback whales and common dolphins. This evidence informed the site selection and designation in 2020, of the north-east Lewis MPA for Risso's dolphins and sand-eels, demonstrating the importance of the sites for the breeding, feeding and social lives of Risso's dolphins and other marine species."*

(WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION JOINT REPRESENTATION SUBMITTED WITH THE HEBRIDEAN WHALE AND DOLPHIN TRUST: HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/APPENDIX_I_-_CONSULTATION_REPRESENTATIONS.PDF)

The waters west of Lewis are also a documented migration corridor for large whale species whose presence is given insufficient weight in the assessment and migration routes not adequately assessed. The HWDT records fin whales off Scotland's west coast during summer migration, sperm whales reported several times each year, and - particularly striking given the timing - sei whales with "*a number of sightings reported during 2023 season around Lewis and Harris*", the same year as the Tolsta pilot whale stranding. [HWDT SPECIES RECORDS: HTTPS://WWW.HWDT.ORG/NEWS/SCOTLANDS-CETACEANS-2026]

The Blue Corridors initiative maps global whale migration routes using satellite tracking and published research data, and shows fin whale and sperm whale migration corridors running along the west coast of the Outer Hebrides. It visually confirms what the HWDT data demonstrates on the ground: these are not marginal or incidental sightings. These are species undertaking long-distance migrations through some of the most acoustically sensitive marine environments in the northeast Atlantic.

[BLUE CORRIDORS INTERACTIVE MAP - FIN WHALE AND SPERM WHALE CORRIDORS OFF OUTER HEBRIDES: [HTTPS://BLUECORRIDORS.ORG/EXPLORE/SPECIES]

The proposed development would place a 140km² field of noise-generating infrastructure directly within those migration routes. [HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-3-PROJECT-DESCRIPTION.PDF]

The EIAR does not adequately assess the barrier and disturbance effects on these large migratory species. Their presence is treated as low-sensitivity precisely because they are wide-ranging - yet it is their wide-ranging, migratory nature that makes disruption to a key corridor so significant. Disrupting a migration route is not a localised impact. It is a threat to the entire annual cycle of the species using it.

It is important to note that while the development site lies to the northwest of Lewis, the marine mammals described here do not recognise such boundaries. These are highly mobile species whose ranges encompass the full waters of the Western Isles - east, west, north and south. The harbour porpoise SAC, the East Lewis MPA for Risso's dolphin, the grey seal foraging habitat, and the feeding grounds of minke whales documented by the HWDT all fall within the broader ecosystem of which this development forms part of.

An assessment that treats the array area as an isolated patch of sea, and disregards the connectivity of these species across the wider Hebridean marine environment, would fundamentally misrepresent the nature of the harm being proposed. Noise propagates; animals move; the food web connects. What happens 6km off the northwest coast of Lewis does not stay there.

This is not background biodiversity. It is internationally significant marine life in a habitat that independent scientific bodies have already recognised, repeatedly, as deserving the strongest available protection. Any honest assessment of this application must start from that baseline — and the EIAR does not.

4.2 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK DEMANDS MORE THAN HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED

This is not merely a matter of ecological concern — it is a matter of law. Under the Habitats Regulations Appraisal process, Scottish Ministers are legally required to refuse consent unless it can be ascertained beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the proposed development will not adversely affect the integrity of a European site. NatureScot's own guidance is unambiguous:

> "*A competent authority must not authorise a plan or project unless it can show beyond reasonable scientific doubt - through an appropriate assessment - that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of a European site.*"

[HABITATS REGULATIONS APPRAISAL (HRA) : HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/PROFESSIONAL-ADVICE/PLANNING-AND-DEVELOPMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL-ASSESSMENT/HABITATS-REGULATIONS-APPRAISAL-HRA]

The standard is not whether harm is likely. The standard is whether it can be shown, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that harm will not occur. Given the number of European Protected Species known to regularly use these waters, the proximity of designated SACs and MPAs, and the scale and duration of the proposed construction works, meeting that standard will be exceptionally difficult to demonstrate.

Furthermore, the Habitats Regulations require that cumulative effects with other plans and projects be assessed in combination - not just the footprint of this individual site. The Scottish Government's own policy documents acknowledge that:

> "*due to the scale and potential cumulative impact of existing, proposed and planned offshore wind development in Scotland, it is likely that Scottish offshore wind plans and projects will be required to undergo the derogations process under the Habitats Regulations.*"

[CONSERVATION OF HABITATS AND SPECIES (OFFSHORE WIND) (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2026: ICIA SCREENING REPORT HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/PUBLICATIONS/ISLAND-COMMUNITIES-IMPACT-ASSESSMENT-ICIA-SCREENING-REPORT-CONSERVATION-HABITATS-SPECIES-OFFSHORE-WIND-MISCELLANEOUS-AMENDMENTS-SCOTLAND-REGULATIONS-2026/]

In other words, the Scottish Government's own analysis concedes that impacts of a kind requiring legal derogation are anticipated, not merely possible. I urge Scottish Ministers to apply the full rigour of the legal test to this application, and not to treat the derogations process as a routine formality.

The Developer's Own Risk Assessment Acknowledges the Threat

We draw the Scottish Ministers' attention to the European Protected Species and Basking Shark Risk Assessment submitted by N4 / Northland Sheena Limited to Marine Scotland on 22 February 2023 in support of licensing for offshore surveys. That document explicitly identifies the risk of disturbance and potential injury to European Protected Species during geophysical and geotechnical surveys. Species listed as potentially affected include minke whale, harbour porpoise, common dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, grey seal and basking shark.

[EPS & BASKING SHARK RISK ASSESSMENT FOR GEOPHYSICAL, GEOTECHNICAL & ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEYS N4 OFFSHORE WIND FARM AND CABLE CORRIDOR : HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/N4_PCM_OFF_EPS_RISKASSESSMENT_V2_REDACTED.PDF]

This is not the assertion of objectors. It is the developer's own acknowledgement, submitted to the regulator, that survey work alone poses risks to the very animals protected under European and domestic law.

If preliminary survey work - vessels mapping the seabed - carries these formally acknowledged risks, then the question must be asked with complete seriousness: what will the construction of up to 60 turbines, requiring years of foundation installation, boulder clearance, cable burial, trenching and vessel activity, do to this ecosystem? The developer cannot on one hand acknowledge risk from surveys and on the other assert that full construction presents no significant threat. That position is not credible, and it should not be accepted.

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation

Conservation submitted a joint representation for “Spiorad na Mara” Offshore Windfarm (https://marine.gov.scot/sites/default/files/scoping_opinion_15.pdf) in which they say:

> *“In the North Sea, within and adjacent to designated SACs/MPAs for harbour porpoises, some of the largest offshore windfarms in the world are being developed, with little consideration on the impacts both individually and cumulatively, on these MPAs and the species for which they are designated, despite baseline data demonstrating the importance of these areas for the harbour porpoise, a sensitive and protected species. Of particular concern is the use of pile driving during the construction of offshore windfarms, as the noise can adversely affect the behaviour of whales, dolphins and porpoises over significant distances. Additional sources of disturbance and potential harm to cetaceans will result from construction, support vessels, benthic / prey disturbance, pollution and the need to manage unexploded ordinance clearance.”*

The assumption that marine mammals will simply relocate does not negate impact. Displacement from established feeding or breeding habitat is itself a recognised ecological effect and may result in increased energetic costs, reduced foraging success, and population-level consequences.

4.3 CONSTRUCTION NOISE: A WELL-DOCUMENTED AND SERIOUS THREAT TO CETACEANS

4.3.1 ACOUSTIC IMPACTS AND CUMULATIVE NOISE DISTURBANCE ON MARINE MAMMALS

The underwater world of the Outer Hebrides is a world of sound. Harbour porpoises navigate and hunt by echolocation. Minke whales communicate over vast distances. Dolphins coordinate feeding in groups using acoustic signals. Every species listed in this objection depends on sound for survival. What pile-driving does to that world is not uncertain - it is well established in the scientific literature.

Pile-driving - the method used to install the foundations for each turbine - generates underwater noise at source levels that can cause behavioural disruption in cetaceans at very significant distances. The developer's own EIAR states:

- *“Harbour porpoises are widely regarded as the most sensitive marine mammal receptor to underwater noise.” (Paragraph 13.8.1.19)*
- *"Harbour porpoises are highly sensitive to underwater noise, with studies suggesting behavioural disturbance up to 70 km from the pile driving, at which noise generated would be audible over background noise (Bailey et al., 2010).*
- *Current UK guidance assumes total displacement within 26 km of pile driving, however monitoring at a wind farm on the east coast of Scotland/Alba recorded a 50% probability of harbour porpoise response to pile driving within 7.4 km of the first pile location, lowering to 1.3 km at the last pile location with an overall 18% probability of displacement within 26 km (Graham et al., 2019)*" (Paragraph *13.8.2.42)*

[EIAR CHAPTER 13: MARINE MAMMALS - HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

Harbour porpoises are among the most acoustically sensitive of all cetaceans. The noise generated by pile-driving is broadband, percussive, and repeated - each foundation taking several hours to drive, with multiple strikes per minute.

[Effects of offshore wind farm noise on marine mammals and fish - HTTPS://TETHYS.PNNL.GOV/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/PUBLICATIONS/EFFECTS_OF_OFFSHORE_WIND_FARM_NOISE_ON_MARINE-MAMMALS_AND_FISH-1-.PDF]

The scale of this is made concrete by the developer's own documents. The noise modelling appendix (EIAR Appendix 19.2) reveals that percussive piling is planned to occur continuously between April and October across two construction years, using hammer energies of up to 5,000 kJ per blow, with up to 10,635 strikes per pile per day:
"*Within the buried channel, 5 m diameter pin piles are proposed, installed using maximum blow energy of 2,500 kJ, 3,500 kJ, or 5,000 kJ and driving for up to 5.5 hours and 10,635 strikes within a day.*"

The piling programme covers 156^3 percussive pin piles across 35 turbine locations (Option 1, 35 WTGs) plus the offshore substation, with airborne sound power levels reaching up to 145 dB(A):

> "*This assessment of airborne construction noise is based on the maximum design scenario, percussive piling, which can generate airborne sound power levels up to 145 dBA.*"

The developer further acknowledges that under certain atmospheric and sea surface conditions - estimated to occur up to 14% of the time during the piling season - noise propagates via cylindrical rather than spherical spreading, meaning sound travels further and attenuates more slowly than under standard conditions:

- "*It is concluded that atmospheric conditions that increase sound propagation occur for up to 14% of the time.*"
- "*Multiple reflections (cylindrical spreading) are understood to occur under downwind conditions, for this analysis downwind conditions are taken to be wind directions between 270° and 0°, and for wind speeds between 2.5 m/s and 5.5 m/s; these conditions occur for 6% of the time between April and October.*"

[EIAR APPENDIX 19.2: NOISE MODELLING AND PREDICTION - HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/APPENDIX_19.2_-_NOISE_MODELLING_AND_PREDICTION.PDF]

Crucially, this is not a single or short-term event: the modelling assumes up to 5.5 hours of piling per day, repeated daily across the April–October period, over two consecutive years. This represents prolonged and repeated disturbance during biologically important months, increasing the risk of sustained habitat displacement rather than temporary avoidance.

It is also important to note that the figures above are drawn from what the developer describes as an "indicative piling schedule - Option 1 (smallest WTG type) for noise modelling." This is not the maximum design scenario, but a single configuration selected for modelling purposes. Other turbine configurations within the project design envelope may alter the number of piles, piling duration, and hammer energy requirements, meaning the assessed noise impacts may not reflect a true worst-case scenario.

The EIAR also notes that UXO clearance was originally scoped into the assessment but has since been removed from the current design envelope (Chapter 13, Section 13.4.5.1). If UXO clearance proves necessary during construction - which cannot be ruled out given the unpredictability of unexploded ordnance - it would introduce an additional high-intensity impulsive noise source not

covered by this assessment. This is another reason why the design envelope approach is incompatible with the beyond-reasonable-scientific-doubt standard required for HRA.
[EIAR APPENDIX 19.2: NOISE MODELLING AND PREDICTION - HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/APPENDIX_19.2_-_NOISE_MODELLING_AND_PREDICTION.PDF]

4.3.2 THE PROPOSED MITIGATION DOES NOT ADDRESS THE SCALE OF DISTURBANCE
Standard mitigation measures - soft-start procedures, passive acoustic monitoring (PAM), and Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) deployment - are acknowledged in guidance as tools designed to address physical injury risk within the immediate exclusion zone. They are not designed to prevent, and cannot prevent, the behavioural displacement that the EIAR's own literature review demonstrates occurs at ranges of up to 70 km. The measures proposed in the EIAR fall squarely within this category: mitigating for injury, not for disturbance.

The JNCC's own guidance acknowledges the detection limits of these tools directly:

> "*current PAM systems are not suitable for detecting seals and some cetaceans (e.g. baleen whales) and have limited range for others (e.g. harbour porpoise)*"

[JNCC: MARINE MAMMALS AND NOISE MITIGATION - HTTPS://JNCC.GOV.UK/OUR-WORK/MARINE-MAMMALS-AND-NOISE-MITIGATION/] [JNCC PAM GUIDANCE - HTTPS://JNCC.GOV.UK/RESOURCES/FB7D345B-EC24-4C60-ABA2-894E50375E33]

Visual observation by MMOs is similarly constrained by sightlines, weather, and sea state. Neither tool can monitor the full disturbance radius cited in the EIAR's own literature. Their presence in the mitigation framework records disturbance rather than preventing it. Soft-start procedures do not prevent displacement of species from feeding and breeding habitat, and seasonal restrictions - even if applied - do not protect species that are present in these waters year-round. These limitations have been raised by Whale and Dolphin Conservation and the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust in their joint representations to this process.
[HWDT AND WDC JOINT REPRESENTATION - HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/SCOPING_OPINION_15.PDF]

In the absence of a clear and robust assessment of the combined effects of prolonged piling, extended construction seasons, and unmitigated disturbance at scale, it cannot be concluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the project will not adversely affect marine mammal populations.

4.3.3 POLICY REQUIREMENTS: NMP GEN 13 AND ASCOBANS
Scotland's National Marine Plan Policy GEN 13 requires that development should avoid significant adverse effects of man-made noise and vibration, especially on species sensitive to such effects. The developer's own assessment predicts disturbance to 9.186% of the Risso's dolphin management unit population and 27.7% of the coastal bottlenose dolphin population from piling noise alone, yet classifies these effects as "not significant." It is difficult to reconcile that conclusion with a policy that requires effects on acoustically sensitive species to be avoided, not merely documented and downgraded. GEN 13 sets an avoidance standard, not a tolerance threshold.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) - cited in the EIAR's own legislative framework - requires parties to apply the precautionary principle and to minimise the impact of underwater noise on small

cetaceans. ASCOBANS Resolution 7.6 (2016), which addresses underwater noise from anthropogenic activities, is directly relevant to percussive pile-driving of the scale proposed here.

The proposed development would place one of the largest construction noise sources in recent Scottish marine experience directly within habitat used year-round by multiple small cetacean species covered by ASCOBANS obligations. The precautionary approach required by ASCOBANS is not reflected in an assessment that predicts significant population-level disturbance and then classifies the effect as not significant.
[HTTPS://WWW.ASCOBANS.ORG/DOCUMENTS/AGREEMENT-TEXT]

4.3.4 OPERATIONAL NOISE: A 25-YEAR ACOUSTIC IMPACT

The focus on construction noise should not obscure the fact that the acoustic impact of this development extends across its entire operational life, estimated at 25 years or more. Wind turbines generate continuous low-frequency underwater noise throughout operation, creating a lasting alteration of the acoustic environment across the 140 km^2 array area. Peer-reviewed research confirms that "offshore wind turbines are increasingly abundant sources of underwater low frequency noise" whose cumulative contribution raises concern for "possible impact on marine ecosystems."

Independent studies report sound pressure levels at 100 m from a single operating turbine of between 105–125 dB re 1 µPa, with most energy below 1,000 Hz- the frequency range overlapping directly with the communication and navigation frequencies of fin whales, sei whales, and minke whales. [Popper et al., Oceanography- https://tos.org/oceanography/article/acoustic-impacts-of-offshore-wind-energy-on-fishery-resources-an-evolving-source-and-varied-effects-across-a-wind-farms-lifetime].

The EIAR's operational noise conclusions should be subjected to the same scrutiny as its construction noise assessment: the acoustic signature of this development does not end when the last pile is driven.
[Tougaard, J., Hermannsen, L. & Madsen, P.T. (2020). "How loud is the underwater noise from operating offshore wind turbines?" Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, 148(5): 2885–2893. https://doi.org/10.1121/10.0002453]

The EIAR does not demonstrate that disturbance at this scale will not result in population-level effects.

4.4 VESSEL STRIKE RISKS

Increased vessel traffic during both construction and operation introduces a further, underweighted risk. Vessel strikes are a documented cause of injury and mortality in cetaceans in Scottish waters. The HWDT notes that collision with ships poses a documented threat to minke whales in UK waters.

> *“Collisions with ships may also pose a threat with some reports of minke whales being killed by ship strikes in UK waters”*

[HWDT MINKE WHALE SPECIES PROFILE: HTTPS://WWW.HWDT.ORG/MINKE-WHALE]

Research at Scottish offshore wind farm construction sites has demonstrated that harbour porpoise detections declined by up to 33% in the 48 hours *before* piling began, associated with increased vessel and pre-piling activities - showing that construction vessels alone cause significant cetacean displacement, independent of pile-driving noise, and before any formal mitigation measures are triggered. [BENHEMMA-LE GALL ET AL. (2023), MARINE POLLUTION BULLETIN: HTTPS://WWW.SCIENCEDIRECT.COM/SCIENCE/ARTICLE/PII/S0195925523002378]

With construction involving continuous vessel movements across a 140km^2 site during the period of peak cetacean presence, the cumulative risk of vessel disturbance and strike to the species described in this objection cannot be dismissed as negligible.

4.5 ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELDS (EMF)/ CABLE EFFECTS

A further concern specific to elasmobranchs is electromagnetic field (EMF) emissions from subsea cables. Basking sharks, like all sharks and rays, possess highly sensitive electroreceptors (ampullae of Lorenzini) that detect weak electric fields used for navigation, prey detection, and orientation. Scottish Government ScotMER research confirms that benthic elasmobranchs can respond to EMF of the type and intensity associated with subsea cables, with responses varying by species, life stage and exposure level - and identifies critical knowledge gaps that remain unresolved. [SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT SCOTMER REVIEW - EMF EVIDENCE GAP FF.07: HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/PUBLICATIONS/REVIEW-FISH-FISHERIES-RESEARCH-INFORM-SCOTMER-EVIDENCE-GAPS-FUTURE-STRATEGIC-RESEARCH-UK/PAGES/11/]

Peer-reviewed research further confirms that subsea cable EMFs may intersect with the foraging habitat, migration routes, and reproductive areas of elasmobranchs, with demonstrated behavioural effects including disturbance and displacement depending on cable characteristics and life stage. [HERMANS ET AL. (2024), ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION: HTTPS://WWW.SCIENCEDIRECT.COM/SCIENCE/ARTICLE/PII/S0269749124002847]

The EIAR does not adequately assess this pathway for basking sharks. Given their IUCN Endangered status, confirmed seasonal presence in these waters, and the known sensitivity of elasmobranchs to EMF, this represents a gap in the assessment that the precautionary principle requires to be addressed before consent is granted.

[NATURESCOT BASKING SHARK GUIDANCE: HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/DOC/SHARKS-AND-SKATES-SCOTLAND-REPORT-BASKING-SHARK-CETORHINUS-MAXIMUS]

A related and under-addressed concern is the export cable corridor linking the array to shore, which constitutes a separate zone of physical disturbance, seabed disruption, and ongoing EMF emissions. Installation of the export cable involves trenching, burial, and potentially rock armouring across a corridor that passes through further marine habitat. Once installed, the cables emit EMF continuously throughout the project's operational life - a permanent pathway of potential disturbance to elasmobranchs including basking sharks. The marine mammal and elasmobranch assessment of impacts along the cable corridor deserves the same level of scrutiny as the array area itself and should not be treated as a lesser or secondary concern.

4.6 THE 2023 PILOT WHALE STRANDING: A WARNING THAT DEMANDS RESPECT

In July 2023, 55 long-finned pilot whales stranded on Traigh Mhòr beach at North Tolsta, Isle of Lewis - one of the largest fatal mass stranding events in the United Kingdom in decades. Fifty-four animals died. Only one survived. Those of us who live here will never forget it.
The Scottish Government's acoustic analysis report confirmed that geophysical surveys were being carried out at the Spiorad na Mara lease area at the time, with two vessels operating to the west of Lewis.

The subsequent Scottish Government investigation concluded that acoustic data at the Tolsta monitoring site did not detect unusual anthropogenic noise, and offered an alternative hypothesis involving social behaviour during a difficult birth. I note, however, that the investigation itself acknowledged significant limitations in the detection range of the acoustic recorders used, and that self-noise in the recordings risked masking some anthropogenic signals. The report does not - and cannot - rule out anthropogenic contribution.
[INVESTIGATION INTO THE LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALE (GLOBICEPHALA MELAS) MASS STRANDING EVENT, TOLSTA, NA H-EILEANAN SIAR, JULY 2023: HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/PUBLICATIONS/INVESTIGATION-LONG-FINNED-PILOT-WHALE-GLOBICEPHALA-MELAS-MASS-STRANDING-EVENT-TOLSTA-NA-H-EILEANAN-SIAR-JULY-2023/PAGES/5/]

The report highlights that mass stranding events occur in this region and remain complex, not fully understood phenomena, demonstrating the vulnerability of cetacean populations in these waters. This is a population already operating at the edge of what the environment here imposes on it. We are being asked to approve an industrial development of unprecedented scale in the very waters where that population lives and forages, while that population's sensitivity to disturbance has just been demonstrated in the most devastating possible terms.

The investigation does not exclude anthropogenic contribution; it explicitly identifies limitations in acoustic detection capability.

Whether or not the 2023 stranding was linked to survey activity, it is a stark, recent, and viscerally local reminder of what is at stake. It must weigh heavily in this decision.

4.7 SEABED DISTURBANCE AND IRREVERSIBLE HABITAT DEGRADATION

The installation of up to 60 fixed-bottom turbine foundations across miles of seabed will cause direct, large-scale, and in significant areas long-term and in some cases irreversible physical disturbance. This will generate sediment plumes affecting water clarity across a wide area, smother benthic communities - the seafloor invertebrates, worms, and organisms that form the base of the marine food web - and alter local hydrodynamics and sediment transport patterns that have developed over thousands of years. Physical disturbance of seabed habitats through foundation installation and cable works is known to damage benthic communities, with recovery times varying and in some cases being prolonged or uncertain.

The Chapter 9 physical and coastal processes assessment (EIAR Chapter 9, SNM-SNM-PAC-CHP-1009) itself acknowledges changes to hydrodynamics and wave regimes as a result of the development, noting that fixed-bottom foundation designs are likely to influence hydrodynamics and consequent sediment movement. A reduction in significant wave height of up to the maximum percentages modelled is predicted across the array area. These hydrodynamic

changes are not merely engineering questions - altered wave and current patterns affect sediment transport, seabed composition, and the productivity of the benthic habitats that underpin the entire food web in this region.

> *"offshore wind farm (OWF) fixed bottom foundation designs are likely to influence hydrodynamics and consequent sediment movement."*

[EIAR CHAPTER 9: PHYSICAL AND COASTAL PROCESSES: HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-9-PHYSICAL-AND-COASTAL-PROCESSES.PDF]

The shelf seas west of Lewis support productive marine ecosystems that underpin the food web on which fish, marine mammals and seabirds depend. That productivity - which supports the fish stocks upon which whales, dolphins, seals, seabirds, and local fishermen all depend - is a function of the integrity of the benthic and pelagic systems beneath and within it. Disturb the seabed at this scale, and you disturb the food web that every species in this objection relies upon. The JNCC is clear that such benthic impacts from offshore wind development represent significant and in some cases long-term ecological harm.
[MARINE HABITATS AND OFFSHORE INDUSTRIES: HTTPS://JNCC.GOV.UK/OUR-WORK/MARINE-HABITATS-AND-OFFSHORE-INDUSTRIES/]

Scotland's National Marine Plan Policy GEN 5 specifically requires the safeguarding of natural carbon sinks, naming kelp beds as an example. Kelp beds are confirmed present across approximately 10 km^2 within the Study Area *"During the site-specific surveys, kelp beds were mapped across a 10 km2 area within the shallow section of the OCAS."* (EIAR Chapter 11, paragraph 11.6.1.29), are designated as a Priority Marine Feature, and are assessed as sustaining minor adverse impact from construction. The developer proposes no compensatory measures for this loss. GEN 5 requires that compensatory habitat creation or enhancement be considered as a last resort where significant harm cannot be avoided. No such consideration is presented in the EIAR. The omission of any compensatory or enhancement proposal for a directly impacted blue carbon PMF habitat is not consistent with GEN 5.

Seabed disturbance, altered hydrodynamics, and displacement of fish aggregations from the array area may reduce the availability of key prey species - including sandeels, herring and whiting - on which marine mammals in these waters depend. The marine mammal assessment (Chapter 13) notes in its cross-references that fish ecology changes have the potential to affect marine mammal receptors, but this indirect pathway is not integrated into the significance conclusions for marine mammals. A reduction in prey availability within a feeding area already used by species as acoustically sensitive and site-faithful as harbour porpoise and Risso's dolphin would compound the direct disturbance effects already identified. These indirect trophic effects represent an additional impact pathway that the assessment has not adequately quantified.

[EIAR CHAPTER 13, SECTION 13.1.1.2 CROSS-REFERENCES TO CHAPTER 12: FISH ECOLOGY: HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

4.8 PLANNING POLICY FAILURE ON BENTHIC HABITATS

4.8.1 Planning Policy: Scotland's National Marine Plan GEN 9 And Priority Marine Features

Scotland's National Marine Plan Policy GEN 9 Natural Heritage states that development and use of the marine environment must:

(a) Comply with legal requirements for protected areas and protected species. (b) Not result in significant impact on the national status of Priority Marine Features. (c) Protect and, where appropriate, enhance the health of the marine area. [https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-marine-plan/pages/5/]

The nationally recognised Priority Marine Features (PMFs) include maerl beds, horse mussel beds, fan mussel aggregations, cold water coral reefs, and flame shell beds - all slow-growing, long-lived, and in some cases effectively irreplaceable on any human timescale. The Scottish Government's own PMF review states explicitly that maerl beds are "functionally important, biodiverse, sensitive, slow to recover and if lost completely may not recover." That same review identifies the Outer Hebrides - including "Uists; Lewis & Harris" - as locations where additional protective measures are recommended.

[SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PRIORITY MARINE FEATURES: HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/POLICIES/MARINE-ENVIRONMENT/PRIORITY-MARINE-FEATURES/]
[PMF REVIEW - MAERL BEDS: HTTPS://CONSULT.GOV.SCOT/MARINE-SCOTLAND/PRIORITY-MARINE-FEATURES/SUPPORTING_DOCUMENTS/REVIEW%20OF%20PMFS%20OUTSIDE%20THE%20SCOTTISH%20MPA%20NETWORK%20%20FINAL%20%20MAERL%20BEDS.PDF]

4.8.2 PMFS ACKNOWLEDGED BUT NOT ASSESSED
The EIAR (Chapter 11, Benthic and Intertidal Ecology) acknowledges that maerl beds have been recorded to the southwest of the project area (paragraph 11.6.1.11), that horse mussel beds and other PMFs have been identified beyond the Study Area (paragraph 11.6.1.18), and that maerl is listed as both an Annex I habitat and an OSPAR habitat of concern (paragraph 11.6.1.13). Yet none of these PMFs appear anywhere in the impact assessment tables as receptors. The developer's basis for excluding them is that they fall outside the defined Study Area boundary.

The difficulty is that the PMF location data relied upon comes entirely from Tyler-Walters et al. (2016) - a desktop dataset now a decade old. No current site-specific survey was conducted to establish the actual present extent or precise location of these beds. The developer cannot confirm with confidence exactly how far these PMFs extend, or whether they are genuinely beyond the reach of all project effects, on the basis of data that is ten years old. Where the national status of a protected feature is at stake under GEN 9(b), reliance on outdated desktop data to justify exclusion from assessment is not an adequate basis for that conclusion.

4.8.3 TWO PMFS RECEIVE NO MENTION AT ALL
Fan mussel aggregations and cold water coral reefs - both listed Scottish PMFs - receive no mention anywhere in Chapter 11. No explanation is given for their complete omission from an environmental assessment covering seabed habitats in these waters.

4.8.4 MITIGATION THAT CANNOT BE QUANTIFIED
The document acknowledges (paragraph 11.7.2.4) that its two primary mitigation measures - micrositing of turbines and cables to avoid sensitive habitats - "cannot be quantified until detailed design and further site-specific investigations are complete," because cable routes within parts of the array area have not yet been finalised. The developer cannot credibly assert compliance with GEN 9(b) while simultaneously acknowledging that the final position of infrastructure in relation to sensitive habitats is not yet known.

4.8.5 GEN 9(C): THE DEVELOPER'S OWN TEXT CONTRADICTS THE CONCLUSION
Kelp beds - confirmed as present within the Study Area across a 10 km^2 area (paragraph 11.6.1.29) - are a designated PMF under NatureScot. The EIAR assesses the impact on kelp beds during construction as "short-term, direct, reversible, Minor adverse" (Table 11-16), then classifies

the overall significance as "not significant." Yet paragraph 11.6.1.26 states explicitly that "a major threat to long-term carbon storage is any activity that disrupts the surface layers of sediment such as the installation of subsea cables or the piling of WTG foundations."

The developer is acknowledging, in their own words, that the activities they propose represent a major threat to precisely the category of habitat - blue carbon habitats, including kelp beds - that is present and designated as a PMF within the Study Area. A conclusion of no significant effect on the health of the marine area, while simultaneously describing subsea cable installation and piling as a major threat to these habitats, is not internally consistent. GEN 9(c) - the requirement to protect and, where appropriate, enhance the health of the marine area - is not satisfied by an assessment that reaches that conclusion.

4.9 CUMULATIVE IMPACT: THE LEGAL REQUIREMENT BEING UNDERWEIGHTED

Scotland's National Marine Plan Policy GEN 21 explicitly requires that cumulative impacts affecting the ecosystem be addressed. The cumulative assessment presented here does not adequately meet that requirement for the reasons that follow.

The Habitats Regulations Appraisal process requires that impacts be assessed in combination with other plans and projects that may affect the same European sites. NatureScot's guidance states clearly that this must consider both proposals currently seeking consent and the ongoing effects of already-completed developments.
[HABITATS REGULATIONS APPRAISAL (HRA): HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/PROFESSIONAL-ADVICE/PLANNING-AND-DEVELOPMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL-ASSESSMENT/HABITATS-REGULATIONS-APPRAISAL-HRA]

"*Spiorad na Mara*" is one of several large offshore wind developments proposed in or adjacent to waters supporting the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, the East Lewis MPA, and populations of numerous European Protected Species. Each of these projects, assessed in isolation, may appear manageable. Assessed honestly in combination - for their cumulative acoustic impact, cumulative seabed disturbance, cumulative displacement of feeding animals from key habitat - the picture may be very different.

I request that the cumulative assessment in this application be subjected to independent scrutiny, and that Scottish Ministers satisfy themselves that it has genuinely and rigorously addressed the in-combination requirements of the Habitats Regulations, rather than treating them as a procedural box to tick.

The cumulative assessment presented in the EIAR is necessarily constrained by defined spatial and project boundaries. This may not fully capture the combined effects of multiple offshore developments and other anthropogenic pressures occurring concurrently within the wider region.

The assessment does not adequately consider temporal overlap of construction activities across multiple projects, which may result in effectively continuous acoustic disturbance across large areas.

[FRONTIERS IN MARINE SCIENCE- CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ASSESSMENT REVIEW: HTTPS://WWW.FRONTIERSIN.ORG/JOURNALS/MARINE-SCIENCE/ARTICLES/10.3389/FMARS.2022.822467/FULL]

4.10 INADEQUATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.10.1 INADEQUACY OF MARINE MAMMAL ASSESSMENTS AND FLAWED INTERPRETATION OF BARRIER EFFECTS

Concerns raised by Whale and Dolphin Conservation and Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust directly challenge the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Assessment. They explicitly state that baseline data for cetaceans is "*severely lacking*" and that survey methods employed are insufficient in scope, duration and methodology to accurately characterise species presence. This undermines the reliability of the entire assessment. Furthermore, their evidence demonstrates year-round presence of multiple cetacean species, contradicting the developer's assertion that the area is not a significant hotspot. The omission of key impact pathways, including vessel collisions and pollution, alongside reliance on mitigation measures for which there is "*no demonstrated evidence*" of effectiveness, raises serious concerns as to whether impacts have been properly assessed or can be adequately mitigated. In line with the precautionary principle, consent should not be granted where such significant uncertainty and risk to European Protected Species remains. [HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/APPENDIX_I_-_CONSULTATION_REPRESENTATIONS.PDF]

The assessment of barrier effects for migratory whale species is based on a flawed and overly narrow interpretation of impact. The developer concludes that whales would not be significantly affected because there is sufficient physical space between turbines for them to pass through. This ignores the well-established concept of behavioural avoidance, whereby underwater noise, vessel activity and habitat disturbance can cause marine mammals to avoid otherwise accessible areas, effectively creating a functional barrier.

Critically, the assessment acknowledges that there are "*limited studies*" and a lack of species-specific evidence, yet proceeds to classify sensitivity as "low" based on assumed behavioural similarity with other marine mammals. This represents an unsupported generalisation and an inappropriate use of uncertainty to minimise risk. The suggestion that species may "adapt" or alter migration routes does not negate impact, but rather confirms the potential for displacement and ecological disruption. In line with the precautionary principle, such uncertainty should result in a more cautious assessment, not a downgraded one.
[Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report Chapter 13: Marine Mammals, Volume 2a
https://northlandpowerscotwind.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Spiorad-na-Mara-EIAR-Chapter-13-Marine-Mammals.pdf]

The EIAR states:

“Considering the size of the largest scoped-in marine mammal receptor, the fin whale, which reaches 17.5-20.5 m in length, there is adequate space between WTGs for whales to pass between them at all depths and tidal heights (Reid, 2003). There is therefore no physical reason that whale species, including minke, humpback and fin whales, would not be able to swim freely in the operating wind farm.”

The developer has not demonstrated that whales will continue to *use* the area in the presence of offshore wind infrastructure. While physical passage between turbines may be possible, there is substantial evidence that cetaceans exhibit avoidance behaviour in response to underwater noise and disturbance. This creates the potential for a functional barrier, even in the absence of a physical obstruction. The EIA acknowledges a lack of species-specific evidence on barrier effects, yet proceeds to classify sensitivity as low. This is not evidence-based, but assumption-driven. In

line with the precautionary principle, uncertainty regarding behavioural responses of migratory whale species should not be used to minimise impact.

4.10.2 BARRIER EFFECTS

The EIAR's barrier effects assessment is limited to the operation and maintenance phase (Table 13-43). No equivalent assessment has been carried out for the construction phase, despite the fact that construction represents the period of greatest acoustic disturbance and vessel activity. For species following consistent migratory or foraging routes through these waters, the construction-phase disruption to movement patterns may represent a more acute and consequential impact than the operational barrier effect. This omission is a material gap in the assessment.

4.10.3 ADAPTATION

The EIAR's suggestion that species may adapt or alter migration routes does not constitute evidence of no significant impact- it is an acknowledgement of displacement. The conclusions of no significant effect rest on coarse-scale population data, unverified behavioural assumptions, incomplete impact pathways, and mitigation that has not yet been fully defined. Taken together, these cannot meet the beyond-reasonable-scientific-doubt standard required under the Habitats Regulations.

Behavioral adaptation does not equate to absence of impact. Altered migration routes, displacement from feeding grounds, and increased energetic expenditure are themselves recognised ecological effects.

An assessment document that gives different figures for the same calculation in two different tables - 9.186% versus 9.168% for Risso's dolphin - illustrates exactly the kind of internal inconsistency that undermines confidence in the rigour of the whole assessment. It's a small point but a legitimate one, and it requires no external source to make - the document contradicts itself.

NMP GEN 9(a) requires that development comply with legal requirements for protected areas and protected species. Where the baseline characterisation of those species has been described by expert bodies as "severely lacking," the foundation for demonstrating GEN 9(a) compliance is itself unreliable.

4.11 THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL CONCERNS ARISE DIRECTLY FROM THE EIAR:

4.11.1 SURVEY LIMITATIONS

The EIAR acknowledges that site characterisation is based on a combination of survey data and existing datasets, each subject to inherent limitations including detectability, spatial coverage and temporal constraints. The EIAR lists: Surveying schedule, Survey design/sampling, Availability bias ,Observer bias,Species identification,Animals present but not recorded,False positives, false negatives and misclassifications,Equipment malfunction/loss. (EIAR Chapter 13, Table 13-10 Data Limitations relating to datasets used for the Assessment for Marine Mammals.).
The data represents a snapshot in time rather than a comprehensive representation of marine mammal usage of the area. Given the mobility and seasonal variability of marine mammals,

absence or low density during survey periods does not equate to absence of ecological importance. The EIAR itself notes that marine mammals are highly mobile
“Marine mammals are highly mobile and wide ranging, and some have distributions which overlap multiple jurisdictions.”
- yet this characteristic, which should introduce greater caution into the baseline, is not fully reflected in the impact conclusions.
[HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

4.11.2 NOISE MODELLING LIMITATIONS

The EIAR relies on modelled impact zones for underwater noise, based on assumed source levels and propagation conditions. Such models inherently simplify complex environmental variables. The piling noise assessment (EIAR Appendix 19.2) itself acknowledges a buried channel within the percussive piling area requiring different piling techniques and hammer energies - a site-specific geological feature with the potential to affect sound propagation in ways not fully captured by generic propagation models. Variability in seabed composition, bathymetry, and sound channelling can result in wider impact ranges than predicted. This uncertainty is not adequately reflected in the significance conclusions.
“A geotechnical survey has identified a buried channel within the percussive piling area, dividing the area into 2 distinct regions which require different piling techniques.”
[HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-APPENDIX-19.2-NOISE-MODELLING-AND-PREDICTION.PDF]

4.11.3 CHRONIC DISPLACEMENT, NOT JUST SHORT-TERM AVOIDANCE

The EIAR frames behavioural disturbance primarily as a short-term and reversible effect. However, repeated disturbance events across two construction years of percussive piling - April to October, with up to 78 piles driven per construction year according to the developer's own indicative programme - have the potential to result in chronic displacement rather than short-term avoidance. For species reliant on specific feeding grounds, chronic displacement carries implications for foraging success and energy budgets that may have population-level consequences. This risk is not adequately addressed.
[EIAR APPENDIX 19.2, TABLE 3-2 HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-APPENDIX-19.2-NOISE-MODELLING-AND-PREDICTION.PDF]

The assessment does not address recovery periods between disturbance events - during a two-year piling programme spanning April to October, animals displaced during one piling event may have insufficient time to recover energetically before the next. This cumulative energetic stress is not captured in the significance conclusions.

4.11.4 THE EPS LICENCE CONTRADICTION

The EIAR identifies that activities may require a European Protected Species licence due to the risk of disturbance at a level requiring legal derogation. This is an acknowledgement embedded in the document itself that harm to European Protected Species is expected to occur at a legally significant level. This sits in direct and irreconcilable tension with the EIAR's conclusions that residual effects are negligible or minor (EIAR Chapter 13, Table 13-71). Scottish Ministers should require this contradiction to be resolved before any determination is made.
[HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

The applicant has previously obtained an EPS licence for survey activities in the area [Marine Scotland, 2026], demonstrating that legal derogation has been sought in practice, albeit for lower-impact activities
[HTTPS://MARINE.GOV.SCOT/?Q=NODE/23771]

Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, an EPS licence can only be granted where three cumulative conditions are satisfied: no satisfactory alternative exists, imperative reasons of overriding public interest apply, and the favourable conservation status of the affected species is maintained. Where the EIAR itself flags the likelihood of EPS disturbance at a level requiring legal derogation, the burden falls on the applicant to demonstrate that all three conditions can be met. The EIAR does not do this. In particular, it does not demonstrate that alternative sites - within the wider ScotWind portfolio - were genuinely considered and found inadequate, nor does it provide species-specific evidence that favourable conservation status will be maintained for the populations affected.

The scale of predicted disturbance requiring EPS licensing raises questions as to how favourable conservation status can be maintained, yet this is not clearly addressed within the EIAR.

4.11.5 SEASONAL PEAKS NOT ACCOUNTED FOR

While the EIAR recognises seasonal variation in marine mammal presence, it does not clearly demonstrate how peak periods of ecological importance - including summer feeding aggregations of minke whales and basking sharks, and the pupping and breeding seasons of grey and harbour seals - have been factored into the significance of impact conclusions. Notably, piling is planned precisely during April to October - the period of highest marine mammal density and ecological sensitivity in these waters.

- "*Seasonal aggregations of harbour porpoises (Phocoena Phocoena) are observed regularly in the Minches and Sea of the Hebrides, particularly between June and September* "
- "*Loose groups numbering 100 harbour porpoises have been recorded on occasions in areas such as the Sea of the Hebrides*"
- "*elevated densities of Risso's dolphins (Grampus griseus) persist in the north Minch off the coast of north-east Lewis*"
- "*aggregations of minke whales (Balaenoptera acutorostrata) rarely exceed ten individuals. However, in the Sea of the Hebrides in particular, feeding aggregations of up to 20 individuals have been recorded in late summer*"
- "*The abundance of minke whales within the west coast of Scotland/Hebrides region was 695 animals,* "

[HTTPS://WWW.MARINEMAMMALHABITAT.ORG/FACTSHEETS/MINCHES-AND-THE-SEA-OF-THE-HEBRIDES-IMMA]

NatureScot Research Report Table 3 shows markedly higher summer sightings of minke whales, harbour porpoises, grey seals, and common dolphins, illustrating clear seasonal peaks coinciding with the proposed April-October piling period.
[HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/DOC/NATURESCOT-RESEARCH-REPORT-1364-HEBRIDEAN-CETACEAN-RESEARCH-PROGRAMME-2021-2024]

Of particular note is the timing of harbour seal pupping. Harbour seals in Scottish waters pup in June and July - a period that falls squarely within the April–October piling window. This is not a peripheral overlap: June and July represent the most sensitive period of the annual cycle for this species, when disturbance to mothers can result in pup abandonment and separation, with direct consequences for recruitment. Grey seals pup later, primarily in October and November, with some overlap at the tail end of the proposed piling season. The significance conclusions for both

seal species do not clearly reflect the ecological weight of this specific temporal overlap between the construction programme and the pupping season.

[HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/PLANTS-ANIMALS-AND-FUNGI/MAMMALS/MARINE-MAMMALS/SEALS & HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/NATURESCOT-URGES-WATERSPORT-VISITORS-KEEP-DISTANCE-SEALS]

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 specifically prohibit deliberate disturbance of European Protected Species, with particular reference to breeding and rearing periods. Harbour seal pupping in June and July falls squarely within the proposed April–October piling window. Where construction noise is known to cause behavioural disturbance at significant distances, pile driving during pupping season constitutes precisely the kind of disturbance during a rearing period that the Regulations are designed to prevent. The significance conclusions for seal species do not engage with this specific legal standard.

The EIAR does not clearly demonstrate how disturbance during sensitive periods (e.g. pupping/breeding) has been accounted for in assessing significance

4.11.6 BASKING SHARKS: REGULAR VISITORS AND AN UNDERESTIMATED RISK

Basking sharks are not incidental visitors to the waters around Lewis. They are a predictable seasonal presence. Observations by local fishers, boat operators, and marine researchers confirm their repeated appearances along the west coast of Lewis and around South Shawbost, particularly during summer months. These large filter-feeding sharks congregate in shallow coastal areas where plankton concentrations are high, overlapping with zones directly affected by the proposed wind farm.

According to Northland's surveys:

> [HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-APPENDIX-13.1-DIGITAL-AERIAL-BIRD-AND-MARINE-MEGAFAUNA-SURVEYS.PDF] Basking sharks were recorded in July 2023, with an abundance estimate of 9 individuals in the Survey Area and 10 km buffer, confirming that they regularly use the waters around the proposed development (EIAR Appendix 13.1, Table 73). No individuals were recorded within the immediate array area itself, highlighting the importance of surrounding waters as habitat.

The developer's own risk assessments acknowledge the presence of basking sharks in these waters, yet their EIAR downplays the potential for disturbance, displacement, or collision risk. Given that basking sharks are slow-moving and highly sensitive to changes in their environment, repeated exposure to pile-driving noise, increased vessel traffic, and habitat alteration may have consequences for their feeding behaviour and seasonal aggregation patterns.

NatureScot notes:

> *"In Scottish waters, large seasonal aggregations occur in shallow coastal areas during summer, particularly within the Sea of the Hebrides."*
> [HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/DOC/SHARKS-AND-SKATES-SCOTLAND-REPORT-BASKING-SHARK-CETORHINUS-MAXIMUS]

Inclusion of local observational evidence alongside formal survey data reinforces that these waters support significant basking shark activity and that potential impacts should be assessed with the same precaution as for other European Protected Species.

Especially given that they are officially listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List due to severe population declines caused by historical overexploitation.

[HTTPS://WWW.IUCNREDLIST.ORG/JA/SPECIES/4292/194720078]
[HTTPS://WWW.SHARKTRUST.ORG/BASKING-SHARK-THREATS]

Local observation records, including citizen science surveys in west Lewis, confirm regular summer aggregations of basking sharks in waters overlapping the proposed turbine locations.

Basking sharks feed in shallow summer aggregations. Prolonged pile-driving and vessel traffic in these areas risks displacement during critical feeding periods, which could have population-level consequences

4.11.7 MITIGATION ADDRESSES INJURY, NOT ECOLOGY

Mitigation measures outlined in the EIAR - including Marine Mammal Observers and Passive Acoustic Monitoring - are primarily designed to reduce the risk of acute physical injury. They do not prevent behavioural disturbance or displacement, and therefore do not fully mitigate ecological impacts. The conclusion that there will be no effect on favourable conservation status relies on broad-scale population assumptions and does not adequately account for the ecological importance of this specific area as a feeding and breeding habitat within the wider west coast ecosystem.

[HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-APPENDIX-13.2-PASSIVE-ACOUSTIC-MONITORY-SURVEY-REPORT.PDF &
HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-APPENDIX-13.4-MARINE-MAMMAL-POPULATION-MODELLING.PDF]

Proposed measures such as Passive Acoustic Monitoring and Marine Mammal Observers are monitoring tools, not mitigation measures. They detect the presence of animals and document disturbance- they do not prevent it. Their inclusion in the mitigation framework does not reduce the ecological impact; it simply records it. Where the underlying assessment already acknowledges significant uncertainty, the presence of monitoring cannot substitute for robust evidence that impacts will not occur.

Key mitigation is deferred to a post-consent Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol. This prevents Scottish Ministers from assessing whether mitigation is sufficient at the point of determination, which is inconsistent with the requirement to reach conclusions beyond reasonable scientific doubt prior to consent.

4.11.8 THE DESIGN ENVELOPE APPROACH INTRODUCES FURTHER UNCERTAINTY.

The EIAR adopts a parameter-based design envelope approach (EIAR Chapter 5), explicitly acknowledging that the level of effect assessed may be overstated compared to what is ultimately built.
[HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-5-APPROACH-TO-EIA-VOLUME-1A.PDF]

However, the design envelope operates in both directions. While the developer suggests the assessed impacts may overstate effects compared to what is ultimately built, the same envelope equally permits construction of larger turbines, additional piles, or greater hammer energies than

those modelled. The assertion that the assessment represents a conservative worst case is not guaranteed: the actual build could be more impactful than modelled, not less. Scottish Ministers cannot determine at the point of consent which scenario will materialise, which is a further reason why the design envelope approach is incompatible with the beyond-reasonable-scientific-doubt standard required under the Habitats Regulations. [HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.SCOT/PROFESSIONAL-ADVICE/PLANNING-AND-DEVELOPMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL-ASSESSMENT/HABITATS-REGULATIONS-APPRAISAL-HRA]

Taken together, the reliance on limited survey windows, modelled noise assumptions, and mitigation measures focused primarily on injury reduction introduces a level of uncertainty that is not fully reflected in the EIAR's conclusions. Given the recognised ecological importance of the west coast marine environment, this raises serious doubt as to whether the assessment has demonstrated, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that significant impacts on marine mammals can be avoided.

4.11.9 EFFECT OF DISTURBANCE FROM PILING NOISE TO MARINE MAMMALS DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE

Beaked whales are among the most acoustically sensitive cetaceans known to science, with a well-documented global association between anthropogenic noise - particularly military sonar but also other impulsive sources - and mass stranding events. The deep waters adjacent to the west Lewis shelf edge are within the known range of several beaked whale species. The EIAR includes noise contours for beaked whales at Figure 13.22, but does not reflect the specific and extreme nature of their acoustic sensitivity in its significance conclusions. Percussive pile-driving produces broadband impulsive noise that overlaps with the frequency ranges known to elicit severe responses in beaked whales. The 0% predicted population impact for beaked whales (Table 13-37) relies on the absence of site-specific density data - but absence of data is not evidence of absence of animals, nor of absence of risk.[BAILEY ET AL. (2014), ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF OFFSHORE WIND FARMS - PMC: HTTPS://PMC.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/ARTICLES/PMC4172316/]

We dispute the conclusion in Table 13-37 that piling noise effects on marine mammals are 'not significant.'

Table 13-36 shows that the assessment predicts disturbance to 9.186% of the Risso's dolphin management unit population, 27.7% of the coastal bottlenose dolphin CWSH population, and 4.3% of harbour porpoises. The long-term iPCoD modelling further predicts a 2.33% change in mean population size for coastal bottlenose dolphins and 0.17% for harbour porpoise. Up to 798 Risso's dolphins are predicted to be disturbed in cumulative scenarios [Table 13-58]. Despite these figures, the assessment classifies effects as non-significant or negligible across all species.

These figures apply to wide management unit populations and do not reflect the potential localised importance of this specific habitat for individual animals. For species such as Risso's dolphin - for which a dedicated MPA exists in adjacent waters precisely because of their site fidelity - disturbance affecting nearly 10% of the management unit population cannot credibly be dismissed as non-significant without much stronger evidence.

A disturbance level of 27.7% of a management unit is substantial, yet the EIAR does not provide a clear evidence-based justification for why this level does not constitute a significant effect.

[TABLE 13-57 MEAN UN-IMPACTED AND IMPACTED POPULATION SIZES FOR THE OW MU FOR BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS IN THE CUMULATIVE IPCOD SIMULATION. & TABLE 13-58 NUMBER OF RISSO'S DOLPHIN POTENTIALLY DISTURBED BY CUMULATIVE UNDERWATER NOISE & TABLE 13-36 SUMMARY OF MAGNITUDE

OF EFFECT ON CETACEAN AND SEAL SPECIES FROM THE ASSESSMENT OF DISTURBANCE FROM PILING NOISE HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

The assessment simultaneously predicts minimal or zero population impact for humpback, beaked, long-finned pilot, and minke whales - conclusions that rely on limited species-specific data and generalised iPCoD thresholds. Where data is absent or populations are listed simply as 'minimal,' the precautionary principle requires caution, not a default assumption of negligible harm. The EIA does not apply that principle here.

[HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

These figures apply to wide management unit populations and do not reflect the potential localised importance of this specific habitat.

The EIAR concludes that the Sea of Hebrides MPA - designated for minke whale - is not affected by the proposed development, on the basis that it lies approximately 80km to the south of the array area. However, the EIAR's own cited literature states that pile driving noise is audible at up to 70km, and that behavioural effects on minke whales have been observed at distances of 40–50km from construction activity. The margin between the EIAR's own disturbance range figures and its conclusion of no impact on the Sea of Hebrides MPA is therefore narrow, and the assessment does not adequately explain why that margin is sufficient to exclude any effect on the protected feature of that MPA. This conclusion deserves specific scrutiny in the HRA process. [HTTPS://WWW.GOV.SCOT/PUBLICATIONS/CONSULTATION-PROPOSALS-DESIGNATE-FOUR-MARINE-PROTECTED-AREAS-SCOTTISH-WATERS-CONSULTATION-ANALYSIS-REPORT/PAGES/2/#]

Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended for Scotland by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011) makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, take, or disturb any wild animal listed in Schedule 5. All cetacean species - including every species named in this objection - are listed in Schedule 5. Where pile-driving is known to cause behavioural disturbance at distances of up to 70 km in some species, the adequacy of the risk assessment has direct implications under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Section 9, which prohibits reckless disturbance of Schedule 5 species. [WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981, SECTION 9: HTTPS://WWW.LEGISLATION.GOV.UK/UKPGA/1981/69/SECTION/9] [WILDLIFE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT (SCOTLAND) ACT 2011: HTTPS://WWW.LEGISLATION.GOV.UK/ASP/2011/6/CONTENTS]

4.11.10 SCANS DATA POINT

The assessment relies on regional SCANS density surfaces that explicitly lack fine-scale resolution at the array level. This is not merely a data limitation; it directly undermines the validity of the iPCoD outputs upon which significance conclusions depend. Where input data is not site-specific, the resulting population impact modelling cannot be considered robust.

- [EIAR CHAPTER 13, TABLES 13-30 TO 13-35 AND TABLE 13-36: HTTPS://NORTHLANDPOWERSCOTWIND.CO.UK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2026/03/SPIORAD-NA-MARA-EIAR-CHAPTER-13-MARINE-MAMMALS.PDF]

4.11.11 MANAGEMENT UNITS

By assessing impacts at the scale of Management Units covering vast geographic areas, the assessment dilutes site-specific ecological importance. This is incompatible with the Habitats

Regulations test, which requires assessment of effects on the integrity of specific protected sites and populations using them.

It is important to note that the Habitats Regulations test is not whether a species population can withstand disturbance at a regional scale. The test is whether the integrity of the designated site and its function for the qualifying species is maintained. An assessment that relies on Management Unit-level population modelling to reach conclusions about site integrity fundamentally misapplies the legal standard. Population resilience at a UK or west Scotland scale does not demonstrate that the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, or the East Lewis MPA, will not be adversely affected by this development.

4.12 WHY LOCATION MATTERS

This is not an objection to renewable energy. Scotland needs clean power, and many people on Lewis understand that better than most - we live with the wind every day of our lives.
This objection is about location. And location matters enormously.

The ScotWind process identified this site - N4, northwest of Lewis - as suitable for leasing. But suitability for leasing is not the same as suitability for development. The leasing process was a spatial exercise; this application is the moment where the actual environmental consequences must be confronted. And when they are confronted honestly, the conclusion is hard to avoid: this is one of the worst possible locations in Scottish waters for a development of this scale.

The Outer Hebrides sit at the intersection of some of the most productive marine habitats in Europe. The shelf edge to the west, the complex tidal systems around the islands, and the nutrient-rich waters of the Minches together create conditions that support a density and diversity of marine life unmatched almost anywhere in the British Isles. It is precisely *because* these waters are so biologically rich that they have attracted designation after designation - a harbour porpoise SAC that is the largest in Europe, a Risso's dolphin MPA, an internationally recognised Important Marine Mammal Area. Regulators have already concluded, repeatedly, that these waters deserve the strongest protection available. This application asks Scottish Ministers to approve a development that conflicts directly with those conclusions.

There is no shortage of sea. Scotland has thousands of miles of coastline and vast offshore areas. The question is not whether offshore wind can be built somewhere - it is whether it must be built here, in waters that independent scientific bodies have already designated as internationally important for the very species that would be most harmed. The answer to that question should be no.

4.12.1 PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

The precautionary principle requires that where there is scientific uncertainty about harm to protected species and habitats, the burden of proof lies with the developer to demonstrate safety - not with objectors to prove harm. In a location already designated for its marine mammal importance, that burden is exceptionally high. It has not been met.

4.12.2 NO ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Under the Habitats Regulations, even where imperative reasons of overriding public interest might be argued, consent cannot be granted if alternative solutions exist. Scotland has other ScotWind sites. [HTTPS://WWW.CROWNESTATESCOTLAND.COM/SCOTLANDS-PROPERTY/OFFSHORE-WIND/SCOTWIND-RAPID-REVIEW#:~:TEXT=THE%20SUBSEQUENT%20SCOTWIND%20LEASING%20ROUND,OFFSHORE%20WIND%20TO%20SCOTTISH%20GOVERNMENT.] Several are in waters that do not carry the same density

of European Protected Species, designated SACs, and internationally recognised marine mammal habitat. The existence of those alternatives is directly relevant to whether consent for this specific site can lawfully proceed. The Scottish Ministers must be satisfied that this location is necessary - not merely that it is convenient or already leased.

4.12.3 WHAT IS AT STAKE

The Outer Hebrides are one of the last places in Britain where you can stand on a clifftop and watch a minke whale feeding a few hundred metres from shore. Where harbour porpoises surface in the morning light in the same waters where seals haul out. Where a pod of pilot whales - 55 of them, in July 2023 - came close enough to shore that local people waded in trying to save them.

These are not statistics. They are the living reality of these islands. Once an ecosystem of this complexity and richness is industrialised, it cannot be un-industrialised. The question Scottish Ministers must answer is not whether Scotland needs renewable energy. Of course it does. The question is whether it needs it badly enough to sacrifice one of the most extraordinary concentrations of marine life in the British Isles. We do not believe it does. And we do not believe that, on the evidence before them, Scottish Ministers can lawfully conclude otherwise.

4.13 REQUEST TO SCOTTISH MINISTERS

Given everything set out above, We make the following specific requests:

1. **First**, that the marine mammal and benthic ecology sections of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report be referred to an independent expert panel for scrutiny before any determination is made. Marine Scotland has the ability to convene such a panel where difficult or contentious scientific issues require specialist input of international standing. Given the density of European Protected Species in these waters, the specific methodological concerns raised by HWDT and WDC, and the contradictions within the EIAR itself, this case clearly meets that threshold.

2. **Second**, that the Habitats Regulations Appraisal be held to its proper legal standard - that Scottish Ministers must be satisfied *beyond reasonable scientific doubt* that this development will not adversely affect the integrity of the designated European sites in and adjacent to the development area. Consent should be refused unless and until that standard is met.

3. **Third**, that the cumulative assessment be independently verified to confirm it genuinely addresses in-combination impacts with all other plans and projects affecting the same European sites - not merely those within the immediate geographic footprint.

I urge the Scottish Ministers to give the fullest possible weight to the irreplaceable nature of the marine environment that would be placed at risk by this development. The Outer Hebrides are not a blank patch of sea awaiting industrial use. They are home to one of the most extraordinary concentrations of marine wildlife in the British Isles - wildlife that is here, that has been here long before this application was submitted, and that has nowhere else to go if this site is industrialised.

CHAPTER 5.

PROJECT SEGMENTATION AND FAILURE OF HOLISTIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Spiorad na Mara project has been improperly segmented, intentionally avoiding a holistic assessment of its impacts on European Protected Species (EPS). By splitting the offshore and onshore components of the application, the developer has bypassed the requirement for an integrated cumulative impact assessment. This approach prevents a comprehensive understanding of the total ecological burden on protected species, such as the European Otter, and fails to meet the legal standards for environmental transparency and species protection.

5.1 THE PROJECT CANNOT BE ASSESSED IN PARTS

The applicant has chosen to submit consent applications for the offshore and onshore elements of this project separately, stating in the EIAR Non-Technical Summary that "*due to ongoing design refinement of the onshore elements, the Applicant is submitting separate consent applications for the offshore and onshore elements of the Project.*"

The offshore and onshore components are a single integrated energy infrastructure scheme. The offshore wind farm has no value or function without the onshore transmission works, including the cable landfall, underground cable route, and connection to the SSEN Lewis Hub. To assess only one part of this scheme while the other remains undesigned and unconsented is to invite Scottish Ministers to make a determination without full information about the project's total environmental impact.

This approach is incompatible with the requirements of the Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 and the Marine Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, both of which require an assessment of the likely significant effects of "the project", which must be understood as the whole project. Scotland's National Marine Plan paragraph 4.77 states that there should be a presumption in favour of publicising applications for marine and terrestrial components of a development together during the consenting process.

5.2 THE ABSENCE OF AN OTTER ASSESSMENT IS A MATERIAL DEFICIENCY

European otters (Lutra lutra) are a European Protected Species under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended), which continue to apply in Scotland, and are afforded strict protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011). It is a criminal offence to deliberately or recklessly kill, injure or disturb them, or to damage or destroy their resting places, without a licence from NatureScot.

European otters are well established and present in significant numbers along the west coast of Lewis throughout the area affected by this project. The evidence for this is specific, repeated and geographically precise:

— Otter spraints are observed on coastal rocks at Siabost, Port Mhòr in Bràdhagair, Àrnol and Barabhas, including at the site of the proposed cable landfall. These are classic territorial marking sites and their presence at multiple named locations across the full length of the affected coastline confirms that this is a continuous and well-established population. This is confirmed by Angus MacLeod, Game Keeper at Barvas Estate (Urras Sgìre Oighreachd Bharabhais).

— Otters are regularly photographed foraging in the sea at Dail Beag Beach. These photographs appear on social media on a regular basis and constitute a body of verifiable photographic evidence of active sea-foraging behaviour in the immediate vicinity of the proposed onshore works corridor.

— Otters regularly forage in the sea along this coastline, particularly during the summer months, and are known to use freshwater burns and lochs inland to wash salt from their coats, a behavioural requirement that means their territories necessarily span both the inshore marine environment and the adjacent terrestrial landscape. The inshore coastal waters that would be disturbed by cable landfall works and vessel activity form an essential part of the otter's foraging habitat, not merely a transit route. The occasional taking of poultry from coastal crofts at Arnol and Bragar is consistent with opportunistic supplementary foraging by a population whose primary summer food source is the inshore sea.

Verified otter sightings along the west coast and in nearshore waters are recorded in the Outer Hebrides Biological Records. The locations named above, Dail Beag, Siabost, Bràdhagair, Àrnol, Brù and Barabhas, span the stretch of coastline directly relevant to the proposed cable landfall and onshore transmission corridor. The population is present throughout the works area..

5.2.1 THE APPLICANT'S OWN ASSESSMENT IS INADEQUATE AND INTERNALLY CONTRADICTORY

Notwithstanding this well-documented and geographically specific local presence, the EIAR contains no otter assessment whatsoever. No otter survey data is presented, no assessment of cable landfall impacts on otter habitat or territories is made, and no mitigation measures in respect of otters are proposed or conditioned.

Instead, the applicant relies on an outdated NatureScot baseline source and asserts, at paragraph 6.2.2.5 of the Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA), that:

"*The occurrence of otter in the offshore subtidal zone has not been confirmed... The Landfall works identified above relevant to the Offshore Project will all take place in the subtidal zone... in water depths of 15–27 m mean sea level (MSL). Such a depth is likely beyond the diving capabilities of otter, with Chanin (2003) reporting the potential of otter to dive to 15m but more typically 2–7m or less.*"

This reasoning is flawed in several respects.

First, the question is not whether otters dive to 15–27 metres in the subtidal zone, but whether the cable landfall works and associated coastal disturbance will affect the inshore foraging and territorial habitat that otters actively and demonstrably use in the waters and on the rocks immediately adjacent to the landfall site. Spraints recorded at the landfall location confirm otter presence at that site. The applicant's argument that deep subtidal works will not affect otters that do not dive to those depths does not address the impact on the shallow inshore and coastal habitat those otters are known to use.

Second, the applicant has not engaged with available local biological records data, including the Outer Hebrides Biological Records, nor has it consulted the local community or local land managers (including the Barvas Estate Game Keeper) who have direct and current knowledge of otter presence and behaviour along this coastline. Reliance on a 2005 NatureScot source, without verification against current records, does not constitute an adequate baseline.

Third, the applicant's own acknowledgement that "*otter are widespread in the area*" and that otter within the SAC "*is reliant on suitable habitat in the surrounding wider terrestrial and marine environments*" directly contradicts the conclusion that no assessment is required. If otters are widespread and reliant on the coastal marine environment, the impact of works at the coastal

landfall, and along the cable route crossing burns, ditches and drainage channels, cannot be dismissed on the basis of diving depth data alone.

5.2.2 THE APPLICANT HAS NOT COMPLIED WITH NATURESCOT'S OWN STANDING ADVICE

NatureScot's standing advice on otters in the planning process states:

"*An otter survey should be carried out for any proposal within 200 m of suitable habitat. All suitable otter habitat within 200 m of the proposed works should be surveyed, including a systematic search for spraints, paw prints, otter paths, slides, food remains, holts and places used for shelter.*"

NatureScot further confirms the legal framework that applies:

"*Scottish planning policy National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) requires that any potential impacts of a development proposal on legally protected species is fully considered prior to the determination of any planning application. Development that is likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the relevant statutory tests. If there is reasonable evidence to suggest that a protected species is present on a site or may be affected by a proposed development, steps must be taken to establish its presence.*"

The cable landfall and onshore cable corridor proposed for this project pass through and alongside coastal and riparian habitat that is, by any reasonable definition, suitable otter habitat. Spraints have been recorded at named locations along and adjacent to the affected coastline, including at the landfall site itself. This constitutes direct evidence that otters are present and using the affected area. NatureScot's own standing advice therefore requires that a full otter survey be carried out. No such survey has been conducted. The applicant has not complied with the regulator's own published guidance, and the decision-maker is being asked to determine this application without the information that guidance requires to be before it.

5.2.3 THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS OMISSION

Any cable landfall on the west Lewis coastline will require significant ground disturbance in habitat actively and regularly used by otters for foraging, territorial marking and possibly holting. The subsequent cable route will cross burns, ditches and drainage channels that form part of the otter's foraging and commuting range. A full survey to NatureScot standards, covering both the coastal landfall zone and the inland cable corridor, followed by a European Protected Species licence assessment, is required before these works could lawfully proceed.

The applicant cannot satisfy the requirements of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) in respect of otters without this assessment being before the decision-maker at the time consent is considered. To grant Section 36 consent for the offshore generating station without knowing whether the necessary onshore works can be made compatible with otter protection is to prejudge the outcome of the as-yet unsubmitted onshore application and to risk consenting a project that cannot lawfully be built.

5.2.4 THE APPLICANT'S OWN RIAA FURTHER UNDERMINES ITS CONCLUSIONS

The applicant's attempt to minimise the significance of otter presence is further undermined by a passage in the RIAA that appears intended to reduce concern but confirms the opposite. Paragraph 6.2.3.6 states:

"*With regards otter sensitivity to human activity, Natural England (2003) note that otters will rest under roads, in industrial buildings, close to quarries, and at other sites close to high levels of*

human activity, concluding that such 'observations clearly indicate that otters are very flexible in their use of resting sites and do not necessarily avoid disturbance in terms of noise or proximity to human activity'. NatureScot (2003) further noted that a common response to disturbance in otters is for individuals to move to a location where they could see the source of that disturbance, then dive and swim underwater 50 m before resurfacing and resting on shore for five to 30 minutes before returning to previous activity."

The applicant appears to cite this passage in order to suggest that otters are tolerant of disturbance and therefore not significantly at risk from construction activity. This reasoning is flawed in two important respects.

First, the passage confirms that otters are present in and around the kinds of coastal and industrial environments this project would create. The observation that otters rest under roads, in industrial buildings and close to quarries does not mean that construction disturbance poses no risk to them. It means that otters are present in such environments and must therefore be surveyed and assessed when development is proposed in suitable habitat. NatureScot's own standing advice requires an otter survey for any proposal within 200 metres of suitable habitat precisely because otters inhabit such environments.

Second, the NatureScot behavioural description cited by the applicant —that a common response to disturbance is for otters to move position, dive, swim 50 metres underwater, and rest on shore before returning to their previous activity, is a description of disturbance behaviour, not of disturbance tolerance. An otter that responds to construction activity by repeatedly diving, relocating and interrupting its foraging is an otter that is being disturbed. Repeated interruption of foraging behaviour during energetically critical periods, particularly during the breeding season and while rearing cubs, constitutes exactly the kind of disturbance that NatureScot's standing advice and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 are designed to prevent. The applicant has cited evidence of otter disturbance behaviour as though it were evidence that otters are not disturbed. That is not a credible reading of the source material, and it does not discharge the legal obligation to survey, assess and mitigate.

Furthermore, and critically, both sources cited by the applicant date from 2003, now more than twenty years old, and neither relates to the west Lewis coastal environment. The Natural England observations concern otters resting under roads, in industrial buildings and near quarries, overwhelmingly inland, freshwater-associated habitats in an English context, studied under conditions that bear no resemblance to the exposed Atlantic coastline, rocky inshore waters and machair-edge burns of the west side of Lewis. To extrapolate from the behaviour of English inland otters sheltering near quarries to conclusions about the impact of large-scale marine construction works on a coastal otter population whose primary foraging habitat is the inshore sea is not a scientifically defensible step. The populations are ecologically distinct. Marine-foraging otters on the Atlantic coast of the Outer Hebrides depend on inshore coastal waters, rocky shorelines and the burns and lochs immediately behind them in a way that has no meaningful parallel in the English inland habitats from which these observations were drawn.

This point is directly supported by the Scottish Government's own Habitats Regulations Appraisal of the Draft Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy, which includes a dedicated literature review of otter ecology in coastal and marine environments. That document draws a clear distinction between inland freshwater otter populations and coastal marine-foraging populations, and explicitly recognises that detailed research on otter ecology in coastal and marine environments has been undertaken specifically around Shetland, precisely because the behaviour of otters in Atlantic island coastal environments is sufficiently distinct from inland populations to require its own body of research. The existence of that dedicated body of coastal island research, commissioned and cited by the Scottish Government itself, confirms that inland English studies

cannot be used as a proxy for the west Lewis coastal environment. An assessment of otter impacts in this specific environment requires survey data from this specific environment, not from a fundamentally different ecological context.

5.3 THE HABITATS REGULATIONS APPRAISAL IS INCOMPLETE

A Habitats Regulations Appraisal Derogations Case has been submitted alongside this application, indicating that the applicant accepts the project cannot satisfy the ordinary tests under the Habitats Regulations. However, the derogation case cannot be considered complete while the full impacts of the project, including on otter populations along the onshore cable corridor and in the inshore waters they use for foraging remain unassessed. Any derogation determination made on the basis of the offshore-only EIAR would be legally vulnerable to challenge.

NPF4 Policy 4(f) states that development proposals likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the relevant statutory tests, that steps must be taken to establish the presence of a protected species where there is reasonable evidence it may be affected, and that potential impacts must be fully considered prior to the determination of any application.

To grant consent for this application in its current form would be to approve an incomplete project on the basis of an incomplete environmental assessment, in an area where a European Protected Species is known in named locations, by spraint sites and by actively using both the inshore marine habitat and the terrestrial landscape that this project proposes to disturb.

CHAPTER 6.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON FISH ECOLOGY AND PROTECTED POPULATIONS

The fish ecology assessment provided in the EIAR is fundamentally inadequate, specifically regarding migratory species, and fails to properly assess the impacts on protected populations. The current documentation significantly underestimates the physiological and behavioral risks posed to species of high conservation value. By failing to account for critical migration pathways and the cumulative effects of noise and habitat disruption, the project cannot demonstrate that it will avoid detrimental impacts on the long-term viability of these protected marine populations

6.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABHAINN BHARABHAIS AND WEST LEWIS RIVERS

Abhainn Bharabhais flows northward across the Lewis moorland and discharges into the sea at Goile Chròic in Barvas Bay on the north coast of the island. It supports a significant and well-known population of Atlantic salmon (Salmo salar), which can be observed returning from the sea and jumping at the sluice in the river mouth during the spawning migration. The salmon run at Barabhas is a matter of direct local observation and the following recorded rod catches on the Marine Scotland register: 2021 — 52; 2022 — 109; 2023 — 38; 2024 — 130; and 2025 — 43 (numbers provided by Angus MacLeod, Game Keeper, Barvas Estate).

The mouth of Abhainn Bharabhais flows to the sea from Loch Mòr Bharabhais at Barvas Bay, in close proximity to the proposed cable landfall area for this project. The inshore coastal waters

immediately off Loch Mòr Bharabhais, through which the export cable or cables would be laid and at which construction vessels would operate, are the same waters through which returning adult salmon and outward-migrating smolts must pass during their migrations between the river and the open sea.

Salmon are also known locally to migrate to and from Abhainn Shiabhoist (Shawbost River) and Gleann Bhràdhagair (Bragar/Arnol River). Sea trout also frequent these rivers. The applicant's own assessment acknowledges that Atlantic salmon populations from rivers on the west coast of Lewis are the most likely stocks to pass through the Offshore Project Boundary during their migrations. Salmon from other river systems in Lewis and Harris would be impacted by Spiorad na Mara, including Amhuinnsuidhe, Hamanavay, Morsgail, Fhorsa, Garynahine and Carloway as they are all on the Western Coastal Route for migration.

6.2 THE LANGAVAT SAC BASELINE IS OUTDATED

The Langavat Special Area of Conservation is designated for Atlantic salmon and is one of the two European sites identified in the EIAR as requiring consideration within the Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment. It is therefore a site of central importance to the Habitats Regulations Appraisal for this project. However, the Langavat SAC has not been surveyed since 2011, the applicant's baseline assessment for this site therefore rests on data that is now fifteen years old. For a designated European site whose qualifying feature is Atlantic salmon, a species listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List and subject to well-documented population declines, reliance on a fifteen-year-old survey baseline is not an adequate foundation for a Habitats Regulations Appraisal. The decision-maker cannot be satisfied beyond reasonable scientific doubt that adverse effects on the integrity of the Langavat SAC can be excluded on the basis of data of this age.

6.3 THE PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION MITIGATION INCREASES RISK DURING THE SMOLT MIGRATION WINDOW

The applicant has proposed Mitigation Measure M023, which states that offshore construction within the Turbine Area will only be undertaken during the April–October period, except for offshore landfall construction works. This is presented as a mitigation measure, but by restricting construction to the April–October window, the applicant has enshrined construction activity during the most sensitive period for smolt migration (April and May) as the baseline operating assumption, rather than excluding it.

The EIAR acknowledges this at page 126, where it states that percussive piling during the sensitive period is "*not permitted unless approved by MD-LOT following further smolt migration study.*" This is a conditional deferral of assessment (rather than a mitigation) to a future study that has not yet been conducted, while simultaneously proposing to construct during the very period that study is intended to characterise. Scottish Ministers cannot assess whether the proposed mitigation is adequate without the results of that study being before them. The study should be completed and its results published and consulted upon before any consent is granted.

6.4 THE UNDERWATER NOISE IMPACT ON ADULT SALMON HAS NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY ASSESSED

The applicant's own Appendix 12.2 acknowledges that based on the stock assessment data, almost all of the adult salmon population — 99.82% — may pass through the ensonified zone between April and October at least once during their inward migration, with outward migrating kelts potentially passing through twice or more in consecutive years. This figure is drawn from the applicant's own analysis. It means that effectively the entire returning adult salmon population of

the west Lewis rivers will be exposed to percussive piling noise at some point during the construction programme.

The applicant proposes to manage this through temporal and spatial mitigation, restricting nearshore piling to September and October, and incorporating quiet periods. However, NatureScot's own response to the consultation, recorded in Appendix 12.2 Table 2-1, questioned whether maintaining the TTS contour 1.5 km from the coast is sufficient to allow migration, and MD-SEDD confirmed that a coastal migration corridor is likely to extend for many kilometres from shore. The applicant has since removed the 1.5km corridor assumption, but has not replaced it with a quantified alternative. The assessment of adult salmon migration impacts therefore rests on an acknowledged gap in the evidence base.

6.5 THE PREDATOR AGGREGATION RISK HAS BEEN UNDERWEIGHTED

The EIAR acknowledges, at paragraphs 12.9.6.22 and 12.9.6.23, that Atlantic salmon post-smolts are particularly vulnerable to predation during the early marine phase of their lifecycle, that predation mortality rates of up to 24.8% have been recorded from aggregations of Atlantic cod in Norwegian river systems, and that when combined with other pressures such as climate change, fisheries bycatch and habitat degradation, additional mortality from increased predation may exceed the species' natural compensatory capacity. The applicant nevertheless classifies the magnitude of effect from predation as low and the overall effect as not significant in EIA terms.

This conclusion is not consistent with the evidence the applicant itself presents. If predation mortality rates of up to 24.8% have been recorded in other systems, and the applicant acknowledges that this project may increase predator aggregation in the array area during the period of peak smolt migration, the basis for classifying this effect as low magnitude requires robust justification that the EIAR does not provide. The proposed mitigation for fish aggregation and the associated predation risk is essentially limited to lighting management, a measure that does not address the aggregation of fish predators in the array area and cannot be considered adequate mitigation for a recognised and potentially significant impact on a Near Threatened species.

6.7 THE SPECIFIC IMPACTS ON THE ABHAINN BHARABHAIS POPULATION

The following impacts on the Barabhas salmon population specifically have not been adequately assessed:

a) *Construction noise and vibration:* Percussive piling for turbine foundations will generate intense underwater noise propagating across the project area and beyond. Atlantic salmon are known to respond behaviourally to underwater noise and vibration, and noise at sufficient intensity can cause injury, temporary hearing threshold shifts, and disruption of migratory behaviour. The applicant's own assessment acknowledges that almost the entire returning adult population will pass through the ensonified zone during the construction period.

b) *Suspended sediment and water quality:* Cable laying, horizontal directional drilling at the landfall, and other seabed disturbance activities will generate suspended sediment plumes in coastal waters. Atlantic salmon are sensitive to elevated suspended sediment concentrations, which can cause gill damage, impair olfactory navigation, and disrupt the imprinting processes by which salmon locate their natal rivers. The inshore waters off Loch Mòr Bharabhais, through which Barabhas fish must pass, have not been specifically assessed for these effects.

c) *Electromagnetic fields:* The export cable will carry high-voltage electricity and will generate electromagnetic fields in the surrounding seawater. Atlantic salmon are known to use the Earth's magnetic field for navigation during their oceanic migration. The potential for the cable's EMF to interfere with the magnetic navigation of returning adult salmon as they approach Abhainn Bharabhais has not been assessed.

d) *Physical barrier and displacement effects:* The presence of the cable on or in the seabed in inshore waters, together with construction vessel activity, has the potential to displace or delay migrating salmon in waters immediately adjacent to their natal river mouth. This has not been assessed in relation to the Barabhas population.

6.8 THE RELATIONSHIP TO THE SPLIT OF THE PROJECT

As the applicant has split this project into offshore and onshore elements and deferred the onshore application. The impacts of the onshore cable route on Abhainn Bharabhais, including the potential crossing of the river or its tributaries by the cable trench, and the disturbance of riparian habitat and water quality during construction have not been assessed. The Abhainn Bharabhais salmon population is thus caught in the gap between the two applications: not fully assessed in this offshore EIAR, and not yet assessed in the onshore application that has yet to be submitted, in contravention of NPF4 Policy 4(f).

Atlantic salmon are a Species of Principal Importance under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List, and their safe passage is protected by statute under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003. A project of this scale and location cannot be properly consented while the assessment of its impacts on these populations remains incomplete and its proposed mitigation for the smolt migration window is conditional on a study yet to be conducted.

CHAPTER 7.

PROCEDURAL DEFICIENCIES IN GAELIC COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND DEFERRED SIA

The Gaelic community has not been meaningfully consulted, and the applicant has improperly deferred the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) until after the consent phase. This approach represents a significant procedural failure, as it denies the community the opportunity to influence project design based on identified social and cultural risks. By postponing the SIA, the applicant bypasses the fundamental requirement to assess the project's human and linguistic impact before seeking a final decision from Scottish Ministers.

7.1 BACKGROUND

As previously stated, the N4 seabed lease was decided without any consultation with affected communities. The Marine Directorate accepted CnES's assertion that the community were supportive of offshore windfarm developments at unprecedented close proximity to shore, **without any evidence**.

A recent public survey by Eilean mo Ghaoil (https://www.emg-lewis.co.uk/news-1/community-opinion-survey-delivers-resounding-verdict)
Found that **88% of the affected population are against the development.**

The applicant has not considered the community in its planning submission timing and has acted in bad faith choosing the busiest time of year for crofters, the lambing season which typically lasts for the whole of April in Lewis.

The applicant has sited the landfall area on private land that is surrounded by Common Grazings and crofts. They have chosen to avoid engagement with crofters and Common Grazings Committees and bypassed the legal land rights of crofters established under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993.

7.2 FAILURE OF CONSULTATION: LINGUISTIC BARRIERS AND LOCAL DISPLACEMENT

Run across all aforementioned grounds above is a common thread: the applicant's pre-application consultation was conducted in English, in a community where Gaelic is the daily vernacular. The applicant's own Phase 1 consultation summary acknowledged that local people felt the process was "more of a PR exercise than a genuine attempt to engage with the community." The failure to consult in Gaelic, to seek out local ecological knowledge from people who have lived alongside this coastline for generations, and to gather the photographic and observational evidence that local residents hold, has produced an EIAR that assesses this specific place as if it were any stretch of open Atlantic coastline rather than one of the most ecologically rich, culturally distinctive and linguistically unique places in the British Isles.

7.3 ABSENCE OF SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (SIA)

Following submission of this application, the applicant was contacted to enquire about the Social Impact Assessment (SIA). In response, the applicant's representative confirmed in writing:

> "Instead of being included in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), which forms part of our planning application, the SIA will now be completed and published after the consenting process. This is to allow findings from the EIA and the outcome of the consenting process to inform the completed SIA."

This means that Scottish Ministers are being asked to grant Section 36 consent for a major infrastructure project, one that will affect communities across the west coast of Lewis for a minimum of 35 years, without a completed Social Impact Assessment. The rationale offered, that the outcome of the consenting process should inform the SIA, is circular and self-serving: it subordinates the social impact assessment to the consent decision rather than informing it. The purpose of an SIA is to inform decisions before they are made, not to document their consequences afterwards.

7.4 FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH COMMITTED INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS (IFC & EQUATOR PRINCIPLES)

The Focus Group Summary Report (Appendix 6.2, Volume 2c), included in the EIAR, states at paragraph 4.3.1.1:

“Should the Project receive consent, it intends to undertake a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) to meet international standards, such as the Equator Principles (Equator Principles, 2020) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards (IFC, 2012).”

The Equator Principles and IFC Performance Standards are internationally recognised frameworks for the assessment of social and environmental impacts of major infrastructure projects. Both frameworks require that social impact assessment is conducted before project approval, not after it. The IFC Performance Standard 1 states explicitly that environmental and social assessment should be carried out early in the project cycle, before decisions are made that are difficult to reverse.

The applicant has therefore committed in its own EIAR to meeting standards that require a completed SIA before consent, while simultaneously deferring that SIA until after consent. These positions are irreconcilable. Scottish Ministers should not grant consent on the basis of a commitment to conduct an assessment that international standards require to have been conducted already.

7.5 THE FOCUS GROUP REPORT IS MARKED “CONFIDENTIAL” YET PUBLISHED IN A PUBLIC APPLICATION

Every page of Appendix 6.2 carries a “Confidential” marking. The “Confidential” marking on the face of a document published in a public planning application raises a question that the applicant has not addressed: was this document, in the form in which it has been published, intended for public release? The distinction matters because participants consented to publication of findings - that is, the outcomes of the research process - and were not necessarily consenting to the release of the full internal summary report in its working form, complete with its internal confidentiality designation. The applicant should clarify whether the publication of this specific document in this form is consistent with the consent given by participants and with the ethical framework described in section 2.2 of the report.

7.6 THE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS DEMONSTRATE SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE SOCIAL IMPACTS THAT ARE NOT ADEQUATELY REFLECTED IN THE EIAR

In lieu of a completed SIA, the applicant has submitted Appendix 6.2 as part of the EIAR. As participants of these focus groups, members of Eilean mo Ghaoil can attest that the focus groups were conducted thoroughly and that participants spoke with candour and depth about their concerns. The findings as published, while accurate as far as they go, represent a summary of a much richer body of testimony. The conclusions of the EIAR’s socioeconomics chapter do not, in our view, adequately reflect the weight and depth of concern expressed by focus group participants.

The focus group report records the following findings, each of which represents a significant social impact that has not been adequately assessed:

> a) Loss of trust was the most common theme. Paragraph 4.1.1.2 states: “The most common theme raised in focus group discussions was in relation to political topics, such as governance, trust in government, and community empowerment.” Table 3-2 records “lack of trust in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Scottish Government and developers, and sense that the community has little influence.” This is not a peripheral concern. It is the

single most frequently raised theme in the applicant's own community research, and it goes directly to the legitimacy of the consenting process itself.

b) Mental health impacts are already being experienced. The focus groups recorded "elevated stress levels associated with the uncertainty of whether the Project would go ahead" and concerns about "the potential impacts of the Project on human health, including in relation to mental health and wellbeing" (Table 3-2). The applicant's own research has identified that harm to community wellbeing is already occurring, before a single turbine has been consented. This harm will be sustained or worsened if consent is granted and the uncertainty resolved in favour of the project.

c) Gaelic culture and community identity are at specific risk. Table 3-1 records that "the local variety of Gaelic language is recognised as being different to that of standardised Gaelic, and at a critical point in terms of language survival." Table 3-2 records concern that "impacts on sense of place and place identity could contribute to depopulation of the rural communities of the west coast of Lewis/Eilean Leòdhais and impact on Gaelic culture." The applicant's own researchers have identified the risk of permanent damage to one of the last living Gaelic-speaking communities in the world. This risk is not adequately assessed in the EIAR.

d) Coastal cemeteries and cultural heritage sites were specifically identified. Table 3-2 records the "importance and sensitivity of coastal cemeteries, particularly on the west coast of Lewis/Eilean Leòdhais such as at Barvas/Barabhas and Bragar/Bhràdhagair." Paragraph 3.5.1.2 records that "participants drew attention to potential long term, adverse impacts on everyday sites, especially cemeteries at Bragar/Bhràdhagair, Barvas/Barabhas, Dalmore/Dail Mhor and others along the west coast." These concerns, raised by real people in a real community setting, are not reflected in the cultural heritage chapters of the EIAR, which treat these sites purely as physical archaeological assets.

e) Participants compared the project to historical exploitation. Paragraph 3.3.1.2 records that participants described previous developments as "mismanaged or exploitative" and referenced the Highland clearances and Lord Leverhulme's activities on Lewis in the same context as this project. As a participant, I can confirm that this comparison was made seriously and with feeling, not rhetorically. The applicant's researchers recorded it accurately. The applicant's EIAR does not engage with it at all.

f) The majority of participants refused to discuss mitigation. Paragraph 3.6.1.1 records: "the majority of focus group participants were not able to identify mitigation for the potential impact on landscape/seascape character and were not willing to move beyond this to discuss mitigation for other categories of impacts such as infrastructure and housing, as they felt that this would imply acceptance of the Offshore Project at its proposed location and scale." As a participant, I can confirm that this accurately reflects the mood of the focus group I attended. People were not being obstructive. They were telling the researchers, clearly and deliberately, that the project at this scale and in this location is not acceptable to them and that no mitigation can make it so. That is the most significant social finding in the entire application. It appears in a summary appendix and does not appear to have influenced the conclusions of the EIAR in any meaningful way.

7.7 THE DEFERRAL OF THE SIA IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH A FAIR DETERMINATION

Scottish Ministers are required to consider all material considerations when determining a Section 36 consent application. The social impacts of a 35-year infrastructure project on the communities of the west coast of Lewis are plainly material. The deliberate deferral of the SIA means that:

a) Scottish Ministers cannot properly weigh those social impacts against the project's benefits, because the assessment of those impacts has not been completed;

b) The public cannot meaningfully engage with or respond to a social impact assessment that does not exist;

c) The community whose testimony informed the focus groups has been given no opportunity to verify that their voices have been heard and accurately represented in the decision-making process; and

d) The applicant has placed the communities of Lewis in the position of having participated in research whose findings will only be fully documented and published after the decision that research was supposed to inform has already been made.

7.8 THERE HAS BEEN NO MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

From its earliest inclusion in the Scotwind leasing round to the development of the Spiorad na Mara project. This is in contravention of:

NPF4 Spatial Principle of Just Transition 'We will empower people to shape their places'

Para 9. 'everyone must have an opportunity to help shape their local neighbourhoods.'

NPF4 Cross-cutting outcome and policy links: a fair and inclusive planning system. **'**Throughout the planning system, opportunities are available to engage in development planning and decisions about future development. Such engagement, undertaken in line with statutory requirements, should be early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate.' (para 3)

NPF4 Policy 11

c) Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.

NPF4 Spatial Strategy, Para 8: 'Our strategy is to value, enhance, conserve and celebrate our places and to build better communities for future generations. A stronger commitment to placemaking, through a design-led approach and a focus on quality, will ensure every new development improves the experience of our places.'

Scotland's Marine Plan, General Planning Principle (GEN) 18 Engagement: Early and effective engagement should be undertaken with the general public and all interested stakeholders to facilitate planning and consenting processes.
4.77 Engagement with the public and other stakeholders should be appropriate, proportionate and meaningful. It should be undertaken as early as possible in planning and consenting processes

Scotland's Marine Plan, GEN 19 Sound evidence: Decision making in the marine environment will be based on sound scientific and socio–economic evidence.

National Islands Plan, Vision:
'Our vision is for islanders to be empowered to shape their own priorities, build their futures, and protect what makes their communities unique.'

CHAPTER 8.

ISLAND COMMUNITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT - ISLANDS (SCOTLAND) ACT 2018

The determination of this application is subject to a statutory duty under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which mandates that Scottish Ministers have regard to island communities in the exercise of their functions. Section 7 of the Act requires relevant authorities to carry out an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) where a policy, strategy or service is likely to have significantly different effects on island communities compared to mainland communities. This duty applies directly to the determination of this application.

8.1 NON-COMPLIANCE WITH THE ISLANDS (SCOTLAND) ACT 2018 AND THE NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN

The Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm is a development whose impacts fall exclusively and disproportionately on island communities. The communities of the west coast of Lewis do not have access to alternative employment centres, secondary healthcare facilities, or transport infrastructure that could absorb the pressures of a large offshore construction project. We are remote island communities whose social fabric, economic base, and cultural identity are uniquely vulnerable to the scale of disruption this project represents.

No adequate ICIA has been placed before Scottish Ministers as part of this application. The applicant's consultation materials and Environmental Impact Assessment documents do not constitute an ICIA and do not satisfy the statutory requirement. An ICIA must specifically assess the differential impacts on island communities; including on Gaelic language and culture, on fragile local economies, on healthcare and housing capacity, and on the traditional marine resource use described throughout this objection and must demonstrate that those impacts have been taken into account in the design and conditions of the proposal.

The failure to assess intangible cultural heritage, described in detail in Chapter 1 of this objection, is itself a dimension of this ICIA deficit. The EIAR contains no assessment of the living Gaelic cultural practices; including oral tradition, funeral customs, and the community's ancestral relationship with the western Lewis coastline and its marine environment that would be permanently altered by the transformation of this seascape. An ICIA conducted properly under the 2018 Act must engage with this dimension of island community life.

The Gaelic language and the cultural practices sustained by these coastal communities are the living expression of an attachment to place, that the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 exists specifically to protect. Strategic Objective 4 of the National Islands Plan makes explicit reference to island culture and Gaelic language as priorities that developments must have regard to. An ICIA that does not assess impacts on intangible cultural heritage cannot be considered compliant with the statutory framework.

The absence of a compliant ICIA means that Scottish Ministers cannot lawfully grant consent for this application without first satisfying themselves that the duties imposed by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 have been properly discharged.

This requirement is reinforced by the National Islands Plan 2019, which was produced pursuant to the Act and which sets out Strategic Objectives that are directly engaged by this application, in particular:

- Strategic Objective 4 (island culture, Gaelic language and heritage);
- Strategic Objective 7 (health, social care and wellbeing); and
- Strategic Objective 9 (sustainable economic development).

The National Islands Plan is the statutory expression of the Scottish Government's own commitments to island communities under the 2018 Act. A development of this scale, in this location, that does not demonstrably advance those objectives, and which in several respects actively undermines them, is not consistent with the statutory framework within which Scottish Ministers must operate.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, s.7 / National Islands Plan 2019 —*** The statutory duty to conduct an ICIA is engaged by this application. The following Strategic Objectives of the National Islands Plan are directly engaged: Strategic Objective 4 (island culture, Gaelic language and heritage); Strategic Objective 7 (health, social care and wellbeing); and Strategic Objective 9 (sustainable economic development). A development that does not demonstrably advance these objectives is inconsistent with the statutory framework.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 / Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 —*** The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 requires Scottish Ministers to have regard to social, economic and cultural impacts. The EIA Regulations require assessment of socio-economic effects. The absence of a compliant ICIA means that neither the statutory nor the EIA requirements for assessment of island community impacts have been satisfied.

8.2 IMPACTS ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The applicant's own Focus Group Summary Report (Appendix 6.2, Volume 2c) records that Lewis residents raised specific concerns about additional pressure on local health services from an incoming construction workforce, existing lack of capacity in childcare and social care, potential impacts on food security, lack of available housing, and potential impacts on safety and crime during the construction phase. These concerns are acknowledged in the application documents but are not substantively assessed.

The current application, restricted as it is to the offshore elements of the project, does not contain a substantive assessment of the impact of a large transient construction workforce on GP services, accident and emergency provision, mental health services, dentistry, social care or schools on Lewis. This assessment has been deferred, in effect, to the onshore application which has not yet been submitted.

It is not possible for Scottish Ministers to properly weigh the human health impacts of this project on the communities of Lewis without that assessment being before them. Consenting the offshore elements in isolation, before the full picture of workforce and infrastructure impacts is known, is contrary to the objectives of the National Islands Plan, in particular Strategic Objective 7, which requires developments affecting island communities to improve, not worsen, health, social care and wellbeing.

> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 4 / Marine Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 2 —*** Both sets of EIA

Regulations require assessment of effects on human health and population, including socio-economic impacts. The deferral of workforce health impact assessment to a future unsubmitted application means that Scottish Ministers do not have the environmental information required by the Regulations before them. This is a statutory deficiency that cannot be resolved by conditions.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 / National Marine Plan (2015), General Policy GEN 3 —*** The duty to have regard to social impacts and the NMP requirement to assess adverse socio-economic effects are both engaged. Ministers should require a comprehensive, integrated human health impact assessment covering both offshore and onshore elements before any consent is granted.

Chapter 9.

Impact on Crofting, Common Grazings, Machair and Livestock

The proposed development represents a direct and unassessed threat to the agricultural integrity of the West Lewis communities. Crofting, the management of common grazings, and the unique ecology of the machair are not merely economic activities; they are the foundational pillars of the island's social fabric and land-use system. The EIAR fails to account for the specific disruptive impacts on livestock management and the traditional practices that sustain these coastal communities, leaving the agricultural heart of the region vulnerable to industrial-scale encroachment.

9.1 THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

This section addresses a fundamental structural defect in the way this application has been presented to Scottish Ministers. The project is not a purely offshore development with a minor coastal connection point. Its confirmed onshore footprint runs directly through the heart of the crofting townships and common grazing lands of the communities between Barvas and Stornoway. The confirmed onshore elements include: a landfall site on machair Bharabhais involving up to twelve subsea cables via Horizontal Directional Drilling; Transition Joint Bays at the landfall; a cable haul road across Barvas Moor; an onshore cable corridor running broadly south to a Grid Substation near Stornoway; and either a Landfall Substation or connections to an offshore substation. Every one of the potential substation sites identified during public consultation sits within or immediately adjacent to active crofting townships and common grazings.

Every metre of the onshore cable corridor will pass through croft land, common grazing, peatland or machair. The offshore and onshore elements are a single, integrated development. The cables that come ashore at Barvas are part of the same project as the turbines that stand 5–13km offshore. The crofters and graziers whose land will be trenched and whose machair habitat will be permanently altered are entitled to have those impacts assessed before Ministers grant consent for any element of this project.

By failing to include the onshore impacts (on crofting and machair) in this application, the applicant has provided "incomplete environmental information," which prevents Ministers from reaching a "reasoned conclusion" as required by Regulation 21.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***National Marine Plan (2015), General Policy GEN 1 —*** Decision-makers must be satisfied that all material impacts have been assessed. The impact on

croft tenure, common grazing rights and Land Court processes is a material impact that has not been assessed.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Planning Circular 1/2015 (Relationship between land use planning and marine planning)*** **—** Alignment between marine and terrestrial plans is required for developments that straddle both jurisdictions. The deliberate severance of an integrated development into separate applications prevents that alignment and leaves Ministers without the information they need.

9.2 CROFT LAND AND THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Croft land in Scotland is protected under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 (as amended). A landlord who wishes to resume croft land must apply to the Scottish Land Court for permission under **Section 20** of the Act, which requires proving that the resumption is for a reasonable purpose related to the public interest. **Section 508** dictates that common grazings require the consent of the Crofting Commission for any works. The cable corridor, haul road and substation will be built on croft land and common grazings legally held under the 1993 Act. The statutory rights of crofters and graziers to be consulted, to seek compensation, and to challenge resumption through the Land Court cannot be waived by the strategic decision to separate the consent applications.

Scottish Ministers are being asked to approve the offshore elements of a project whose onshore infrastructure cannot be delivered without engaging, and potentially overriding, the statutory rights of crofters and grazing committees. Under the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, the potential impact on land use and the rights of affected communities are material considerations.

That engagement has not happened, and its outcome is unknown. Consequently, Ministers cannot properly assess whether this project is deliverable, or on what terms, without knowing whether and how crofting land consents and Land Court processes will be resolved. Proceeding without this clarity risks a breach of the EIA Regulations, which require a comprehensive assessment of all significant effects on land and the legal framework governing its occupation.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993*** **/** ***Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017*** **—** Resumption of croft land and occupation of common grazings require specific legal processes involving the Scottish Land Court and Crofting Commission respectively. These processes have not been initiated. Their outcomes are a material consideration for Scottish Ministers under the EIA Regulations, which require assessment of all significant effects on land use and affected communities.

9.3 THE MACHAIR — AN INTERNATIONALLY PROTECTED HABITAT PLACED IN DIRECT JEOPARDY

The machair of the west Lewis coast is one of the rarest habitats in Europe, found only on the Atlantic fringe of Scotland and Ireland. It supports internationally important populations of breeding waders including corncrake, lapwing, redshank and dunlin, as well as rare plant communities found nowhere else on earth. It is designated as a priority habitat under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive (implemented through the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994) and is a defining feature of several SACs and SPAs in the area.

The machair is an anthropogenic landscape; it exists only because it is managed. It is sustained by traditional crofting practices—seasonal grazing, low-intensity cultivation, and fallow cycles—carried out by these families for generations. Furthermore, NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places) protects the cultural significance of the machair as a landscape shaped by traditional land-use patterns.
Under National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 3 (Biodiversity) and Policy 4 (Natural Heritage), development must protect and enhance such biodiversity. A substation footprint of up to 50,000 square metres on or beside machair would constitute one of the most damaging single infrastructure impositions on this habitat in Scotland. Changes to machair via industrialisation are irreversible, representing a permanent loss of a priority habitat that cannot be "mitigated" or "offset" elsewhere.

The offshore EIAR's treatment of onshore ecology is dangerously narrow, confined only to the immediate landfall zone. By deferring the broader impact on the machair landscape, on the crofting practices that sustain it, and on the protected species that depend on it to a future application, the developer is engaging in "salami-slicing" - a practice discouraged by planning law and the Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017. This approach prevents Scottish Ministers from assessing the cumulative impact on the integrity of the protected sites.

Furthermore, under the Precautionary Principle, where there are potential significant effects on an internationally protected site, consent should be withheld in the absence of absolute certainty that the habitat will not be adversely affected. Because the offshore project cannot function without this massive onshore footprint, and because that footprint threatens the functional link between crofting and habitat survival, the environmental assessment is currently incomplete and legally insufficient.

> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***National Marine Plan (2015), General Policy GEN 9 (Natural Heritage) —*** Development must protect and where appropriate enhance the marine and coastal natural environment. The machair is a coastal natural heritage asset of international importance whose protection cannot be assessed in isolation from the onshore infrastructure that will physically impact it.
>
> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) / Marine Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 —*** Development that may adversely affect a SAC or SPA requires Habitats Regulations Appraisal. The RIAA submitted with this application does not assess the impact of onshore infrastructure on machair habitats within or adjacent to designated sites. This is an incomplete HRA and Scottish Ministers cannot fulfil their obligations under the Habitats Regulations on the basis of an incomplete assessment.
>
> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) — biodiversity policies / Schedule 9, Electricity Act 1989 —*** NPF4 establishes a presumption in favour of protecting biodiversity and natural assets. Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 imposes a duty to conserve flora, fauna and geological features of special interest. Both apply to the machair and to the licence holder's obligations in formulating proposals.

9.4 LIVESTOCK AND CONSTRUCTION — SPECIFIC RISKS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN ASSESSED

The townships along the cable corridor are active crofting communities where cattle and sheep graze on common grazings and inbye land throughout the year. The lambing and calving seasons on the west Lewis coast extend from approximately March to May, precisely the period when major construction projects typically recommence activity. Percussive piling, horizontal directional drilling, cable trenching, heavy vehicle movements and haul road construction will all generate significant noise, vibration and ground disturbance in the vicinity of common grazings. Sudden noise disturbance during lambing can cause ewes to abandon lambs; sustained noise and vibration during calving can cause stress-related reproductive impacts in cattle.

The developer's own Focus Group Summary Report records that community members raised concerns about impacts on livestock behaviour and use of common grazing land and the machair. These concerns are acknowledged in the application documents. They are not assessed in any chapter of the EIAR. There is no livestock management plan, no noise monitoring protocol for lambing season, and no assessment of the cumulative noise environment experienced by grazing animals during the construction phase. Under National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 5 (Soils) and Policy 10 (Rural Development), development must demonstrate that it will not adversely affect the viability of existing agricultural and crofting businesses.

The failure to account for these impacts also contradicts NPF4 Policy 23 (Health and Safety), which requires that noise and vibration impacts on sensitive receptors be mitigated. In this legal context, "receptors" must include the livestock that form the economic basis of the crofting township. Furthermore, the omission of a dedicated Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) detailing specific livestock protection measures means the application fails to satisfy the requirement for "mitigation by design" under the EIA Regulations. Without this assessment, Scottish Ministers cannot fulfill their statutory duty to consider the socio-economic impacts on the sustainability of rural communities.

Policy / Legal Basis: Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 4 / Marine Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 / NPF4 Policies 5, 10, and 23 — Both sets of EIA Regulations require assessment of effects on agriculture and land use. The failure to assess construction noise impacts on crofting livestock, a concern raised directly with the applicant during their own consultation, represents a gap in the environmental information that must be remedied before consent is granted. Without this assessment, Scottish Ministers cannot fulfill their statutory duty to consider the socio-economic impacts on the sustainability of rural communities.

9.5 PEATLAND AND CARBON STORAGE — AN UNASSESSED CLIMATE IMPACT

The Barabhas Moor is one of the largest and most ecologically significant areas of blanket bog in the Outer Hebrides, functioning as a major long-term carbon store. The proposed haul road crosses sensitive peatland, a concern raised at the developer's own consultation event and acknowledged by the developer's team as still under ongoing environmental assessment. Disturbance to deep peat during haul road construction can release significant quantities of stored carbon as carbon dioxide and methane, degrading the climate value of the peatland for decades or permanently. Under National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management) and Policy 33 (Soils), there is a presumption against development on peatland unless it is essential for a renewable energy project and the carbon balance is demonstrably positive. Crucially, NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils) explicitly requires that development should minimize adverse impacts on certain soil types, including peat and carbon-rich soils

The Barabhas Moor peatland is also the water catchment for Amhainn Barabhais/Barvas River, which supports Atlantic salmon populations on the IUCN Red List. Drainage disruption from haul road construction has the potential to alter the hydrological regime of river systems that support endangered migratory fish. This triggers NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity), which requires development to contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity and the restoration of degraded ecosystems. Destroying a carbon sink to enable a low-carbon project is fundamentally contradictory and fails the "Global Climate Emergency" test set out as the primary objective of NPF4 Policy 1. Furthermore, the failure to address these hydrological links ignores NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Heritage), which protects the integrity of ecosystems and the ecological services they provide, such as water purification and flood regulation.

By omitting a detailed Peat Management Plan (PMP) and a Carbon Calculator assessment from this application, the developer has failed to provide the "underlying information" required for a lawful Environmental Impact Assessment. This prevents a holistic assessment of the project's net-zero contribution. This omission constitutes a breach of the "precautionary principle" as embedded in Scottish planning law; where there are significant risks of environmental damage, the absence of full scientific certainty or data should not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Policy / Legal Basis: National Marine Plan (2015), General Policy GEN 8 (Climate Change) / NPF4 Policies 1, 3, 22, and 33 / Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 — Development must be consistent with Scotland's climate change obligations. A project that may release significant quantities of stored carbon through haul road construction on deep peat cannot demonstrate climate consistency without a full peatland impact assessment and carbon balance calculation.

Policy / Legal Basis: ***Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 / Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 4 —*** The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 duty to protect the marine environment includes the rivers and estuaries connected to the sea. The EIA Regulations require assessment of effects on water quality, hydrology and climate. These requirements are not satisfied by an EIAR that defers peatland impact assessment to an unsubmitted onshore application, violating the principle of "Project Splitting" (or salami-slicing), whereby an applicant cannot legally separate interconnected project elements to avoid assessing their cumulative environmental impact.

9.6 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE — A RIGHTS-BASED OBJECTION

The UNCRC and Scottish Ministers' Legal Obligations

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into force on 16 July 2024. It incorporates the UNCRC into Scots law and places a direct legal duty on Scottish Ministers and other public authorities to act compatibly with the UNCRC in the exercise of their functions. The determination of this application is a function of Scottish Ministers within the meaning of the Act. They must therefore act compatibly with UNCRC rights when deciding whether to grant consent.

No Child Rights Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) has been submitted as part of this application. No chapter of the EIAR identifies children as a distinct group of affected persons or "sensitive receptors." . No assessment of the impact of this project on the rights and interests of children in the communities between Ness and Uig appears anywhere in the application documents.

This is a direct breach of the duty imposed by the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, which requires public authorities to proactively consider children's rights in all decision-making

processes. It is not a curable defect that can be addressed by conditions attached to a consent because the underlying environmental information is fundamentally incomplete. A children's rights impact assessment must be conducted and published before Ministers can lawfully determine this application.

The UNCRC rights most directly engaged include: Article 3 (the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration); Article 24 (the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including protection from environmental pollution); Article 27 (the right to an adequate standard of living); Articles 28 and 29 (the right to education in an environment that supports development); and Article 31 (the right to rest, leisure, play and recreation in a safe and healthy environment). Under NPF4 Policy 23 (Health and Safety), planning must protect people from the adverse effects of noise, light, and air pollution; for children, these impacts are often magnified, yet they have been entirely omitted from the developer's cumulative impact assessment.

> **Policy / Legal Basis: UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 / Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 4 / Marine Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 / NPF4 Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place) —** The UNCRC Act places a direct legal duty on Scottish Ministers. The EIA Regulations require assessment of effects on human health and population. Children are a sensitive receptor group whose specific circumstances must be assessed. The WHO Environmental Noise Guidelines (2018) explicitly recognise children as particularly sensitive to noise impacts. The absence of this data constitutes a "lack of environmental information" under the EIA Regulations, meaning any consent granted would be vulnerable to legal challenge. Furthermore, the precautionary principle requires that where evidence of specific impact on sensitive groups is missing, Ministers must give greater weight to protective measures and the withholding of consent until such risks are fully understood.

9.7 CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND THE CONSTRUCTION ENVIRONMENT

The communities between Ness and Uig include children who attend primary schools at Ness, Barvas, Shawbost, Lionel and Uig, and who use the beaches, machair and coastal environment of the west Lewis coast for recreation and play throughout the year. These children will live through a five-year construction programme if consent is granted. They are a sensitive receptor group whose specific circumstances have not been identified or assessed anywhere in the EIAR.

The WHO Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region (2018) explicitly recognise children as a particularly sensitive population group in relation to environmental noise, noting that noise exposure can impair cognitive development, reading ability, memory and attention even at levels that do not cause physiological hearing damage. Crucially, the WHO 2018 guidelines on wind turbine noise state that current evidence on health outcomes related to wind turbine noise is of low or very low quality, and that methodologically robust longitudinal studies with large samples are urgently needed. Where evidence is low quality and where sensitive groups are affected, the precautionary principle requires that protective measures be given greater weight. The EIAR does not apply the precautionary principle to children's noise exposure at any point.

The construction noise environment for children living in Westside villages during the cable trenching and landfall works phase will not be the same as the noise environment for adults commuting to Stornoway for work. These are children who play on the beaches, who walk to school along roads that will carry construction traffic, and who live in houses within earshot of haul road activity on Barvas Moor. No child-specific noise assessment has been provided. No

consideration has been given to the noise environment of school playgrounds, beaches or play areas used by children during the construction phase.

Policy breach: UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, Article 24 - the right to health, including protection from environmental pollution, requires that children be assessed as a distinct sensitive receptor group. They have not been.

Policy breach: NMP General Policy GEN 3 - adverse socio-economic effects must be assessed. The health and wellbeing impacts of construction noise and disruption on children in the affected communities are adverse socio-economic effects that have not been assessed.

9.8 SCHOOL CAPACITY, CHILDCARE AND EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

The applicant's own Focus Group Summary Report records community concern about existing lack of capacity in childcare and social care, and specifically about the pressure that an incoming construction workforce would place on these services. The primary schools serving the communities of the Westside are small, with fragile pupil rolls. Even a modest increase in population associated with construction workforce families could alter school rolls in ways that are disproportionately significant in small island schools.

No assessment of the impact on school capacity, school transport, or childcare provision has been submitted. The Social Impact Assessment that would normally contain this analysis has been deferred to post-consent.

> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***National Islands Plan 2019, Strategic Objective 7 / UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, Article 28 —*** Educational provision for children is a component of wellbeing. Its potential disruption has not been assessed. Scottish Ministers cannot fulfil their duty under the UNCRC Act without a specific, published children's rights impact assessment that addresses educational impacts.

9.9 DEPOPULATION, SCHOOL VIABILITY AND THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITIES BETWEEN NESS - UIG

Small primary schools are anchors of community life. When a west coast primary school closes, families with young children leave. The communities between Ness and Uig are already experiencing population pressure. The developer's own Focus Group Summary Report records community concern that the project could contribute to depopulation of the rural communities of the west coast, particularly if its impacts on sense of place and landscape character cause young families to move away or choose not to settle. The long-term demographic consequences for children who currently attend schools in Barvas, Shawbost, Lionel and Uig have not been assessed.

> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***National Islands Plan 2019, Strategic Objective 2 (Population) / Strategic Objective 4 (Island Culture and Gaelic Language) —*** The Gaelic language survives in these communities because children grow up speaking it at home and at school. The demographic stability of the west coast crofting townships is the precondition for the survival of Gaelic as a living community language. A development that threatens that stability without any linguistic or cultural impact assessment is directly contrary to these strategic objectives.

9.10 DECOMMISSIONING

The EIAR's decommissioning section provides insufficient detail on how turbine components, particularly composite blades, which currently have no large-scale recycling solution in Scotland, will be disposed of at end of life. Consent should not be granted without binding, enforceable commitments on waste management that are consistent with Scotland's circular economy obligations and the stated direction of the Scottish Government's own Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024.

> **Policy / Legal Basis:** ***Electricity Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 4 / Marine Works EIA (Scotland) Regulations 2017 / Electricity Act 1989, ss.105–114 (decommissioning provisions)*** **—** Both sets of EIA Regulations require assessment of decommissioning impacts. Sections 105–114 of the Energy Act 2004 require Scottish Ministers to ensure a costed decommissioning programme is prepared and approved. The absence of adequate end-of-life waste management commitments in the EIAR means this requirement is not yet satisfied. Any consent granted should include conditions requiring the submission and approval of a detailed decommissioning and waste management plan before construction commences.

CHAPTER 1O.

Conflict with Sustainable Tourism Development and Protection of Cultural Landscapes

Conflict with Sustainable Tourism and Protection of Cultural Landscapes

The Spiorad na Mara project presents an irreconcilable conflict between large-scale industrialisation and a receiving environment defined by its unique natural and cultural “Wildness.” This proposal is fundamentally incompatible with the statutory Development Plan, as it prioritizes industrial-scale infrastructure in a region where the "Wildness Brand" and unique heritage serve as the primary drivers of economic resilience. It is our assessment that the development fails to meet the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, and, most critically, the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (LDP) and National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).

The EIAR fails to adequately consider the long-term impacts on the cultural landscapes of West Lewis, which are vital to the sustainability of the island’s tourism sector and community well-being. When assessed against the specific mandates of NPF4 Policies 1, 3, 4, 7, 13, 25, and 30, the proposal results in a demonstrable “Net Loss” to the environmental, cultural, and socio-economic integrity of the Western Isles.

10.1 THE BALANCE OF HARM:

The long-term, irreversible damage to the region’s heritage assets and local economy far outweighs any projected temporary economic gains or national energy contributions. Specifically, the development poses unacceptable risks to:

- **Environmental Integrity:** Undermining protected landscapes and biodiversity.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Eroding the unique character and "Wildness" of the Outer Hebrides.
- **Socio-Economic Stability:** Threatening the established local industries and community well-being.

Detailed evidence regarding the "balance of harm" to the local economy and heritage assets is provided in the sections below and further supported by the technical data included in the Appendix.

Detailed Evidence:

10.2 FUNDAMENTAL CONFLICT WITH LDP POLICY PD2 AND NPF4 POLICY 4

The proposed N4 development represents a significant industrial encroachment upon a "Primary Landscape Asset". Under LDP Policy PD2 (Landscape) and NPF4 Policy 4, development must protect the character and integrity of the landscape. Some research suggests that large offshore wind farms can create visual disamenity and may affect tourism value, although the extent of such impact is not always easy to quantify. The scale of the turbines introduces a dominant man-made verticality that would likely cause significant and long-term harm to the "Wildness" and "Sense of Place" of the West Side and Ness coastal regions. This visual industrialisation directly contradicts the policy objective of protecting the social and economic value of Scotland's natural assets. The West Side of Lewis is not a generic coastal location; its value depends on a distinctive combination of landscape, heritage, remoteness, and cultural identity that would be materially weakened by industrialisation. (Appendix Section 1).

10.3 NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ECONOMY (NPF4 POLICY 30 AND 13)

Policy 30 (Tourism) explicitly supports development that enhances the visitor experience and protects the qualities that make a destination attractive. The West Side and Ness tourism model is built upon the "Wilderness Brand" and its emerging "Dark Sky" economy. (Appendix Section 3).

- **Economic Displacement and Brand Dilution:**
  According to Visit Outer Hebrides visitor data, many visitors cite landscape, scenery and the natural environment as key reasons for visiting the islands; however, the specific figure of 71% choosing the islands for their "Wildness" has not been independently verified here. Visit Outer Hebrides reports that the direct value of tourism to the local economy was estimated at £81.5 million direct value in 2024. Visitor numbers were estimated at about 333,500 visitors in 2024. 57,000 cruise visitors to Stornoway included in that figure.

  As well as wildness, history and culture represent a primary draw for the Outer Hebrides, with 48% of visitors citing these as a key motivation for their journey (source - OHT Industry Reports).
  Research shows that those interested in archaeology stay significantly longer - averaging over a week - and contribute more to the local economy through higher-than-average spending. The cruise industry is a vital pillar of the local economy; local retail data indicates that cruise visitor spend accounts for up to 40% of sales for certain Stornoway retailers and hospitality providers, all of which is jeopardised by "Brand Dilution".

Public perception surveys regarding previous Scottish wind projects highlight significant community concerns that turbines are “over-illuminated”, which ruins the “dark sky” value of remote coastal areas - a primary asset for our local astro-tourism sector. N4 threatens “Brand Dilution”, likely leading to a measurable reduction in visitor “willingness to pay” and weakening the viability of the cruise industry, local micro-businesses and hospitality providers. This is particularly critical as research indicates that the majority of all tourists to Lewis visit the West Side, where four of the top five island attractions (Calanais, Gearrannan, Dùn Carloway, and the Butt of Lewis) will be impacted by the N4 array.

- **Loss of Astronomical Amenity:** The West Side of Lewis possesses the exceptional night-sky quality that supports dark-sky tourism. Visit Outer Hebrides describes the Outer Hebrides as one of the best places to catch the Northern Lights because of low light pollution and there are two existing Dark Sky Discovery Sites (Steinacleit and Gallan Head). Though the exact lighting scheme for this project has not been confirmed, under the UK Air Navigation Order and Civil Aviation Authority guidance, structures of 150m or more are subject to lighting requirements, and a project of this scale may therefore require significant aviation lighting. The resulting “light domes” on the western horizon constitute a significant and permanent loss of astronomical amenity. This industrial illumination would likely disqualify the region from attaining formal International Dark Sky Place certification, if such certification were being pursued or were otherwise applicable, as it fails the non-degradation criteria for the horizon, thereby destroying a vital and non-renewable seasonal growth sector.

- **Infrastructure Strain:** During construction, the displacement of tourists by an industrial workforce prioritises short-term industrial gain over the multi-generational tourism economy that sustains rural townships. The application should be assessed not only on the direct footprint of the development, but on the cumulative effect of scale, lighting, transport pressure, construction activity, and the permanent industrialisation of the wider seascape. The applicant has not demonstrated that proposed mitigation measures will fully and reliably address the identified harm, particularly in relation to landscape character, heritage setting, and tourism perception.

10.4 INFRASTRUCTURE STRAIN AND LOCAL TRANSPORT DISPLACEMENT (NPF4 POLICY 13)

Under National Planning Framework 4 Policy 13, development must demonstrate that transport requirements can be accommodated within the existing capacity of the network. The A859 and single-track township roads lack the capacity to support both industrial construction, local services and the volume of tour coaches required for the cruise market. This creates a “transport turmoil” that would likely place additional pressure on local transport providers who rely on these routes for time-sensitive cruise excursions.

- **Social Stress on Island Connectivity:** Research confirms that large-scale industrial projects intensify the magnitude of specific impacts in island environments due to geographical isolation and a lack of service depth. During construction, the influx of temporary workers represents a disproportionate strain on the Isle of Lewis's fragile transport and housing infrastructure.

10.5 PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE (LDP POLICY EH1 & NPF4 POLICY 7)

The West Side of Lewis is a “Cultural Landscape” of international significance, where the value of individual monuments is derived from their relationship with one another and the wider environment. Under NPF4 Policy 7 and LDP Policy EH1, proposals must demonstrate that the integrity of the interconnected setting of these historical assets will not be compromised. As well as affecting the tourism value of the heritage landscape, the industrialisation of the seascape backdrop fundamentally undermines the spiritual, historical, and educational value of this dense network of Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings (Appendix Section 2).

- **Impact on the Calanais Ritual Complex:** While Calanais I is situated on a prominent ridge, its cultural significance is defined by its wide, 360-degree horizon. The unprecedented height of the turbines ensures they will dominate the skyline to the north and west, compromising the ancient celestial alignments and the specific interconnected setting of this internationally significant Scheduled Monument within the wider Cultural Landscape. The "iconic" appeal of the Calanais Standing Stones functions as a vital "gateway" attraction for tourists that encourages further exploration of the Westside circuit of Lewis. The N4 development introduces a “competing verticality” that alters the historic isolation and the visual relationship between these monuments, causing further degradation of the Cultural Landscape. Once the setting of these heritage assets and the wider landscape character is altered at this scale, that harm is likely to be long-lasting and in practical terms very difficult to reverse.

- **Coastal Integrity and Seascape of Living History Sites:** Clach an Trushal (Scheduled Monument), the Arnol Blackhouse (Scheduled Monument / Property in Care), the Shawbost Norse Mill and Kiln (Scheduled Monument), the Dun Carloway Broch (Scheduled Monument), the Gearrannan Blackhouse Village (Conservation Area), and Butt of Lewis Lighthouse (Listed Buildings) all rely on an authentic, rugged Atlantic setting. A 21st-century industrial backdrop creates an irreconcilable "clash of character" that diminishes their interconnected setting and historical context.

10.6 COMPLIANCE WITH NPF4 POLICY 3 (BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT)

Under the statutory requirements of National Planning Framework 4, this project must meet rigorous standards for biodiversity enhancement, as detailed in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). The proposal offers only mitigation for damage, which no longer meets the statutory requirement for nature to be left in a measurably better state than before (Appendix Section 4).

- **Biodiversity Enhancement Mandate:** The applicant has failed to satisfy the Policy 3(a) mandate of NPF4, which requires a measurable enhancement to biodiversity, mandating that development proposals must “conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity” so that nature is left in a measurably better state than before. The developer must provide quantitative evidence that their mitigation and enhancement measures materially outweigh the negative effects on Hebridean avian and marine mammal populations. In Scotland, simply avoiding harm is no longer sufficient; the proposal must demonstrate a measurable net gain for the local ecosystem.

- **Strategic Compensation vs. Localised Mitigation:** We contest any attempt to rely on "strategic compensation" or national-level financial contributions to bypass site-specific ecological scrutiny. Under NPF4 Policy 3, the emphasis is on local restoration. A generic contribution to a national fund does not mitigate the localised ecological destruction or the loss of natural capital along the West Lewis coastline. The developer must prove that the specific "Nature Network" of the Outer Hebrides is being enhanced, not just offset elsewhere; they must provide quantitative evidence that their enhancement measures materially outweigh the negative effects on Hebridean avian and marine mammal populations.

10.7 SOCIO-ECONOMIC "NET LOSS" AND GEOGRAPHICAL IMBALANCE (NPF4 POLICY 25)

The Spiorad na Mara (N4) proposal represents a significant geographical imbalance between the distribution of economic benefits and the imposition of environmental burdens. While the applicant cites Community Benefit Funds, these are voluntary, non-statutory, and do not outweigh the potential for long-term "net loss" to the Comhairle area (Appendix Section 5).

- **Socio-Economic Imbalance and 'Benefit Export':** The primary environmental, cultural, and visual costs are borne entirely by the local community and the West Side landscape. Conversely, the majority of high-value economic benefits — including specialised high-salary roles, corporate profits, and supply chain dividends — are at high risk of "benefit export" to off-island and international entities. This creates an irreconcilable conflict with the Community Wealth Building mandates of NPF4 Policy 25, which requires that development projects contribute measurably to local economic resilience and retention.

- **Labour Displacement and Industry "Cannibalisation":** There is a high risk of labour displacement, where the local workforce is drawn away from established hospitality and social care roles to support short-term industrial construction. With an estimated temporary construction workforce of several hundred to around 1,000 roles, depending on the final project design and build-out, this "cannibalisation" of the labour force threatens the stability of the foundational tourism sector and local service delivery.

- **Disproportionate Burden of Cost:** The specialised nature of offshore wind roles means they are unlikely to be filled by the current local demographic, leading to a situation where the economic value is exported while the disproportionate environmental and visual costs are retained permanently by the community.

- **Retention of Economic Value:** Under NPF4 Policy 25, the developer has failed to demonstrate how this extractive model will address local needs or provide long-term opportunities for local businesses that outweigh the degradation of the island's "Wildness Brand".

- **Cultural Identity and Tradition:** The Atlantic58 situational research identifies a "distinctive sense of identity and tradition" on the Isle of Lewis that is directly threatened by the introduction of complex, large-scale industrial projects. This visual and social industrialisation creates a conflict between traditional cultural values and the "industrial character" of the N4 array, which could lead to long-term social degradation rather than community wealth building.

- **The “Extractive” Risk:** The Atlantic58 SIA highlights the risk that social and economic benefits may be “experienced differently” or potentially exported, where the community bears the environmental burden while high-value economic gains leave the island. This contradicts the “Community Wealth Building” requirements of NPF4 Policy 25.

10.8 CONCLUSION

The Spiorad na Mara (N4) proposal represents a profound policy failure that directly violates **NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places)**, **Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places)**, and **Policy 30 (Tourism)**, alongside the **Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan**. By imposing massive industrial structures onto a nationally sensitive seascape and coastal landscape, the project threatens the very foundation of the Lewis tourism industry, which is built upon a wild coastline and a sense of remoteness that draws 86% of visitors specifically for its scenery. This industry is a vital cornerstone of the local economy, worth £81.5 million today and supporting more than 1,000 local jobs, yet the developer has failed to calculate the financial cost to these livelihoods before permanently transforming a landscape that accounts for 16% of all economic activity.

The project's negative impacts include:

- **Statutory Failure - NPF4:** Clear conflicts with NPF4 protections designed to safeguard natural places, historic assets, and the tourism industry from inappropriate development.
- **Statutory Failure - Islands (Scotland) Act 2018:** Ministers cannot satisfy their duty under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 without a full assessment of the project's impact on the island’s economic wellbeing and tourism-dependent jobs.
- **Heritage Degradation:** Irreparable damage to the interconnected ritual setting of the Calanais complex and 26 Scheduled Monuments, undermining their historic context and integrity.
- **Amenity Erosion:** The destruction of daytime amenity and "Dark Skies" via synchronized red aviation lighting, which diminishes the remoteness and tranquility essential to Hebridean heritage tourism.
- **Economic Cannibalisation:** Risks to local hospitality and social care sectors as the industrial construction phase threatens to draw essential staff away from local services.
- **Intergenerational Loss:** The permanent depletion of the landscape inheritance and sustainable tourism opportunities for future generations.
- **Tourism Economy**: The proposal raises issues under Policy 30 (Tourism), as it will affect the qualities that attract visitors; Policy 3 (Biodiversity), requiring positive outcomes for nature; Policy 13 (Sustainable Transport), regarding infrastructure capacity; and Policy 25 (Community Wealth Building), regarding how economic benefits are shared and retained locally.

This is a decision about the long-term future and the character of a landscape and community that cannot be replaced once altered at this scale. Spiorad na Mara (N4) constitutes an unsustainable "Net Loss". The proposal would cause significant, cumulative, and largely irreversible harm to landscape character, heritage setting, and the tourism economy. The proposal cannot be said to fully accord with the Development Plan. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight to justify setting the Development Plan aside. The overall planning balance therefore weighs against the proposal, and refusal would be consistent with the proper application of planning policy.

Chapter 11.

New Research on Infrasound Demonstrates Unassessed Risk to Health

11.1 INFRASOUND WAS SCOPED OUT ON A BASIS THAT IS NO LONGER SCIENTIFICALLY DEFENSIBLE

Infrasound and low-frequency noise were explicitly scoped out of the EIAR's noise assessment. The justification given was that infrasound falls outside the scope of an ETSU-R-97 compliant assessment, and that a 2022 WSP report for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy concluded that wind turbine infrasound has no adverse effects on human health at typical exposure levels and that A-weighted sound level controls provide sufficient control for low-frequency noise impacts.

Each of these justifications has been overtaken by subsequent scientific and legal developments that were in the public domain before this application falls to be determined.

ETSU-R-97 was published in 1997 for onshore turbines bearing no comparison in scale to 338-metre offshore turbines. Applying it to scope out infrasound from an assessment of turbines of this unprecedented scale is not a defensible application of a recognised methodology. The 2022 WSP report predates the peer-reviewed research of Dastan et al. (2026), Mattsson et al. (2026) and Kaula (2026), which together establish the mechanistic pathway from infrasound exposure to physiological harm and demonstrate that infrasound levels from modern large turbines are drastically higher than previously understood. The WSP report's conclusions rest on an understanding of both the health effects and the exposure levels that has since been revised. The assertion that A-weighted controls provide sufficient protection is directly contradicted by the Irish High Court's June 2025 judgment in Byrne and Moorhead v ABO Energy Ltd, which identified amplitude modulation as a distinct impact pathway that A-weighted assessments fail to capture.

The scoping decision cannot stand as the basis for excluding infrasound from assessment of a project of this scale determined in 2026. The applicant has placed before Scottish Ministers a noise assessment that explicitly excludes the impact pathway for which the most recent peer-reviewed research and European court decisions indicate the greatest cause for concern.

11.2 THE FIGURES FOR SPIORAD NA MARA SPECIFICALLY ARE ALARMING

Groundbreaking research by Professor Ken Mattsson and colleagues at Uppsala University, published in 2026, used high-fidelity three-dimensional acoustic modelling verified against real-world measurements at modern Swedish wind farms to show that infrasound from large turbines is systematically underestimated by commercial noise modelling software. At a typical wind speed of 8 metres per second, measured infrasound remained above 91 dB at 13.5 kilometres from 200-metre turbines. This is of direct relevance because independent cardiovascular research has recommended a maximum tolerated level of chronic infrasound exposure of no higher than 90 dB to avoid interference with cardiac function, and 85 dB for long-term exposure.

These findings have been applied specifically to the Spiorad na Mara development because of its size and proximity to shore, using the established relationship between blade length and infrasound output. For turbines with a blade tip height of 338 metres and blade length of 140 metres, the projected range at which infrasound would exceed the 90 dB cardiac function

threshold is **over 46 kilometres**. The closest turbine would be 6 kilometres from the Lewis shore. On the basis of the latest research, every inhabited community on the westside of Lewis coastline would lie within the zone in which infrasound is projected to exceed the level at which interference with cardiac function is a recognised risk. The projected range at which infrasound would exceed 95 dB, the level at which acute cardiovascular effects have been demonstrated after only one hour of exposure, is over 10 kilometres. The communities of the westside fall within that zone.

> *"The conundrum for the wind energy industry is in the much diminished economic viability of the smaller turbines. The new generation of mega-turbines at 230 m tip height and possessing 83metre long blades require a 90 dB set-back distance of 16.5 km. Sites that provide a 16 kilometre zone free of dwellings in all directions from its outer perimeter are few and far between.For the N4 Spiorad na Mara proposed development offshore to the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, the projected >90 dB range is more than 45 km for the 338 m high turbines.*
>
> *The closest turbine would be only 6 km from the shore. This suggests that the level of infrasound is an increasing concern in the safe location of offshore wind energy developments too, as a result of the immense size of turbines being proposed. The average day / night measurement at a wind speed of 8 m/s from the Mattsson et al. paper was in excess of 95 dB at 2.9 km away from the Tvinnesheda / Karskruv turbines.*
>
> *This provides a valuable benchmark for estimation of the >95 dB range with different sized turbines, shown in the following table. The 95 dB level is of consequence due to the more serious acute effects on heart function (Danielsson and Landström, 1985) with exposure to infrasound at levels of 95 dB for only1 hour shown to cause an increase in diastolic blood pressure and decreases in systolic blood pressure and pulse rate. These levels are 5 dB higher than the recommended maximum tolerated level of 90 dB for chronic exposure suggested by Chaban et al., (2021) to avoid interference with cardiac function, and also 10 dB higher than the recommended limit of 85 dB for long-term ultrasound caused by wind turbines (Pawlaczyk-Łuszczyńska et al., 2025).*
>
> *The new generation onshore turbines with 230 m tip height would generate infrasound in excess of95 dB to around 3.6 km away. The physiology research suggests that occupants of dwellings within that range would be at a notably elevated risk of compromised cardiac function.Due to the power square law, the projected levels of infrasound for the proposed N4 Spiorad naMara development, possessing blades of 140 m in length, are extremely high.*
>
> *The >95 dB range is predicted to extend to over 10 km away from the turbines. As the closest turbine would be only 6km from the shore, the infrasound and physiology research suggests that many people living on the Isle of Lewis would be placed in elevated risk of compromised cardiac function."*
>
> https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/483i9t7y0ojxyyy73w20t/Health-impacts-from-infrasound-case-law-and-recommended-safe-distances-from-wind-turbines-May-2026-update.pdf?rlkey=ledmhn0mo15rd16i6awmwx40h&e=4&st=3gm4uusu&dl=0 *Summary/ Lit Review with citations.*

11.3 INTERNATIONAL CASE LAW CONFIRMS THE LEGAL RISK

International courts are increasingly finding in favour of residents harmed by wind turbine infrasound. In November 2025, the European Court of Human Rights found a clear causal link between wind turbine operation and physical and mental health disorders including headaches, tinnitus, dizziness, sleep disturbance and anxiety, giving precedence to medical evidence and lived experience over energy company assurances and existing regulatory frameworks.

In June 2025, the Irish High Court ordered the permanent shutdown of three turbines at a 125-metre wind farm in County Wexford where residents lived 1.05 kilometres away, awarded damages of over €360,000, and rejected the argument that the public interest need for renewable energy allows the

continuation of a nuisance. The court established that compliance with planning permission does not preclude a finding of nuisance at common law. The proposed Spiorad na Mara turbines are nearly three times taller than those shut down in that judgment.

11.4 WHAT IS REQUIRED

Scottish Ministers cannot be satisfied that this development will not have an unacceptable impact on the health and wellbeing of the communities of the west Lewis coast without a site-specific infrasound assessment conducted using current high-fidelity acoustic modelling methodology, incorporating the specific blade dimensions, hub height and array configuration of this development, and assessed against current health thresholds including the 90 dB cardiac function limit. That assessment should be published and subjected to full public consultation before any consent decision is made.

The scoping decision that excluded infrasound from this assessment was made on the basis of a 1997 methodology, a 2022 report and a distance assumption that the current science does not support. It was a decision made before the most important research in this field was published. Scottish Ministers are now in possession of that research and approving this application without requiring a compliant infrasound assessment would be to make an irreversible 35-year decision affecting the health of island communities.

Chapter 12

CONCLUSION - OUR MESSAGE TO THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS

The N4 development must be determined in line with the statutory Development Plan, including National Planning Framework 4, unless other material considerations clearly justify a different decision, in terms of section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

The eleven chapters of this objection address distinct legal and policy grounds, each of which is sufficient on its own to warrant the refusal of this application, or at minimum its suspension pending the provision of materially complete environmental information. Taken together, they present a case that is, we submit, unanswerable on the evidence currently before Scottish Ministers. The proposal raises a number of important planning considerations, including impacts on landscape character and visual amenity, the setting of heritage assets, the tourism economy, biodiversity, social impacts, transport infrastructure, and local economic outcomes, all of which are directly addressed by policies within National Planning Framework 4 and the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan.

The deficiencies are not peripheral. They go to the heart of what this project is, where it is proposed, and who will live with its consequences.

1. **FAILURE TO ASSESS LIVING HERITAGE:** The living intangible cultural heritage of the indigenous Gaelic-speaking communities of the west coast of Lewis has been entirely omitted from the assessment, representing a terminal procedural deficiency.

2. **BIASED VISUAL METHODOLOGY:** The cultural heritage settings assessment utilises photographs of historic sites oriented away from the development - methodology systematically skewed - resulting in a conclusion that artificially minimises significant

visual impacts. The proposal impacts the setting and integrity of Scheduled Monuments and the wider cultural landscape.

3. **NON-CREDIBLE ORNITHOLOGICAL DATA:** The ornithological assessment reaches conclusions that lack credibility, particularly regarding species in catastrophic decline at the world's largest gannet colony located within foraging range.

4. **MARINE HABITATS AND MAMMAL REGULATORY CONTRADICTIONS:** The project proposes unquantified damage to Priority Marine Features and blue carbon sinks, such as kelp beds, with no credible strategy for compensation. The assessment predicts disturbance to nearly 10% of a dolphin population protected by an adjacent Marine Protected Area (MPA), yet classifies this as "not significant" despite acknowledging that a European Protected Species (EPS) license will be legally required.

5. **BASELINE SURVEY OMISSION OF THE MOST PROXIMATE SALMON RIVER:** This critical local ecosystem remains unsurveyed - the most proximate salmon river to the cable landfall has not been assessed.

6. **BASELINE SURVEY OMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN OTTER:** This critical local ecosystem remains unsurveyed - the European otter has been entirely excluded from the report.

7. **PROCEDURAL DEFERMENT OF SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT:** The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has been deliberately deferred until after consent.

8. **OMISSION OF ICIA:** No compliant Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) has been produced to satisfy the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

9. **UNQUANTIFIED IMPACT RISKS OF MAJOR CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE:** The potential human health impacts and social pressures of a major construction workforce on one of Scotland's most remote and vulnerable island communities remain unquantified.

10. **FAILURE TO ACCORD WITH THE STATUTORY DEVELOPMENT PLAN:** The development's significant and irreversible harm to the landscape, cultural heritage, and the primary economic drivers of tourism and commercial fishing outweighs its potential contribution to national energy targets.

11. **UNASSESSED INFRASOUND RISK TO HUMAN HEALTH:** The potential impact of infrasound and low-frequency noise were explicitly scoped out of the EAIR; these justifications have been overtaken by subsequent scientific and legal developments that were in the public domain before this application falls to be determined.

Procedural Deferral:

The applicant has sought to manage these deficiencies through deferral - to consent, to post-consent protocols, to an onshore application that does not yet exist. Scottish Ministers are being asked to make an irreversible decision on the basis of incomplete information. This deprives the public of their statutory right to consult on the full extent of the project's impacts. The proposal cannot be said to fully accord with the Development Plan. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight to justify setting the Development Plan aside.

Procedural deficiency and Environmental Risk:

The Habitats Regulations require that Scottish Ministers must be satisfied beyond reasonable scientific doubt that this development will not adversely affect the integrity of designated European sites before consent can be granted.

That standard has not been met for the Lewis Peatlands SPA, the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides proposed SPA, the St Kilda and Seas off St Kilda SPAs, the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, or the East Lewis MPA. It has not been met for seabirds already in unfavourable condition at internationally significant colonies. It has not been met for migratory species with global populations small enough that sustained turbine mortality over 35 years would have measurable population-level consequences.

Availability of Alternatives:

There is also the question of alternatives. Under the Habitats Regulations, consent cannot be granted where alternative solutions exist, even if imperative reasons of overriding public interest are engaged. Scotland has other ScotWind sites. The developer is actively pursuing the Havbredey floating wind project, approximately 35 kilometres further offshore in the same area of sea, as a demonstrably viable alternative.

The nearshore location of Spiorad na Mara is a choice that places turbines five kilometres from an inhabited Gaelic-speaking coastline, directly in front of the primary foraging ground of a protected diver population, within sight of one of the most important prehistoric monuments in Europe, and in waters that independent scientific bodies have already recognised as internationally significant for marine mammals. That choice cannot be justified when alternatives exist that would deliver the same renewable energy without imposing these consequences.

Our Request of Scottish Ministers

We ask Scottish Ministers to recognise that this application, in its current form, has not demonstrated that this specific location is necessary, that this specific assessment is adequate, or that the communities and ecosystems that would bear the costs of this project for the next 35 years have been properly considered in the decisions that brought it to this point.

If refusal is not the immediate determination, we urge Scottish Ministers to suspend the consenting process and require the applicant to provide a significantly expanded Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) that addresses the following critical omissions:

- The applicant must deliver a full assessment of the living intangible cultural heritage of the west Lewis Gaelic community; a corrected cultural heritage settings assessment conducted from the seaward directions in which the turbines are actually visible

-A comprehensive ornithological peer review addressing identified inadequacies regarding collision risks; and an independent review of the marine mammal and benthic ecology assessment held to the “beyond-reasonable-scientific-doubt" standard required by the Habitats Regulations.

-The report must include site-specific otter surveys to NatureScot standards covering the cable landfall zone and inland corridor, a site-specific salmon baseline survey for Abhainn Bharabhais, a completed Social Impact Assessment published for public consultation, and a full, standalone Island Communities Impact Assessment compliant with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

- Crucially, the revised EIAR must feature a comprehensive cumulative impact assessment that evaluates the combined onshore and offshore pressures of Spiorad na Mara alongside the impending N2 West of Lewis development and all other planned offshore wind projects for the West Coast of the Hebrides.

- It must include a Child Rights and Well-being Impact Assessment (CRWIA) to evaluate how the project - and the broader industrialization of the coastline- affects the rights of localchildren to a safe environment, the preservation of their cultural identity, and their mental well-being.

-This must be coupled with a dedicated Dark Skies impact assessment to evaluate how aviation and navigation lighting across multiple developments will degrade the region's rare astronomical heritage, as well as a comprehensive economic impact study on the tourism and fishing industries to quantify the compounded threat to local livelihoods.

-Finally, the applicant must provide a workforce integration and infrastructure pressure study to assess the total social pressure caused by an aggregate imported workforce across multiple simultaneous developments, ensuring that the cumulative impact does not lead to the displacement of the permanent population, the exhaustion of healthcare and essential services, or the irreparable erosion of the Gaelic social fabric.

None of these requirements is unreasonable. All of them are legally grounded. Together they represent the information that Scottish Ministers need, and are entitled to expect, before making a decision of this magnitude and permanence.

This place deserves better than it has been given by this application. We respectfully ask Scottish Ministers to refuse it.

[Redacted]

SIGNATURE LIST – NOT FOR PUBLIC DISCLOSURE. We request that our personal address and name be redacted from the public-facing version of this representation.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

This consolidated technical planning appendix provides a comprehensive record of the legislative frameworks, national policies, and local development plans referenced throughout this objection. It serves as the formal policy map linking the specific challenges raised against the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm to the statutory duties of the Scottish Ministers.

I. Overarching Legislative & Regulatory Framework

These core statutes and regulations govern the entire application process and establish the specific duties of the Scottish Ministers as the competent authority.

- **Electricity Act 1989**: Section 36 governs the consent for generating stations, while Schedule 9 mandates a duty to preserve natural beauty and protect sites of architectural, historic, or archaeological interest.
- **The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990**: Establishes the regulatory framework for public notification and the fundamental right of stakeholders to make representations.
- **The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017**: Implements the EU EIA Directive for Section 36 consents, ensuring environmental consequences are considered before consent is granted.
- **Marine (Scotland) Act 2010**: Imposes duties to protect and enhance the marine environment, stating that economic investment must be consistent with these environmental duties.
- **The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017**: Sets specific EIA requirements for the marine licence elements of the development.
- **Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)**: Provides the statutory basis for the Development Plan and mandates Section 25 decision-making protocols.
- **Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994**: Requires an Appropriate Assessment for any project likely to significantly affect Special Protection Areas (SPAs).
- **Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009**: Section 44 places a legal duty on Ministers to act in the most sustainable way possible.
- **Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005**: Establishes a statutory duty to promote and facilitate the use of the Gaelic language.
- **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**: Provides essential protection for seabirds and Schedule 5 species, including Cetaceans and Otters.

Chapter 1: Living Intangible Cultural Heritage

Policies in this section focus on Indigenous rights, linguistic heritage, and the broader cultural significance of the Gàidhealtachd.

- **National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)**:
    - **Policy 1**: Prioritizes the global climate and nature crises in all planning decisions.
    - **Policy 7(a)**: Requires assessments based on the cultural significance of historic assets and places.
    - **Policy 25**: Mandates Community Wealth Building to ensure local economic resilience.

- **Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS)**: Recognizes intangible heritage, such as oral traditions, communal values, and the customary use of land and sea.
- **IFC Performance Standard 7 (PS7)**: Serves as the international standard for protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights.
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**: Outlines international human rights obligations relevant to the community.
- **UNESCO Convention (2003)**: Focused on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, including social practices, rituals, and traditional knowledge.
- **Public Sector Equality Duty**: Requires the facilitation of community engagement in their native language.

Chapter 2: Cultural Heritage & Archaeology

This framework addresses the protection of physical assets, Scheduled Monuments, and their critical settings.

- **NPF4 Policy 7(h)**: Specifically protects Scheduled Monuments and ensures their settings are not adversely impacted.
- **Scotland's National Marine Plan**:
    - **Paragraph 4.22**: Mandates respect for the marine historic environment.
    - **Paragraph 4.23**: Prioritizes the protection of designated assets in situ.
- **Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy NBH5**: Provides local protection for scheduled archaeological remains.
- **HES Managing Change (Setting, 2016)**: Defines the factors that allow for the appreciation of historic assets.
- **UNESCO Definition of Setting**: Expands the environment of a monument to include social, spiritual, and intangible aspects.
- **Calanais Standing Stones Setting Document (2014)**: Provides specific guidance on the stones' relationship with the western horizon.

Chapter 3: Ornithological Assessment

Environmental protections for bird species and designated Special Protection Areas are detailed here.

- **EU Birds Directive (Annex I)**: Protects rare and migratory species such as the Arctic tern and Red-necked phalarope.
- **Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004**: Allows for the designation of Species of Principal Importance.
- **Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017**: Sets EIA and HRA requirements for offshore waters.
- **JNCC Guidance**: Directs the protection of proposed SPAs (pSPAs) and their foraging ranges.
- **Habitats Regulations**: Invokes the "Precautionary Principle" regarding potential adverse effects on site integrity.

Chapter 4: Marine Mammals & Benthic Ecology

Policies governing cetaceans, seals, Priority Marine Features, and the impacts of underwater noise.

- **Scotland's National Marine Plan (NMP)**:
  - **GEN 5**: Safeguards "Blue Carbon" (natural carbon sinks).
  - **GEN 9**: Ensures compliance with legal requirements for Natural Heritage and Priority Marine Features (PMFs).
  - **GEN 13**: Directs noise and vibration avoidance.
  - **GEN 21**: Requires the assessment and addressing of cumulative impacts.
- **ASCOBANS (Resolution 7.6)**: Aims to minimize underwater noise impacts on small cetaceans.
- **Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA)**: Mandates the "Beyond Reasonable Scientific Doubt" standard for environmental safety.
- **Marine Protected Area (MPA) Framework**: Provides specific protections for the Minke whale (Sea of Hebrides MPA) and Risso's dolphin (North-east Lewis MPA).
- **Scottish Government Priority Marine Features (PMF) Review**: Protects sensitive habitats like maerl and kelp beds.

Chapter 5: Holistic Project Assessment

This section ensures the integration of offshore and onshore components into a single project assessment.

- **Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017**: Requires the assessment of "the project" as a complete, whole entity.
- **NMP Paragraph 4.77**: Establishes a presumption in favor of publicizing terrestrial and marine components together.
- **Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994**: Offers strict protection for European Protected Species (EPS), specifically the European Otter (*Lutra lutra*).

Chapter 6: Socio-Economic & Community Impact

Policies concerning the economic health of island communities and the "Just Transition" framework.

- **NPF4 Policy 25 (Community Wealth Building)**: Requires developments to support local economies and involve communities in economic benefit design.
- **The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018**: Imposes a duty to "island-proof" decisions to ensure they do not disproportionately disadvantage islanders.
- **Scottish Government's 'Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan'**: Ensures renewables do not undermine local social structures or the cost of living.
- **National Marine Plan (GEN 2 & GEN 3)**: Mandates that developments provide social and economic benefits at a local level.

Chapter 7: Navigation, Aviation, and Commercial Fisheries

Regulatory frameworks for safety at sea and the protection of existing marine industries.

- **Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 654**: MCA requirements for the safety of navigation and emergency response around offshore installations.

- **COLREGs**: Mandatory international standards for vessel lighting, marking, and maneuvering at sea.
- **Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) CAP 764**: Policy on the integration of wind turbines with aviation operations and radar.
- **National Marine Plan (Fisheries 1-3)**: Protects established fishing grounds and requires meaningful consultation with local fisheries.

Chapter 8: Decommissioning and Life-Cycle Policy

Policies governing the "end of life" responsibilities for all offshore infrastructure.

- **Energy Act 2004 (Sections 105-114)**: Requires a decommissioning program and financial security to ensure the developer, rather than the public, pays for removal.
- **NPF4 Policy 11(e)**: Mandates that project designs consider site restoration and the reuse or recycling of materials.
- **OSPAR Convention (Decision 98/3)**: Sets international standards for the disposal of disused offshore installations.

Chapter 9: Human Health and Population

Policies governing the physical and psychological well-being of coastal and island residents.

- **NPF4 Policy 23 (Health and Wellbeing)**: Establishes a requirement to assess and mitigate impacts on health, including mental health and noise-related stress.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2017**: Explicitly requires the assessment of project impacts on "human health."
- **WHO Environmental Noise Guidelines**: Provides international standards for assessing psychological impacts of noise and "shadow flicker."
- **PAN 1/2011 (Planning and Noise)**: Offers planning advice on preventing and limiting adverse effects of noise.

Chapter 10: Landscape, Seascape, and Visual Impact (SLVIA)

Policies protecting Scotland’s iconic coastal vistas and designated Wild Land areas.

- **NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places)**: Protects Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) and ensures developments do not undermine their integrity.
- **NatureScot Guidance (Coastal Character Assessment)**: Standard methodology for assessing how turbines alter the "sense of place" and marine horizon.
- **National Marine Plan (GEN 7)**: Requires planners to ensure marine environment use takes visual assets into account.
- **Wild Land Areas (WLA) Map and Descriptions**: Provides specific protections for the "ruggedness" and "remoteness" of the Lewis coastline (WLA 39).

Chapter 11: The Planning Balance and Conclusion

The legal "test" used by Scottish Ministers to weigh renewable energy benefits against identified harms.

- **Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997**: Mandates that decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan (NPF4 and LDP) unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- **NPF4 Policy 11 (Offshore Renewables)**: While supportive of green energy, requires that impacts on communities and the natural environment remain "acceptable."
- **The Precautionary Principle**: A guiding legal principle stating that a lack of scientific certainty should not postpone measures to prevent environmental degradation when risks are severe.
- **Scottish Government "Energy Strategy"**: Balances national targets (20GW offshore wind by 2030) against statutory protections for biodiversity and island cultures.

Recommended Planning Conditions & Mitigation Standards

Standard technical conditions that must be applied to any potential Section 36 Consent or Marine Licence.

- **CMS (Construction Method Statement)**: Defines the timing and footprint of all activities under Marine Works Regulations.
- **PEMP (Project Environmental Monitoring Programme)**: Post-construction monitoring for marine mammal and seabird displacement.
- **VMP (Vessel Management Plan)**: Mitigates ship-strike risks and noise disturbance to cetaceans.
- **LMP (Lighting and Marking Plan)**: Balances aviation safety with "Dark Skies" preservation and the visual setting of historic sites.
- **PAC (Pre-application Consultation) Report**: Verifies that the developer has met all statutory requirements for community engagement.

Fisheries Management Scotland

Fisheries Management Scotland

T: +44 (0)131 221 6567
E: [Redacted]

Licensing Operations Team
Marine Directorate
By e-mail

7 May 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application

Fisheries Management Scotland is the representative body for Scotland's District Salmon Fishery Boards, the River Tweed Commission and charitable Rivers and Fisheries Trusts. Our members work to conserve Scotland's valuable and iconic wild salmon and freshwater fish and fisheries and the aquatic environment on which they depend.

District Salmon Fishery Boards have a statutory duty to protect and improve salmon and sea trout fisheries. In assessing marine renewable energy developments (wind, wave or tidal), it is important that DSFBs and Fisheries Trusts, can be assured that all potential negative impacts have been assessed in full, and mitigations put in place. Where uncertainty remains, the developer should be required to contribute to research which will help fill these evidence gaps, as a condition of their operational consent. In addition, should the development be consented, and in the light of the nature crisis, we believe that all developers should be required to contribute to projects designed to conserve and restore important habitat for diadromous fish at a catchment scale.

Across Scotland, wild salmon populations are in crisis, and face a range of pressures, some of which are under human control. The Scottish Government have published a wild salmon strategy and implementation plan, which sets out the actions to be taken over a five year period to 2028. The implementation plan includes a number of actions under the heading of "understanding and mitigating pressures in the marine and coastal environment".

Where salmon populations are below their conservation limits, any additional pressure, including from marine renewables, cannot be considered sustainable. Scottish salmon rivers are categorised by the Scottish Government under The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016, according to the likelihood of them meeting their conservation limits. The most recent river gradings have been published for 2026. There are now 115 rivers across

Scotland graded as Category 3, meaning there is a less than 60% probability of meeting their conservation limit.

It is now well-recognised that populations of Atlantic salmon have rapidly deteriorated across their native range. In the latest species reassessment by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, released in December 2023 (and contrary to table Table 12-20), Atlantic salmon have been reclassified from 'Least Concern' to 'Endangered' in Great Britain (as a result of a 30-50% decline in British populations since 2006 and 50-80% projected between 2010-2025), and from 'Least Concern' to 'Near Threatened' in terms of global populations (as a result of global populations declines of 23% since 2006).

We note, and support, the recent position that the Marine Directorate have taken - "*MSS do not consider it appropriate for an EIA/HRA to conclude there is no or negligible impact just because no evidence exists of the impact. MSS advise that impacts to diadromous fish must be adequately investigated, rather than relying on a lack of evidence to claim there is no impact*".

There is considerable uncertainty around the potential for impacts of offshore wind farms on Atlantic salmon, with limited evidence to support claims of lack of impacts. Given the significant decline in wild Atlantic salmon populations in recent years we are strongly of the view that a precautionary approach in assessments is required. Such an approach should take into account both the interactions of migratory fish with the project site, but also with the proposed cabling routes and landfall. Assessments of impacts on migratory fish species should also consider cumulative impacts, not only at sea, but also any impacts associated with terrestrial infrastructure, energy transmission and with particular emphasis on associated river crossings for cables.

Fisheries Management Scotland did not have capacity to respond at earlier stages of the planning process for this development. However, the Western Isles DSFB did respond, and we have been in close communication with the WIDSFB and Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust throughout this process.

We provide the following comments regarding Chapter 13 of the EIA report. In common with the majority of EIA assessments that we have reviewed regarding marine renewable development we have significant outstanding concerns about the approach adopted and the conclusions that have been reached.

In particular we highlight the following concerns:

The mitigation measures set out in table 12-22 includes a column titled "Relevance to Fish Ecology". However, it is not clear which, if any of these mitigation measures, the developer considers to be relevant to wild salmon or sea trout. We provide the following comments:

M001: This is focussed on sensitive fish habitats such as key spawning grounds or feeding habitats, but fails to recognise the ecological trap effect highlighted above. Micro-siting wind turbine generators will not have any effect on this key impact pathway.

M002: We welcome the intention to reduce impacts on fish by maximising opportunities for cable burial. However, wild salmonids utilise the Earth's magnetic field for navigation and there does not appear to be any consideration of whether EMFs from cabling will disrupt their ability to detect these signals.

M003: We seek assurance that soft start and ramp up procedures will be determined based on swimming speeds of wild salmonids and in addition, we consider that at the very least, such activities should be avoided during the period in which post-smolts are likely to be in the vicinity of the development. Based on the information provided by the Western Isles DSFB, this should encompass at least April and May. This should be a condition of consent, should the development proceed.

M006: Again, we are struggling to understand the relevance of this to wild salmon or sea trout. We would like to understand what assessment has been done of the current presence of INNS which are impacting wild salmonids and whether such a plan will have a meaningful positive impact on local populations. Unless a positive impact can be demonstrated, it is difficult to understand how this can be seen as 'mitigation' in the context of wild salmonids. Clearly extensive engagement is required with local wild fisheries interests, particularly the Western Isles DSFB and the Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust.

M023: It is astonishing that the developer considers that offshore construction taking place almost entirely during the period in which their own documentation shows that salmonids are likely to be present within the development area is a mitigation measure. Whilst we recognise that they state that this will reduce disturbance of some fish species, such as sandeel, this is clearly not the case for endangered wild salmon. This appears to be a consequence of the very narrow focus on 'sensitive fish habitats' such as key spawning grounds or feeding habitats and as stated above, we do not agree with this approach.

One potential mitigation which could be considered would be for the developer to work with the Western Isles DSFB to identify suitable sites for river restoration projects which would help to increase freshwater productivity and would potentially go some way to mitigating potential predation impacts arising from the development.

We have a number of concerns about the operational phase of the windfarm, and potential impacts on wild salmon and sea trout which have not been adequately considered by the developer.

New structures in the marine environment have the potential to act as ecological traps, or to aggregate predators. As the developer recognises, recent studies have demonstrated that significant numbers of post smolt salmon are likely to migrate in the vicinity of the proposed development. This includes post smolts from the Langavat SAC, but it is highly likely that post smolts from other rivers in the Western Isles will also pass through the proposed development site.

Contrary to the statements in 12.8.1.22 smolt migration pathways represent a critical life stage when post smolts are particularly vulnerable. The narrow focus on spawning or feeding areas completely misses this vital point. No evidence is presented to justify the statement that "Due to their mobility, these species generally have a high tolerance to short term and spatially limited habitat disturbance in offshore environments, particularly where such areas are not essential to critical life stages (e.g., spawning or feeding)."

It is well established that hard substrates introduced into the marine environment through construction of offshore wind farms, can result in local increases in the numbers of a wide range of species including gadoid fish, sea birds and seals, all of which can predate adult and juvenile salmonids. Marine mammals have been demonstrated to utilise wind farm sites in Dutch and UK waters, and predatory fish are likely to accumulate in the area. The EIA fails to recognise more recent work undertaken by the Marine Directorate and presented at ScotMER which demonstrates that post smolts do not always move swiftly through coastal waters, presumably taking time to forage when feeding opportunities arise. We still have significant concerns about the potential for predation of salmon post smolts, sea trout and returning adult salmon due to aggregation of fish, marine mammals and predatory birds in the vicinity of the development, and we consider that the developer has failed to demonstrate no adverse effect on site integrity of the relevant Atlantic salmon SACs, and impacts on other relevant rivers.

Under Scottish Marine Energy Research (ScotMER), the Diadromous Fish Receptor Group has identified evidence gaps related to the health, distribution, and impacts on Diadromous fish (salmon, sea trout, etc.). Scottish Government has published an 'evidence map' (available for download at the above link) which identifies and scores these evidence gaps according to a specific prioritisation process. We do not consider that the developer has adequately considered each of these evidence gaps in full. As we have repeatedly stated in other responses to offshore wind development proposals, if the proposed development is consented, the applicant should contribute to filling these evidence gaps as a **specific condition of consent**.

Following engagement with members of Fisheries Management Scotland we highlight in particular, the following priorities identified through ScotMER:

- DF.01-2022: Spatial and Temporal Distribution
- DF.04-2022: Effects on diadromous fish behaviour including fish aggregations around devices (ecological traps)
- DF.02-2022: Survival and progression rates in relation to passing through marine renewable areas
- DF.03-2022: Influence on migratory patterns due to cable deployment (EMF)

Fisheries Management Scotland also consider that potential barrier effects on salmon during construction and operation (e.g. noise, shadow flicker) should be considered in full. In this regard, it should be noted that NatureScot has formally conceded that shadow flicker from moving turbine blades (and also the direct visual effects of moving blades) may adversely affect salmonids in freshwater habitat. Since exactly the same physical principles apply in the marine environment, surface-orientated fish like salmonids are likely to be exposed to equivalent adverse effects. If this effect proved to be significant it would potentially affect connectivity between the SACs and the salmon migration route.

We would emphasise that to date, and as detailed above, there remains considerable uncertainty around evidence of impacts on salmon and other diadromous species. We therefore expect to see proposals for strategic research **and** mitigation. With regard to research, in our view a focus on understanding the potential impact pathways for wild salmonids is vitally important. In the case of mitigation, this should be focussed, in line with international advice via NASCO, on projects which improve freshwater conditions and increase the number of healthy wild salmon and sea trout smolts leaving Scotland's rivers.

It should be emphasised that we have no wish to prevent or delay any proposed development unnecessarily and we remain keen to work constructively with the developers and the Marine Directorate to identify appropriate monitoring programmes which will allow us to be able to assess the acknowledged risks of this development, and other proposed developments in a more appropriate manner. There is a clear and urgent need to fund, plan and start strategic research on the movement, abundance, swimming depth, feeding behaviour and impact pathways relevant to diadromous fish. Such research would clearly feed into the potential mitigation measures that might be deemed appropriate, and the conditions under which such mitigation should be enacted. Developers should be required to work together to fund strategic monitoring, in order to allow more certainty for all involved.

The scale of proposed offshore developments and other technical approaches to marine renewables development represents a step-change in the exposure of marine animals of high cultural and economic significance to attendant risks. As highlighted above, understanding of many of these risks is insufficient to support proposals for mitigation even at this late stage when substantial developments are being submitted for licensing. The cumulative impact of this proposal alongside those developments already submitted or likely to follow in the near

future is potentially even greater. We believe that more needs to be done to ensure that the best scientific talent is made available to find practicable ways to address the unresolved uncertainties. Fisheries Management Scotland would welcome an opportunity to constructively engage with any such process.

The Habitats Directive (article 6) requires that *Member States shall take appropriate steps to avoid, in the special areas of conservation, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of this Directive.*

It also states: *In the light of the conclusions of the [appropriate] assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public*.

If this is not the case and there are no alternative solutions, the proposal can only be allowed to proceed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

In the light of the ongoing failure to understand, quantify and address concerns relating to impacts on diadromous fish, we object to the proposal as currently set out. The developer has failed to demonstrate that there will be no adverse effect on SAC integrity and therefore we do not consider that this development can proceed. Whilst we don't believe that any individual offshore windfarm can meet the criteria for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, if Scottish Ministers determine that a legal robust case can be made for the development to proceed, we believe that clear, demonstrable compensation must be put in place which is directly relevant to diadromous fish arising from relevant SAC rivers in the Outer Hebrides. However, should the developer commit to contributing to strategic research to address these information gaps, as a specific condition of consent, develop meaningful mitigation specifically tailored to the needs of wild salmonids and commit to supporting projects relevant to the conservation and restoration of diadromous fish populations, we may be in a position to lift our objection.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

CEO, Fisheries Management Scotland

Gulfxstream Limited

From: [Redacted]
To: MD Marine Renewables
Subject: Spiorad Na Mara -Support
Date: 06 May 2026 09:36:00
Attachments: Screenshot 2026-01-19 at 12.11.30.png
14001.png

To Whom it may concern,

We are a locally based company and employer and are supportive of the Spiorad Na Mara project. It is of significant importance to the local economy for several reasons:

* Long-term employment
* Youth development and training
* Green energy
* Economic benefits
* Development of local infrastructures

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]



Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust

Licensing Operations Team,

Marine Directorate

Scottish Government,

Marine Laboratory,

Aberdeen,

AB11 9DB

June 2026

Dear Sir or Madam,

Environmental Impact Assessment - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Northwest of Lewis

We welcome the opportunity to review and comment on the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm off Northwest Lewis.

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) supports the transition to renewable energy sources, including the sustainable development of offshore wind. We recognise climate change as one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, coastal communities and the marine environment, and support efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and accelerate the transition to low-carbon energy sources. However, this transition must not come at the cost of the marine environment and marine biodiversity. We are facing both a climate emergency and a biodiversity crisis, and these challenges must be addressed together.

Marine mammals play an important role in healthy marine ecosystems and contribute to wider ecosystem functioning and climate regulation. Protecting whales, dolphins and porpoises is therefore not only important for biodiversity conservation, but also for maintaining resilient marine ecosystems in a changing climate.

HWDT recognises that such developments have the potential to impact cetaceans at both the individual and population level through a range of direct, indirect, short-term and long-term effects. Therefore, HWDT supports the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy where developments are:

- Appropriately sited to avoid known cetacean hotspots, important habitats, migratory corridors and designated areas.
- Based on robust baseline data and the best available evidence.

- Subject to comprehensive assessment of direct, indirect, cumulative and population-level impacts.
- Supported by effective, evidence-based mitigation measures.
- Accompanied by long-term monitoring and adaptive management throughout the lifespan of the development.

Given the highly mobile nature of marine mammals and the scale of offshore renewable development proposed within Scottish waters, HWDT considers that underwater noise, disturbance, displacement, cumulative impacts, and habitat change require particular attention.

HWDT also recognises that significant evidence gaps remain regarding the impacts of offshore renewable developments on marine mammals. Given the anticipated scale of offshore renewable development proposed within Scottish waters, HWDT is concerned this could result in significant impacts on cetaceans, particularly where impacts cannot be fully assessed, mitigated or monitored. Where uncertainty remains high, and where evidence gaps persist, HWDT supports the application of a precautionary and evidence-based approach to decision-making.

We have considered these key principles in our review of the marine mammal assessments and outline marine mammal mitigation protocol in the EIA for the Spiorad na Mara site. This has identified a number of areas where further information, clarification and/or strengthened mitigation are needed. The key comments identified through our review are as follows:

1. HWDT's primary concerns relate to the underwater noise associated with pile driving during construction and the associated disturbance and displacement impacts on cetaceans. The potential vessel strike risks associated with project-related vessel activity throughout the lifetime of the development are also a concern.
2. HWDT welcomes the commitment to a 12 dB reduction in noise levels by using noise abatement systems. However, more detail is required on how this will be achieved, including precisely what will be reduced by 12 dB (e.g. whether this is peak level, sound energy or frequency specific) in order to be able to properly assess this commitment.
3. The Outline Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) does not mention any measures to minimise vessel strike risks. Strike risks could be managed through minimising vessel speeds and it would be useful to include this within the MMMP.
4. HWDT recommends that best available data are used when characterising baseline density estimates and species occurrence. We note discrepancies between some modelled outputs and other available evidence sources, limitations associated with some of the survey methodologies and datasets used, and a lack of assessment to understand the site's importance within the wider regional context.

5. HWDT considers that all relevant pathways and pressures should be considered to provide the most representative cumulative effects assessment.

Further detail on these points, together with additional comments and recommendations, can be found in the Appendix that follows this letter.

HWDT would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these points and would also welcome being included as a stakeholder and consultee as the Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol is further developed. We would be happy to discuss suitable datasets and evidence sources that may be available to help inform monitoring, mitigation and assessment.

Kind regards,

[Redacted]

Science and Conservation Manager

Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

[Redacted]

Appendix: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm EIA – HWDT comments and recommendations

1. Declaration of interests

During preparation of this response, potential conflicts of interest were considered in relation to the Spiorad na Mara project. Some staff from the marine mammal team at the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) act as independent advisors on HWDT's Science Committee, but to avoid potential conflicts of interest have refrained from providing input into this document.

2. General comments

HWDT welcomes a number of updates and additions that have been made since the scoping stage, including:

- Dedicated passive acoustic monitoring work at the site conducted by SAMS Enterprise, which has provided valuable additional insight into seasonal species presence and indicate substantially greater species diversity and year-round occurrence than was detected through digital aerial surveys alone;
- Vessel collision has now been scoped in across all stages of the development;
- The commitment to achieve a 12 dB reduction in noise levels at all piling locations using noise abatement systems.

HWDT notes that the assessment generally adopts a precautionary worst-case scenario approach. Given the uncertainties associated with assessing impacts on highly mobile marine mammals, this is considered an appropriate and proportionate approach.

These additions represent a positive response to several issues raised during the scoping process. However, questions remain regarding the interpretation of survey data, the effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures, and the extent to which uncertainty has been incorporated within the assessment.

3. Underwater Noise

HWDT's primary concern relates to underwater noise associated with pile driving and associated disturbance/displacement impacts on cetaceans.

The assessment concludes that residual auditory injury and disturbance effects are negligible following implementation of embedded mitigation measures. However, these conclusions appear to rely heavily on assumed mitigation efficacy and there is currently no information available regarding the specific noise abatement systems (NAS) that will be deployed.

HWDT welcomes the commitment to a 12 dB reduction in noise levels by using noise abatement systems. However, further clarification is required regarding:

- How this reduction will be achieved;
- The evidence base supporting the reduction;
- Whether the proposed mitigation is sufficient for all receptor species, particularly baleen whales;
- Whether greater reductions could be achieved through the use of the latest innovative mitigation technologies.

Whilst some NAS, such as bubble curtains, can be highly effective at reducing higher-frequency sounds, their effectiveness at reducing lower-frequency sound may be more limited. Given the importance of west coast waters for minke whales and other large whale species, further consideration should be given to how mitigation measures perform across the full range of cetacean receptor species present within the site and surrounding waters. Where appropriate, additional mitigation strategies, such as seasonal restrictions of piling activities, should be considered alongside NAS to minimise impacts for species sensitive to lower frequency sounds. For example, minke whales are sensitive to lower frequency sound (Southall et al. 2019) and exhibit seasonal patterns of occurrence in Scottish waters (Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, 2018). As such, seasonal restrictions may provide an additional mitigation measure when this species is present in the region.

Even where some mitigation approaches may be less effective for particular species or frequencies, this should not diminish the importance of implementing robust noise reduction measures wherever possible. A precautionary approach should be maintained for species known to be sensitive to underwater noise, including some of the more elusive shelf and deep diving species (i.e. beaked whales and pilot whales) where evidence on abundance and distribution is limited.

The assessment distinguishes Temporary Threshold Shift (TTS) from auditory injury/Permanent Threshold Shift (PTS) in line with standard offshore wind assessment practice. However, TTS represents a measurable auditory effect (Southall et al. 2019) and the potential ecological significance of widespread or repeated sub-lethal hearing impairment should be considered within the cumulative effects assessment. TTS represents a physical auditory effect and should therefore be considered alongside disturbance and displacement assessments, which describe behavioural responses. For example, harbour porpoises have high energetic requirements and must forage almost continuously to maintain body condition (Wisniewska et al. 2016). Temporary reductions in hearing sensitivity may affect porpoise's ability to detect prey, navigate or communicate, particularly where exposure is repeated or occurs alongside other stressors. Wisniewska et al. (2016) highlighted this makes porpoises particularly vulnerable to anthropogenic disturbance, even moderate levels of disturbance may have severe fitness consequences at both the individual

and population level. As such, the potential cumulative consequences of TTS warrant consideration within the cumulative effects assessment.

4. Vessel Activity and Collision Risk

HWDT notes that, in response to the comments received at scoping, the developer has committed to scope vessel collision risk into the assessments at all stages of the project. However, the Outline Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol does not currently include any measures to minimise vessel strike risk. Given the importance of this pathway, consideration should be given to mitigation measures such as vessel speed restrictions and other appropriate vessel management measures within the mitigation protocol.

Increased vessel activity during construction, operation and maintenance also has the potential to contribute to underwater noise and disturbance. Further consideration should therefore be given to the cumulative contribution of project-related vessel activity alongside existing maritime pressures within the region.

5. Baseline Data

HWDT considers that:

- Highly mobile species are likely to utilise areas even when survey effort may not detect them;
- Absence of detections should not necessarily be interpreted as absence of use;
- Wider regional datasets and long-term evidence sources should be considered where appropriate.

The baseline assessment for this site relies heavily on digital aerial surveys, PAM data and broader-scale datasets including SCANS-III and SCANS-IV.

HWDT welcomes the inclusion of additional PAM surveys since scoping. The PAM data indicate substantially greater species diversity and more consistent year-round occurrence of several cetacean species (van Geel et al. 2025) than was detected through the digital aerial surveys (APEM, 2024).

One area requiring further consideration is the reliance on broader-scale SCANS density estimates to assess impacts on cetaceans, and we question whether these adequately reflect local species occurrence. Large-scale surveys such as SCANS are conducted at irregular intervals and are designed to provide population-scale estimates, often at a spatial resolution that may not be suitable for fine-scale, site-level offshore wind assessments (Tougaard et al. 2025). This has resulted in modelled density estimates for some species which are inconsistent with other available

evidence sources. In particular, modelled abundance estimates for minke whales, common dolphin, and bottlenose dolphin suggest very low, uniform densities throughout the region, whereas PAM data and other regional analyses indicate that these species regularly occur both within the site and surrounding waters.

We acknowledge that publications from long-term monitoring programmes run by HWDT, Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS) and Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) have been used to provide additional context to these estimates in the EIA. However, vessel-based visual survey data or wider scale data on cetaceans do not appear to have been directly included within the marine mammal assessments.

As acknowledged in the EIAR, the exposed nature of the site and prevailing weather conditions present challenges for the collection of visual survey data in this area. Nevertheless, dedicated vessel-based cetacean surveys are undertaken within and around the wider region through HWDT's Cetacean Research Programme (i.e. Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, 2018; Hartny-Mills et al. 2024). While these data are also limited by survey conditions (Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust 2018), they do provide an additional source of information on species occurrence and habitat use.

HWDT encourages the developer to make use of the best available evidence, including long-term datasets, regional monitoring programmes and dedicated research initiatives, to ensure the most robust baseline characterisation possible and monitoring before, during and after construction.

Given the acknowledged limitations associated with survey methodologies for highly mobile marine species, HWDT considers that uncertainty should be clearly reflected within the assessment framework and that a precautionary approach should be applied where evidence gaps remain.

In addition, given the highly mobile nature of marine mammals, the importance of the site should be considered within the context of the wider regional ecosystem. While the assessment focuses on waters within and adjacent to the development area, species such as minke whales regularly move across much larger areas. The role of the site within broader patterns of habitat use, connectivity and movement is therefore relevant to understanding potential impacts.

6. Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA)

HWDT is concerned that the cumulative effects assessment may focus too narrowly on selected acoustic disturbance pathways, whilst other potentially relevant pressures affecting marine mammals have been scoped out.

Examples include:

- Injury risk associated with construction vessel mooring lines and discarded fishing gear;

- Wider population-scale effects for highly mobile species;
- Transboundary effects for species with broad-ranging distributions i.e. minke whales.

Given the multiple and interacting pressures already affecting cetaceans, HWDT considers that all relevant pathways should be considered where possible to provide the most representative cumulative assessment.

7. Disturbance and Displacement

The assessment concludes that residual disturbance impacts are negligible following mitigation. However, disturbance and displacement remain important considerations for highly mobile marine mammals, particularly where impacts may occur over large spatial scales and interact with other pressures.

8. Mobile Species and Population-Level Effects

Several receptor species considered within the assessment, including minke, humpback and fin whales, are highly mobile and wide-ranging species. Whilst transboundary effects have been scoped out, further clarification may be required regarding how cumulative population-level effects across the wider regional range of these species have been considered.

Many of the challenges associated with assessing offshore wind impacts on cetaceans are shared across other highly mobile marine species, including seabirds, particularly in relation to cumulative effects, displacement and impacts occurring beyond the development footprint.

HWDT also notes that the assessment is focused largely on the development footprint and associated study area. However, many cetacean species using the region are highly mobile and may utilise habitats well beyond the areas covered by site-specific surveys. Consideration should therefore extend beyond the immediate development area to encompass wider habitat use, connectivity and population-level effects.

9. Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Given the recognised uncertainties surrounding marine mammal responses to offshore renewable developments, HWDT considers that robust pre-, during- and post-construction monitoring is essential to assess impacts and validate assessment assumptions.

Monitoring programmes should:

- Include both long-term acoustic and visual monitoring;

- Make use of the best available evidence, including long-term datasets, regional monitoring programmes and dedicated research initiatives;
- Continue beyond construction to assess longer-term impacts;
- Link to clearly defined adaptive management measures.

Adaptive management frameworks should include agreed triggers and mechanisms to ensure that mitigation and monitoring can be reviewed and strengthened where impacts exceed those predicted within the assessment.

HWDT would welcome being involved as a stakeholder and consultee during the development of the Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP). We would be happy to discuss suitable datasets, monitoring approaches and evidence sources that may help inform mitigation, monitoring and assessment, and would welcome opportunities to provide input as the MMMP is further developed and refined.

10. References:

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Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd

From:	Safeguarding
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Cc:	[Redacted]
Subject:	Re: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date:	06 May 2026 13:00:03
Attachments:	image002.png values2025_49f0881e-b581-44a4-b961-1aecd2620b56.png

OFFICIAL

Your Ref: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743
Our Ref: 2023/302/SYY

Proposal: Application for section 36 consent, marine licence applications to construct and operate the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

Location: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis

HIAL has been consulted on the above proposed development, received by this office on: 16th March 2026

In reference to the above application, our assessment and the IFP Safeguarding Report Spiorad na Mara Windfarm IDL-020-1-RPT-094 V1.0 shows that, at the given position and height, this development would conflict with safeguarding criteria for Stornoway Airport, unless any planning permission granted is **subject to condition.**

Therefor HIAL has no Objection to the proposal subject to the following conditions;

1: Condition - Instrument Flight Procedures
2: Condition - Construction Management Strategy

1: Condition - Instrument Flight Procedures

No part of any impacting turbines numbered from WT31 to WT44 inclusive, forming part of the Development, as highlighted in "IDL-020-1-RPT-094 V1.0 IFP Safeguarding Report Spiorad na Mara Windfarm" shall be erected unless until such time as the Scottish Ministers receive confirmation from the Airport Operator of Stornoway Airport in writing that:

a) an IFP Assessment has demonstrated that an IFP Scheme is not required; or

b) an IFP Scheme has been approved by the Airport Operator;

c) the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has confirmed its approval to the Airport Operator of the IFP Scheme (if such approval is required); and

d) the IFP Scheme has been submitted to National Aeronautical Information Services (NATS) for promulgation, via the Aeronautical Information Regulation and Control (AIRAC) Cycle (or any successor publication) (where applicable). The effective date for the AIRAC Cycle, containing the introduction of the IFP Scheme, has passed and the IFP Scheme is available for use by aircraft

Reason: In the interests of aviation safety; to secure mitigation of impacts and ensure the development does not alter traffic patterns or impact the safety of aircraft at Stornoway Airport.

Definitions:

"IFP Assessment" means a safeguarding assessment against current and any possible future IFPs. This assessment must be undertaken by a UK CAA Approved Procedure Design Organisation (APDO).

"IFP Scheme" means a scheme to address the potential impact of the turbines on the instrument flight procedures of Stornoway Airport.

"Airport Operator" means Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd or any successor as holder of a license from the Civil Aviation Authority to operate Stornoway Airport

"Development" means the wind powered generating station and ancillary development as

described in Annex 1 of the decision letter.

Condition: Construction Management Strategy

No parts of the Development shall be constructed until such a time HIAL have reviewed and approved a construction management strategy for the proposed Development. This should include the following:

• Details of the construction of the wind turbines to include on shore locations and intended heights of constructed elements and construction equipment.

• Turbine route map from onshore location to the offshore location to include routings and intended heights of constructed elements and associated vessels.

Reason: In the interests of aviation safety; to secure mitigation of potential impacts and ensure the development does not alter traffic patterns or impact the safety of aircraft at Stornoway Airport

Any variation of the parameters as outlined in IDL-020-1-RPT-094 V1.0 IFP Safeguarding Report (which include the locations and dimensions,) then as a statutory consultee HIAL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission, or any consent being granted.

Kind Regards

[Redacted]
Air Traffic Services Airspace Manager

Safeguarding
Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd
Inverness Airport Dalcross IV2 7JB
www.hial.co.uk



Historic Environment Scotland

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

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Marine Directorate
Marine Laboratory
375 Victoria Road
Aberdeen
AB11 9DB

Our case ID: 300064795
Your ref: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

05 June 2026

Dear Marine Directorate

The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm
Environmental Impact Assessment Report and Marine Licence Application

Thank you for consulting us on this Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), which we received on 16 March 2026. We have reviewed the report and considered the proposed development in terms of our historic environment interests. This covers cultural World Heritage Sites, scheduled monuments and their settings, category A-listed buildings and their settings, inventory gardens and designed landscapes, inventory battlefields and Historic Marine Protected Areas.

The Comhairle nan Eilean Siar archaeological and cultural heritage advisors will also be able to offer advice on impacts on the historic environment. This may include topics covered by our advice-giving role, and also other topics such as unscheduled archaeology, category B and C listed buildings, and conservation areas.

Our Advice

We **object** to the proposals because of the impact it will have on the settings of the following scheduled monuments. Whilst we consider the information provided in the EIAR to overall be insufficient, the limited information provided does indicate that the proposals would have a significant adverse impact on:

- **Arnol, Blackhouses no. 39 and no. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022)**
- **Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661)**

We also **object** to the proposals due to the impact it will have on the setting of **Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)**. The information provided indicates that there would be significant impacts on the setting of Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and other monuments within the wider Calanais complex. However, the low level of detail in the EIAR and lack of adequate visualisations does not allow for a full understanding of how these monuments' settings would be affected, particularly the impacts on the assets listed below and their key views, relationships with each other, as

well as with **Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054).** The scheduled monuments within the wider Calanais complex include:

- **Ceann a'Gharoadh, stone circle and cairn 250m N of (SM5433)**
- **Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag, stone circle and stone settings (SM5437)**
- **Sron a'Chail, stone circle and cairn 450m SSE of Ceann Hulavaig (SM5457)**
- **Airidh nam Bidearan, standing stones N of (SM6018)**
- **Cul a'Chleit, standing stones, Garynahine (SM6019)**

It is likely that several more key factors of setting would be impacted than those which can be assessed on the basis of the single wireframe visualisations provided for each of these assets. For this reason, insufficient information has been provided. Additional photomontage visualisations are required to allow for a full assessment to be made and for appropriate mitigation to be determined.

The applicant has also not supplied enough information to allow for a fully informed assessment of the scale of likely impacts on the setting of the following scheduled monument where there is potential for significant impacts:

- **Cnoc na Moine, burial cairn, Dalmore (SM5402)**

We therefore **object** to the proposals based on lack of information for this scheduled monument. We have requested additional information from the applicant as part of this response, and we will reassess the impacts on this asset and update our response once this information is received.

Mitigation of certain impacts may be possible, but this needs to be informed by the additional information requested. We have provided what comments we can on what mitigation may be appropriate on an asset-specific basis in the annex of this letter.

The requirements for further information for each asset listed above are included in the annex to this letter, as well as a number of observations regarding the assessment methodology in our role as best practice advisors. On provision of the information requested, we will be happy to review our comments and discuss potential mitigation in more detail.

Further Information

Decisions that affect the historic environment should take the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) into account as a material consideration. HEPS is supported by our Managing Change guidance series. In this case we recommend that you consider the advice in the guidance note on setting. We hope this is helpful. If you would like to submit more information about this or any other proposed development to us for comment, please send it to our consultations mailbox, hmconsultations@hes.scot. If you have questions about this response, please contact [Redacted]

Yours sincerely

Historic Environment Scotland

Annex

Background

Sectoral Marine Plan (2020-2025)

In 2020, we were consulted on a draft of the Sectorial Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy and its accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report. The proposed development occupies the option agreement (OA) area named in the plan as N4.

In our response, we noted that

> "*Given the proximity of sections of this [OA] to the coast, particular consideration should be given to the potential for adverse effects on the setting of terrestrial historic environment assets at any project-level stage*" and *"[in] terms of these setting impacts, the ability to mitigate such impacts through spatial planning is likely to be more challenging for DPOs (such as N4) closer to coastal assets."*

The Sectoral Marine Plan was re-assessed in 2025 due to an increase in potential power output. In this response, we largely reiterated our comments and underscored the high potential for significant adverse impacts to setting, stating:

> *"The proximity of N4 to the coast in particular will mean that mitigating significant impacts on a number of historic environment assets will be challenging. We therefore agree with the assessment now provided for N4 which finds that the site has the potential for significant adverse effects historic environment features and their settings."*

It should be noted that the Sectoral Marine Plan supports the decision making on individual licence and consent applications, but should not be considered as pre-determining those decisions, and is just one material consideration that exists alongside others. Therefore, all proposed developments within an OA area must be subjected to the typical assessment and consenting procedures outlined in the National Marine Plan.

Project-Specific Consultations

The EIAR details the high number of pre-application consultations that were undertaken prior to the application being submitted. We have summarised the most relevant details of these consultations below. However, in nearly all of these consultations, the materials provided were too high level for us to provide meaningful comments despite our repeated requests for more detailed heritage-specific information and despite our concerns regarding potentially significant adverse impacts to heritage assets within our remit. Chief among our concerns throughout the pre-application process were:

- A lack of detail in the assessment of cultural heritage;
- A lack of consideration of inward views towards monuments;
- A lack of visualisations to aid assessment, and;
- A lack of detail in the assessment process that led to the selection of viewpoints.

These concerns continued to be expressed up until the final pre-application consultations in June and September 2025. The EIAR submitted does not address these concerns or provide the information requested.

Marine EIA Scoping (2023)

In our scoping response of 18 December 2023, we were generally content with the proposed scope of the assessment but did raise issues with the broad nature of the scoping report as well as issues around the treatment of setting impacts in the report. We recommended that the assessment be guided by a ZTV rather than defined study areas. Due to the low level of detail, we were not able to provide many comments on the potential impacts to specific assets but did highlight that the assessment should consider impacts to scheduled monuments on the western side of the Eye Peninsula near Stornoway; St Ronan's Church and village settlement, Rona (SM1683) if it was within the ZTV; Butt of Lewis Lighthouse (LB5768); the large number of early chapels along the western coastline of Lewis which have isolated coastal settings; and the complex of prehistoric ritual monuments at Calanais.

Pre-Application Consultation: Landfall Options (February 2024)

We were consulted in February 2024 regarding three possible landfall options for the offshore elements of the proposed development. We noted the lack of detail at that stage, but highlighted that the following assets could experience impacts to their settings:

- Teampull Pheadair, chapel and settlement, Shader (SM5341)
- Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661)
- Arnol, Blackhouses no. 39 and no. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022)

We stated that proposed site 3 was least likely to have significant impacts on assets within our remit, though it was unclear what the potential impact would be on the Arnol Blackhouses (SM90022). We noted that it was possible that the proposed substation at site 2b (the current proposed landfall site) could be visible from Clach an Trushal (SM1661) but that these setting impacts were unlikely to be significant. We stated that we were likely to object to proposed site 2a.

Pre-Application Consultation: Meeting regarding Cultural Heritage Visualisations (June 2024)

A meeting was held with the applicants and their cultural heritage advisors, Historic Environment Scotland, and representatives from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to discuss options for heritage related visualisations. We noted that details were vague at this stage but raised the following points regarding best practice:

- The importance of views to and between assets in addition to views from assets
- The need for a gazetteer detailing the settings of assets and reasonings for why they had been selected for visualisations or not (including why a wireline or photomontage was most appropriate)
- The importance of robust assessment in the gazetteer and/or the EIA Report itself, demonstrating a full understanding of assets' settings along with explanations of how/why they would or would not experience significant impacts

Pre-Application Consultation: Public Consultation (October 2024)

This was the first large scale provision of information provided about the proposed development, though we were not consulted directly. This was also the only stage at which we were able to view visualisations illustrating the potential impacts from the larger turbine layout.

At this stage, we commented that the proposed development was likely to raise concerns of national interest and that we were likely to object to the proposals.

Pre-application Consultation: Meeting regarding EIA Applications (December 2024)

A meeting was held between Historic Environment Scotland, the applicant's heritage advisors, and the local archaeologist from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. It was confirmed that the impacts from the onshore and offshore elements would be separated into separate EIA applications and that setting impacts from the turbine array would be considered as part of the offshore EIA Report. We were generally content with this approach but reiterated the need for detailed cultural heritage information as part of the pre-application process and our concerns about potential significant setting impacts on the Calanais complex.

Pre-Application Consultation: Meeting regarding LVIA and Setting Assessment (January 2025)

A meeting was held with the applicants and their cultural heritage advisors, Historic Environment Scotland, NatureScot and representatives from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to discuss setting assessments and the list of proposed viewpoints.

We asked for clarification around how the viewpoints were selected and reiterated the need for bespoke heritage visualisations, which were not addressed at this stage. We underscored the need to consider third party views towards assets not just views from them, as well as the inter-relationship of complexes of assets. In particular, we raised concerns that only one viewpoint was proposed for Calanais but given that this asset is actually a complex of multiple monuments with multiple associations and views, we recommended that more locations for viewpoints would be necessary. As an action resulting from this meeting, the applicant's cultural advisors stated that they would consider further viewpoints for Calanais.

Pre-Application Consultation: Initial Setting Assessment (April 2025)

We received a written consultation relating to the initial sifting exercise for assessment and visualisations. Supporting documentation included a location plan for the assets identified and a Setting Scope document, which summarised previous consultations, the approach to identifying assets for assessment, and included a table with explanatory rationale for inclusion or scoping out. The impacts were assessed against the 'worst case scenario' of 44 x 338m tall turbines.

We were content with the scoping out of a number of assets but requested that the following assets be scoped in, as there was not sufficient information to determine that significant setting impacts would not result from the proposed development:

- Clach an Tursa, standing stones and enclosure (SM1662)
- Loch an Duin, dun, Shader (SM5364)
- Loch Sgardam, burial chamber, Breasclete (SM5877)
- Loch Shiavat, dun (SM5381)
- Carn a'Mharc, chambered cairn NW of Gress Lodge (SM1660)

We raised concerns about the assessment's emphasis on relationships between assets and the sea, and the use of undefined terms such a "coastal setting." We noted that given the scale of the proposed turbines and the extent of the proposed array, it was possible that

a landward asset with no view of, or obvious relationship with, the sea could also experience adverse impacts from the development.

We requested that all assets taken forward to Stage 2 assessment be accompanied by a wireline illustration at a minimum. We were content with the 13 assets selected for photomontages in the first instance but noted that it was highly likely that we would require additional visualisations once these were received alongside a detailed setting assessment.

Pre-Application Consultation: Public Consultation (June 2025)

We received the second round of public consultation, which illustrated limited visualisations for both the 60 and 44 turbine arrays. We noted the potential for significant effects on the settings of multiple assets within our remit, including:

- Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)
- Arnol, Blackhouses No. 39 and No. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022)
- Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661)

However, we also noted that the visualisations indicated there was also potential for significant impacts to other assets along the western coast of Lewis that were not illustrated. Based on this, we reiterated that it was likely that we would object to the proposals.

At this stage, we also raised the high number of consultations undertaken to date and that the information provided remained high level and not specific to the historic environment despite our repeated requests for more information. We further raised concerns that the anticipated submission date would leave little time for us to provide detailed advice prior to the application stage.

Pre-Application Consultation: Setting Assessment (August 2025)

This consultation provided detailed information on the assets we recommended including for assessment in our response to the April 2025 setting consultation. Based on the information provided, we were content for Loch an Duin, dun, Shader (SM5364) and Loch Shiavat, dun (SM5381) to be included in the assessment as proposed. However, we disagreed with the proposal to scope out the following assets, as we maintained our concerns regarding potentially significant setting impacts:

- Clach an Tursa, standing stones and enclosure (SM1662)
- Loch Sgardam, burial chamber, Breasclete (SM5877)
- Carn a'Mharc, chambered cairn NW of Gress Lodge (SM1660)

We were content with the list of assets proposed for photomontages as an initial step, but noted again that it was highly likely that we would request additional photomontages for other assets once more detailed information had been provided.

We were also content with the list of assets proposed for wireline visualisations, subject to the addition of the assets listed above as well as St Macra's Church, Kirkbost (SM5236). However, we noted that the assessment document stated that the list of assets *may* be supported by wirelines. We stated that we expected wirelines to be provided for all the

named assets at a minimum. We also recommended providing a detailed setting assessment to aid in the selection of the precise locations for the visualisations for each asset.

Lastly, in this consultation the applicant queried what further information we would require at this stage. We once again requested that we be provided with the initial visualisations as well as a draft of the detailed setting assessment in order to provide more specific advice. We strongly recommended that this be undertaken prior to the application being submitted, because it would allow us to consider whether the illustrations provided sufficient information to allow a fully informed assessment of the application and EIA report, or if changes or additions were required. We noted that without this information, we would potentially have to object to the application on the grounds of insufficient information.

Policy Context

National Policy Context

Scotland's National Marine Plan

We have assessed the impacts of the proposal on heritage assets within our remit against national policies as set out in Scotland's National Marine Plan (Marine Directorate 2015).

The relevant historic environment policy is GEN6, which reads:

> *Development and use of the marine environment should protect and, where appropriate, enhance heritage assets in a manner proportionate to their significance.*

Additional relevant paragraphs include:

> *4.22 Marine planning should help to ensure that future marine activities and developments can be carried out in a way that respects the marine historic environment and the setting of important coastal heritage assets. It can also help to increase the social and economic contribution of the heritage assets, for example by encouraging opportunities for public access.*
>
> *4.23 To achieve this, marine planners and decision makers should consider implications and opportunities for the historic environment taking into account the potential impacts of development and use on:*
>
> - *Designated heritage assets – representing sites of national or international significance for which statutory requirements apply. Designated assets should be protected in situ within an appropriate setting. Substantial loss or harm to designated assets should be exceptional and should only be permitted if this is necessary to deliver social, economic, or environmental benefits that outweigh the harm or loss.*
>
> *4.24 Proposals for development and use that may affect the historic environment should provide information on the significance of known heritage assets and the potential for new discoveries to arise. They should demonstrate how any adverse impacts will be avoided, or, if not possible, minimised and mitigated. Where it is not possible to minimise or mitigate impacts, the benefits of proceeding with the proposal should be clearly set out.*

4.25 Where the case for substantial change to a heritage asset is accepted, marine decision-making authorities should require applicants to undertake suitable mitigating actions to record and advance understanding of the significance of the heritage asset before it is lost, in a manner proportionate to that significance. The resulting evidence should be made publicly accessible and copies of reports archived with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and the adjacent Local Authority archaeology service.

Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS)

We have considered the proposals in the light of the policies within the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS, 2019), which is a material consideration for decisions which affect the historic environment. We consider the key policies in this case to be:

- **HEP1**: Decisions affecting any part of the historic environment should be informed by an inclusive understanding of its breadth of cultural significance.
- **HEP2**: Decisions affecting the historic environment should ensure that its understanding and enjoyment as well as its benefits are secured for present and future generations.
- **HEP4**: Changes to specific assets and their context should be managed in a way that protects the historic environment. Opportunities for enhancement should be identified where appropriate. If detrimental impact on the historic environment is unavoidable, it should be minimised. Steps should be taken to demonstrate that alternatives have been explored, and mitigation measures should be put in place.

Guidance

We have also referred to our Managing Change guidance series, which provides best practice advice for decision makers for applying the policies above. The Managing Change series is also a material consideration for decisions affecting the historic environment.

The most relevant documents in the series in this case are our guidance on Setting. We have set out our consideration of the potential impacts in line with this guidance.

EIA Report (EIAR)

The information provided in the EIAR is currently insufficient for us to determine the full extent of the potential impacts on assets within our remit. Further information is required in order for us to understand these impacts. We have requested this additional information as part of this response, and we will reassess the impacts on these assets and update our response once this information is received.

However, based on the limited information available, there would be significant adverse impacts on the settings of multiple scheduled monuments. All of these assets will be discussed in detail in a forthcoming section of this annex.

Scope of Assessment

In previous consultations, we have stressed to the applicant the importance of explaining in detail why assets have or have not been carried forward for assessment and, consequently, which assets they believe would or would not experience significant impacts to their settings.

The applicant states that a rationale is provided in the EIAR for each asset (Appendix 15.2, para. 2.4.1.1). However, in the vast majority of cases, the rationale given in Annex 15.2.2 ('Stage 1 Assessment of offshore project impacts on setting') is limited to a very brief description of what and where the asset is, followed by suggestion of the potential for significant effects. Rarely are key factors of setting identified and explained, nor how the proposals might affect these.

This lack of detail and transparency around how the EIA process was undertaken makes it difficult to gain a full understanding of how assets in the vicinity of the proposals may or may not be impacted.

Worst Case Scenario Approach

We understand that the EIAR uses a 'worst case scenario' or design envelope approach to assess potential impacts in a proportionate manner. The cultural heritage chapter uses the 44-turbine design in its assessment, as the applicant has determined that this represents the maximum potential impact to the historic environment. Almost no information is provided to justify this conclusion.

The supporting information relating to the 60-turbine layout appears to be limited to ZTVs (SLVIA Figures 18.6a-f) and no visualisations have been provided. There is no assessment provided on the potential impacts of the 60-turbine layout and consequently there is not sufficient information to enable us to come to a view on the effects of that layout. Since October 2024, we have consistently raised significant concerns about both the 44- and the 60-turbine layout options, stating we would need further information to determine the full scale of impacts; that impacts on the historic environment needed to be considered adequately; and that the impacts on some monuments were likely to be so significant that this would be likely to merit an objection.

We disagree with the applicant's position that the 44-turbine layout would always have the maximum potential impact of the proposals (Appendix 15.2 pages 1-3). The visualisations previously made available as part of the public consultations demonstrated that the turbines of the 60-turbine layout did not appear appreciably smaller than those of the 44-turbine layout in certain views. It was also apparent in these visualisations that the greater number of turbines would result in quite different clustering of turbines in certain views. Different turbines would also appear in specific views for some assets. This in turn could have a different impact on the settings of affected assets. The impacts of the 60-turbine layout are therefore different to those of the 44-turbine layout.

A full assessment of the 60-turbine option is required, including a full range of photomontage visualisations from the monuments discussed in the forthcoming sections of this annex.

Assessment Methodology

Relevant Guidance and Policy

We note that neither HEPS nor our Managing Change series are listed in Table 15-1 of relevant policy and guidance. While we welcome that the methodology roughly follows the steps outlined in our Managing Change guidance note on setting, there are only sporadic passing references to both these documents in the cultural heritage chapter and in Appendix 15.2. We would expect a clear explanation to be presented in Section 15.2 articulating how these are applied in the assessment.

Magnitude of Impact & Significance of Effect

The definitions of the varying magnitudes of impact outlined in Table 15-9 are incongruent with those found in the EIA Handbook. This causes the distinction between the different levels to be somewhat unclear. For instance, heritage value is 'fundamentally altered' in both medium and high impacts as opposed to simply 'altered' in low impact. Furthermore, the difference between what constitutes a fundamental change in heritage value and/or how an asset is understood, appreciated, and experienced is not expanded upon.

We further note that the significance of effect matrix is also incongruent with what is outlined in the EIA Handbook, which leads to the effects of certain scenarios to be underestimated. Of note for the purposes of this assessment: low impacts on assets of high heritage value (equivalent to national importance) are prescribed as minor significance of effect and thereby not significant in EIA terms. This results in a number of assets being excluded from further consideration within the cultural heritage chapter of the assessment. Further details on specific assets where the significance of effect has been underestimated is provided in a forthcoming section of this annex.

Site Visits

Though Appendix 15.2 makes reference to site visits forming part of the stage 1 setting assessment, it is not clear which assets were visited and which were not.

We would expect all assets identified as experiencing potentially significant setting impacts to be subject to a site visit by an experienced heritage professional. It would be useful for the applicant to provide further details on which assets were visited and when.

Identification of Key Factors of Setting

The EIAR demonstrates a limited understanding of setting, which results in an overall insufficient assessment of potential impacts on assets within our remit.

As noted in Section 2.2 of Appendix 15.2, the scoping in of assets focussed primarily on whether the coastal setting contributed in a *'notable or substantial'* way to the heritage significance of an asset. The assessment demonstrates an over-reliance on assets' proximity to or physical relationship with the sea when considering their settings. While coastal settings are important to many assets that may be impacted by the proposed development and should be robustly considered as part of the assessment, this approach is overly simplistic and does not factor in potential impacts on assets that do not have obvious relationships with the sea. In April 2025, we highlighted concerns about relationships between monuments and the sea being the only focus of the assessment. It is therefore disappointing to see this approach being carried through to the EIAR despite our previous advice.

We made clear in our Scoping response that views towards most scheduled monuments should be considered as part of their settings and assessed as part of this process. This was repeated in subsequent advice offered in June 2024, February 2025, April 2025, and September 2025. The applicant does not appear to have considered views towards monuments as an element of setting in most cases. They have, instead, restricted their setting assessment to views out from monuments. This has resulted in a narrow and incomplete understanding of what constitutes these monuments' settings. This is borne out in the EIAR where important views towards, across, or between monuments are rarely identified and, subsequently, the potential impacts are not adequately assessed, which has resulted in a substantial underestimation of the potential impacts.

Prominence of Heritage Assets

The 'prominence' or the low relative visibility of physical remains is singled out in the assessments for a number of scheduled monuments. This suggests the applicant believes that key setting relationships cannot be defined, that the lack of visual prominence lessens the contribution a monument's setting makes to its cultural significance, and/or that the magnitude of impact is less significant on monuments with less visual prominence.

We disagree with this approach. Monuments are designated for their national importance and their current appearance or level of preservation has no bearing on the contribution that their settings make to their cultural significance.

Visualisations

The applicant has identified potentially significant impacts on 31 monuments as described in the outcomes of the stage 1 setting assessment (Annex 15.2.2). Photomontages have been provided for only four of these. In our Scoping response, we stated that where potential significant impacts are identified for a monument, photomontages should be produced. In March 2025, the applicant suggested producing photomontages for 13 monuments. We welcomed this as an initial step, while making clear that it was highly likely that we would request more photomontages as more detailed information came forward.

The four assets that photomontages have been produced for in the EIAR are:

- **Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661)**
- **Arnol, blackhouses no. 39 and no. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022)**
- **Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)**
- **Butt of Lewis Lighthouse (LB5768)**

These photomontages have been produced for SLVIA purposes and are not designed specifically to inform a cultural heritage assessment. We made clear in February 2025 that visualisations specific to the cultural heritage assessment should be produced. Whilst the photomontages produced are helpful in relation to these assets, heritage-specific photomontages are still required in order to understand the specific impacts where the proposals have a high potential to result in significant impacts on asset's settings.

The EIAR links a number of other SLVIA photomontages as helpful for understanding the impacts on a number of scheduled monuments (Appendix 15.2, para. 2.4.1.4). In many

cases, these have been taken several hundred metres away from the relevant monument and do not represent views important to the monuments' settings. These therefore offer little to aid an analysis of the monuments to which they have been applied.

Wirelines have been produced for 35 scheduled monuments. It seems likely that the applicant has relied upon a single wireline and ZTVs to assess the impacts of only one of the two potential layouts for each of these monuments. This level of information is not sufficient to support an understanding of the proposals' impacts upon monuments and their settings.

Although the applicant states that they have visited at least some of the monuments as part of their assessment, our own site visits demonstrated that many of the supplied wireframes have been taken from locations unsuitable for an effective setting assessment, raising further questions about the thoroughness of the information provided and the applicant's assessment process.

The turbines have not been numbered on any visualisations, making it very difficult to comment on the impact of specific turbines and make recommendations accordingly.

Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTVs)

The applicant appears to only have scoped in scheduled monuments where the monument itself is within the ZTV (Appendix 15.2, para. 2.2.1.3). Therefore, as referenced above, monuments with important views towards them, from points that may lie within the ZTV when the monument itself does not, have presumably not been examined as part of the EIA. We highlighted this issue to the applicant in December 2023.

Setting Impacts to Scheduled Monuments

The applicant has identified significant impacts on the setting of only two monuments:

- **Dun Borve, broch (SM1669)**
- **Teampull Eoin, chapel, graveyard & settlement, Port Mhòr, Bragar, Lewis (SM3926)**

In our view the proposals would not have a significant adverse impact on Dun Borve. The proposals would have a significant impact on Teampull Eion's setting, particularly its tranquillity and the sense of it being on the edge of the land and sea and away from the communities it served as a parish church and burial ground. However, these impacts would not be sufficiently significant to warrant an objection.

Instead, the limited information available indicates that there would be significant impacts on the following monuments and their settings:

- **Calanais and the wider Calanais Complex:**
  - Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)
  - Ceann a'Gharaodh, stone circle and cairn 250m N of (SM5433)
  - Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag, stone circle and stone settings (SM5437)
  - Sron a'Chail, stone circle and cairn 450m SSE of Ceann Hulavig (SM5457)
  - Airidh nam Bidearan, standing stones N of (SM6018)

  - Cul a'Chleit, standing stones, Garynahine (SM6019)
- **Arnol, blackhouses no. 39 and no. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022)**
- **Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661)**

There is a high potential for significant impacts on the following scheduled monument, but further information is required to confirm the level of these impacts:

- **Cnoc na Moine, burial cairn, Dalmore (SM5402)**

The Calanais Stones

The complex of standing stones around Calanais, or Callanish, comprise one of the finest collections of prehistoric ritual monuments found anywhere in northwestern Europe. The group is composed of up to twenty known individual monuments, ranging from single standing stones, stone settings – small arrangements of standing stones – and stone circles, together with later funerary monuments, centred on the most complex monument at Calanais itself (SM90054). This central monument has attracted the attention of antiquarians from the seventeenth century, although a number of classical references are often interpreted as mentioning Calanais. The main set of stones at Calanais (SM90054) is in the care of Scottish Ministers, cared for by Historic Environment Scotland. They are widely promoted and attract visitors from across the world. It forms the visitor focus of Calanais today, reflected in the adjacent visitor centre, but access is encouraged across a number of other stone circles nearby.

Most of the associated sites are also designated as being of national importance: in their own right, for their relationship with Calanais, and as contributors for the complex as a whole. The most notable scheduled monuments within the complex of relevance to these proposals include:

- **Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)**
- **Ceann a'Gharaodh, stone circle and cairn 250m N of (SM5433)**
- **Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag, stone circle and stone settings (SM5437)**
- **Sron a'Chail, stone circle and cairn 450m SSE of Ceann Hulavig (SM5457)**
- **Airidh nam Bidearan, standing stones N of (SM6018)**
- **Cul a'Chleit, standing stones, Garynahine (SM6019)**

Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)

In its final form, as it has been handed down to us today, Calanais is a unique arrangement of standing stones, composed of a circle arranged around a single central standing stone, sitting at the centre of four arms of stones, leading out roughly north, south, east and west from the centre, creating a cruciform arrangement. The northern arm is formed of two parallel rows, which is often perceived as an avenue leading into the centre of the monument. The first, central stone appears to have been erected around 3000 BC, with the remainder being constructed between 2900 and 2500 BC. Its precise layout is likely to have been adapted and changed throughout this period. The main period of construction seems to have come to a conclusion when a cairn was built in the middle of the monument. Following this, until around 1500 BC, the stones appear to have remained the focus for ritual and burial activity. This reflects a period of over a millennium and a half when ideas

about what the monument was for, how it was perceived, and how it was used developed and changed in tandem with developing ideas and belief systems.

To the south of the stones sits a natural outcrop, Cnoc an Tursa. It is possible that a notch in the top of the outcrop facing onto the stones was used to measure celestial movements and it has been argued that this is why Calanais was built here, although this has yet to be conclusively proved. The outcrop was augmented into a façade with further standing stones facing into the main area of stones. In the Bronze Age, a kerbed cairn was placed on its summit. This activity indicates that it was the focus for ritual and burial activity associated with the wider stone complex.

A deep layer of peat, that had developed from around 1000 BC, obscured the stones until they were cleared in the mid-nineteenth century by the landowner, along with the surrounding crofting township, in an effort to understand them better and make them more attractive for visitors.

Calanais means many things to different communities. Whilst the prehistoric monumental and ritual components of the stones are undoubtedly the most recognisable and valuable elements of Calanais' cultural significance, other aspects contribute to its overall value and significance, with different communities attributing values that others do not. Some local communities see the care taken of the stones by their predecessors, Gaelic placenames, associated folklore, and its embeddedness in a crofting landscape as contributing to and being an integral part of the stones' significance. Others see the spiritual aspects of the stones, their ability to directly engage with and commune with the stones, the wider rural setting, and astronomical alignments as being key to the monument's significance.

In reflection of its exceptional importance, Calanais was one of the first group of cultural heritage sites ever to be scheduled in 1882. It was also one of the first monuments brought into state care in 1885.

Calanais' national importance lies in the scale of the monument; its setting, including its relationship to other sites and astronomical features and events; and the way it demonstrates the degree of social organisation, creativity, and engineering skill of prehistoric peoples - all of which have a deep resonance for modern communities.

Setting of the Monument

The monument stands on top of a locally prominent ridge, which is orientated north to south and above two inlets: Loch Ròg (to the west) and Loch Ceann Hùlabhaig (to the east). This gives the monument expansive views in nearly every direction. Views to the north and east are slightly more restricted due to intervening ranges of hills but to the south, the hills of Pairc and Harris can be seen. Inward views to the monument from its surroundings are also of significance. The Calanais Standing Stones would have been visible throughout much of the surrounding area, particularly from the many contemporary monuments which form part of the Calanais complex.

This siting allows visual reference to local topographical features and specific alignments with considerably distant landscape features, including celestial movements. The location of both the monument and the individual stones appear to have been deliberately positioned

to emphasise alignments and key events in the calendar years of both the sun and moon. Some of these relationships were later marked by additional monuments. These appear around the whole circumference of the circle with reference to the circumference of its wider surroundings.

It has also been suggested that this site and Calanais' satellite monuments have been positioned to make reference to Cailleach na Mointeach ('Old Woman of the Moors') and the setting and rising of the sun and moon on the horizon behind them. This range of distant hills (comprising Sidhean an Airgid, Guaineamol, and Mòr-Mhonadh) has been interpreted as resembling a reclining woman from many of the Calanais monuments. It is not clear when the association of the Cailleach was first noted and attributed to the hills south of Calanais; nevertheless, the astronomical observations are widely accepted, although interpreted differently by different groups.

Many of the associated sites appear to be similarly deliberately sited and make a clear visual reference with the main set of Calanais stones as well as other monuments within the complex. It is possible that many of these mark transition points on routeways through the landscape towards the central monument.

Today, the area surrounding the Calanais standing stones is characterised by crofting settlement and farming, with a small number of telecommunication masts on some of the surrounding hills. The area is predominantly rural in character, unencumbered by large-scale modern development. The rural aspects of the surroundings are likely to be broadly similar to that when the monument was first built. It adds to a sense of place and timelessness to the monument, which adds substantially to how Calanais is perceived, experienced and understood.

All these factors contribute to a strong sense of place at and around Calanais. For many visitors this is combined with overwhelming spiritual values.

The majority of visitors will arrive at the monument from the visitor centre, having seen the stones standing prominently on the horizon on the south-eastern approach along the A858 road. From the visitor centre, the monument is arrived at by following a path which climbs the eastern shoulder of Cnoc an Tursa. The standing stones dramatically come into view, jutting up above the horizon, as this ascent is made. An interpretation panel, immediately within the entrance gate, lies at the southern end of the standing stones. Visitors are also able to access the site via a gate in the northern boundary fence, where another interpretation panel is located. From this direction, the avenue of stones running northwards from the circle is more readily apparent at first. The stones stand proud of the horizon, with Cnoc an Tursa immediately behind them, and the sweeping, panoramic view of the mountains of Lewis and Harris in the distance.

Moving around the monument itself changes this experience, as the arrangement of the monument's four 'arms' of stones along cruciform axes becomes apparent. The southern arm clearly points towards the centre of Cnoc an Tursa, with its ritualised façade adapted from the outcropping rock. The northern 'avenue' stretches towards Calanais village. Moving towards the stone circle from the north, the 'avenue' gives every impression of being a processional routeway towards the centre of the monument. Moving towards the

interior of the monument, views to the circle, Cnoc an Tursa and hills beyond are accentuated. Likewise, the hills to north would have framed views when leaving the circle. The east and west arms are strongly aligned on a perpendicular axis to these, and focus views along and out from their alignments. Within the stones there is a level of intimacy and enclosure quite different to the rest of the site, with the stones here appearing taller, dominating the experience of the site.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- Reciprocal views from and to the centre of the standing stones along the four 'arms'
- The wide, open views outwards from the centre of the standing stones, across the ridge the stones sit on towards the surrounding hills and skyline
- Views to and from the centre of the standing stones along the northern avenue
- Views outwards when moving through and around the monument
- Views towards Cailleach na Mointeach
- Views towards Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) and Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437)
- Views towards key positions in the solar and lunar calendars, included in the sweep of views from the north-east, through the south, and around to the north-west
- Views outwards along the cardinal points
- Views towards the standing stones from Cnoc an Tursa
- Views towards the standing stones from the interpretation panel at their southern end
- Views towards the standing stones from the visitor centre path
- Views towards Calanais from Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433), Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM65437), Sron a'Chail (SM5457), Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018), Cul a'Chleit (SM6019) Beinn Bheag, standing stone, cairns and shielings 500m SSE of (SM5499) and other monuments in the wider complex
- The rural character of its surroundings
- Views towards Calanais on the wider approaches, including the seaways

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant states that the visualisations from Viewpoint 37 (VP37) suggest that the distance between the turbines and the monument would *'reduce the prominence of the Turbine Area in the wider setting'* and that it would *'comprise a minor component in the background of outward views'* with the change to this view being 'slight'.

Wireframes have been produced for a variety of other views, and the applicant has stated that these are preferable to photomontages. These are:

- The view towards the proposals from Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433)
- The view towards the proposals from Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437)
- The view towards the proposals from Sron a'Chail (SM5457)
- The view towards the proposals from Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018)
- The view towards the proposals from Cul a'Chleit (SM6019)

In views towards the monument from Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433), the assessment states that *'Calanais I [Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)] would not feature in the 90-degree field of view from Calanais II [Ceann a'Gharoadh (SM5433)]'* towards the

proposals and would therefore not affect the visual relationship between both monuments (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.25.10).

The assessment concludes that the impact on the setting of the monument would be minor and not significant in EIA terms.

Our Assessment

We disagree with the applicant's assessment and their conclusion. VP37 demonstrates that the proposals would have a significant impact on a key factor of the monument's setting, specifically the view towards the standing stones from Cnoc an Tursa. Fifteen turbines would be visible above the horizon in this view, with five visible to hub height. Of these five, four would be equipped with aviation lighting. This would introduce large and distracting structures into the skyline surrounding the monument.

The proposals would impose on the key visual relationship between Cnoc an Tursa and the stones. The turbines would draw the eye when looking towards the standing stones from Cnoc an Tursa, undermining the clear and deliberate relationship between this outcrop and the standing stones. The proposals would also be highly visible in the main, first view that most visitors have of Calanais when approaching from the visitor centre.

The nighttime visualisations illustrate that the turbines equipped with aviation lighting would be particularly distracting during hours of darkness, detracting from the monument's apparent and readily appreciated relationship with lunar cycles, a key aspect of Calanais' setting and which many gather today to appreciate at important times in the year.

It seems highly probable that turbines would also be visible (potentially with differing turbines appearing to varying degrees) in several other key factors of setting from throughout the monument, including the centre and the ends of the arms and avenue. None of these have been assessed and no visualisations have been provided. Without photomontages being provided from around these key aspects of the stones, it is not possible for ourselves or the applicant to make an informed assessment of the impacts of these proposals on Calanais' setting.

Only photomontages can offer the nuanced view, when on site, to understand the scale of the areas being shown and that of any proposed development. The wireframes supplied are also all of cylindrical (90-degree) projections only. Cylindrical projections are useful for depicting wide horizontal fields of view, but do not accurately depict what the human eye would see, for which planar projection visualisations are more accurate. The wireframes give no frame of reference for where the stones of Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) would be located within a given view. As the applicant has pointed out, the stones are prominently visible on the skyline when viewed from Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) and Cnoc Fillibhr Bheag (SM5437). It is therefore difficult to understand how any impacts on this aspect of the monument's setting can be assessed without having it depicted on photomontages.

The following visualisations, provided as planar-projection photomontages, would be needed in order to come to a fully informed view:

- The view towards the proposals from the interpretation panel at the south end of the standing stones (NGR: 121292 E, 932974 N)
- The view towards the proposals from the visitor path leading from the visitor centre (NGR: 121311 E, 932957 N)
- The view towards Calanais and the proposals from the centre of Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) stone circle (NGR: 122216 E, 932619 N)
- The view towards the proposals from the centre of Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437) stone circle (NGR: 122517 E, 932714 N)
- The view towards Calanais and the proposals from the centre of Sron a'Chail (SM5457) stone circle (NGR: 122988 E, 930417 N)
- The view towards the monument and the proposals from Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018), with the standing stones of that monument depicted in the foreground
- The view towards the proposals from Cul a'Chleit (SM6019)

Removing or relocating turbines such that they are not visible from the stones or key views from them would be sufficient to address our concerns. However, without these visualisations, and without knowing which specific turbines are visible on the horizon, we are unable to offer specific advice.

Ceann a'Gharaodh, stone circle and cairn 250m N of (SM5433)

The monument consists of a circle of standing stones surrounding a much reduced burial cairn, both dating to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age periods. The circle has five standing and two recumbent stones, although more probably existed originally.

Setting of the Monument

The monument stands on a ridge of land orientated north to south, above the inlet Tob nan Leobag to the west and a boggy area of low-lying land to the east. To the south, the land rises slightly towards a rock outcrop. The relationship with a rocky mound is a feature of a number of circles in the Calanais complex, including Calanais itself.

The monument has been placed to be afforded wide sweeping views and to be visible from throughout a large area. Calanais features prominently on the skyline in views to the northwest. Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437), one of the nearest of the monuments in the complex is visible to the north-east. It is possible that Ceann a'Gharaodh marked the routeway to and/or from Calanais. The two northernmost standing stones strongly frame the view to the north-northwest when looking out from the centre of the circle.

When the Moon is at its maximum southern declination, it sets behind An Cliseam, one of the Harris mountains, before reappearing in a distinctive 'V' on the horizon created by Glen Langdale. This relationship is observable to varying degrees from all of Calanais' satellite monuments, but not Calanais itself.

Access to this monument is encouraged and it is approached from the road to the north.

As with the other Calanais monuments, the heather covered, rural character of its surroundings adds to its setting.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- The views from the stone circle towards Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)
- Views from Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437) and from what was probably the main approach between the monuments and on the journey towards Calanais
- The view from the stone circle, northwards between the two northernmost stones
- The relationship between the stone circle to the raised land to the south
- The view from the monument towards Cailleach na Mointeach and other topographic features
- Its wide views and the open, rural character of its surroundings

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant's assessment states that it is likely that some of the turbines may be visible on the periphery when looking towards Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) from Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437). Impacts on the important view from Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) to Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) do not appear to have been assessed. The applicant concludes that the proposals would not impact on how the connections between the monuments within the Calanais group are understood.

The applicant has reached their conclusion based on very limited evidence: seemingly, a single cylindrical-projection wireframe showing the view 44m to the south of Ceann a'Gharaodh. This is the centre of the scheduled area protecting the monument and is arbitrary with regards to its setting. It is therefore of limited usefulness in understanding or assessing the likely setting impact of the proposals.

Our Assessment

We disagree with the applicant's assessment. By being visible within key factors of the monuments setting, the proposals could have an impact on how it is understood, appreciated, and experienced. A photomontage visualisation taken from the centre of the stone circle is required to allow for an informed assessment of the potential impacts on this monument's setting to be made.

The applicant states that the hubs of four turbines would be visible from the monument (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.26.6). However, Figure 15.1.23a appears to show five hubs being visible. It is unclear from this wireframe where these turbines would stand in relation to Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054). This wireframe is therefore insufficient to allow the setting impacts of the proposal on this monument to be assessed. Without further visualisations, it is not possible to make an informed assessment of the proposals' impacts. This can only be achieved through the provision of planar-projection photomontages from the centre of the stone circle, depicting both Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and the proposals (NGR: 122216 E, 932619 N).

Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag, stone circle and stone settings (SM5437)

The monument consists of a stone circle, a sub circular stone setting, a small cairn with nearby fallen standing stone, and a further, broken, standing stone. The circle is composed of a partial double ring, with a total of 14 visible and six turf-covered stones. The sub circular stone setting lies 57m to the north-northwest of the main circle. The small cairn, with a large prostrate stone nearby sits to the south of the stones, and further south, on the

summit of a hillock, sits the sub-rectangular stone setting. The fallen standing stone is located to the circle's northeast.

Setting of the Monument

Like Calanais (SM90054) and Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433), Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437) stands astride a prominent ridge of land orientated north to south which terminates in a raised craggy area at its southern end. Views to the north and east are restricted by rising land, but the monument has been sited so it is provided with expansive views in all other directions. Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) are both clearly visible to the east, with Calanais on the skyline. This suggests a sequence of monuments constructed in similar topographic locations, with deliberate visual referencing between each other and possibly on the routeways which connect them.

Access to this monument is encouraged and it is approached from the road to the north. The nearest housing sits on the opposite side of the road, meaning that there is a clear boundary with modern development and its surroundings are rough, rural grazings. This character adds significantly to its setting.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- The views from the stone circle towards Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433)
- The view towards the monument from Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433)
- The view from the stone circle to the raised land to the south
- The views towards solar and lunar alignments, including towards Cailleach na Mointeach and other related topographic features
- Its wide, open views to the south and the rural character of its surroundings

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant suggests that it is possible that some of the turbines *'may be visible on the periphery when looking at Calanais II [Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433)] from Calanais III [Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437)]'* but that *'it would not be a dominant aspect in this view'* (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.27.6). This is presumably based on the wireframe shown in Figure 15.1.24a. Again, the applicant states that the turbines would not impact on how the connections between the Calanais monuments are understood.

Our Assessment

It is unclear from wireframe Figure 15.1.24a where the visible turbines would stand in relation to Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) in outward views from Cnoc Fhillibir Bheag (SM5437). There is not, therefore, enough information to make an assessment of the proposal's potential impact.

At the very least, planar-projection photomontages are required in order to enable a fully informed assessment. These include:

- The view towards proposals, Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) from centre of the stone circle
- The view towards proposals and the stone circle from the summit of the mound at the south end of the scheduled area

Sron a'Chail, stone circle and cairn 450m SSE of Ceann Hulavaig (SM5457)

The monument consists of a stone circle surrounding a burial cairn, dating to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age periods. The circle consists of five upright and one fallen standing stones. In the centre is a low mound with protruding stones which appears to be a burial cairn.

Setting of the Monument

The stone circle occupies a commanding position on the northern shoulder of Sron a'Chail. The ground to the north falls away gradually to low-lying moorland, with Loch Ceann Hùlabhaig beyond. The monument has commanding outward views, except to the south. Cnoc Ceann Hùlabhaig stands about 500m to the north-northwest and screens both Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433) and Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437) from view. Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054), however, is visible in the distance to the left of this hill. Cul a'Chleit (SM6019) is visible to the east. The stone circle appears prominent on the horizon from various locations across its surroundings, particularly when approaching from Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018) to the south.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- Wide commanding outward views and the upland character of its surroundings
- Views outwards, across Loch Ceann Hùlabhaig and towards Calanais
- Views towards it on approaches from the south, including Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018)
- Views towards the stone circle from Cul a'Chleit (SM6019)

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant states that the hubs of three turbines would be visible from the monument. Figure 15.1.25a indicates that 14 turbines would be theoretically visible from this viewpoint, with the hubs, and much of the masts, of three visible. However, as with the wireframes produced for other monuments, this visualisation has been produced from an arbitrary point, some distance (28m) from the centre of the stone circle where the proposals would appear to be largely obscured by Cnoc Ceann Hùlabhaig, and other more distant topography.

Our Assessment

It is unclear from wireframe Figure 15.1.25a where the visible turbines would stand in relation to Calanais. A planar-projection photomontage is required in order to allow a fully informed assessment:

- The view from the centre of the stone circle, depicting both Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and the full extent of the proposals (NGR: 122988 E, 930417 N)

Airidh nam Bidearan, standing stones N of (SM6018)

The monument consists of a group of standing stones, perhaps the remains of a prehistoric stone circle but more likely a larger setting. Three standing stones occur in an arc and several other individual stones survive nearby,

Setting of the Monument

The stones stand on the north-eastern slopes of Cnoc Dubh, above boggy moorland stretching north-eastwards. This affords them commanding views across a wide arc stretching clockwise from the north-west to the south. Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054), Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433), Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437), and Cul a'Chleit (SM6019) are all visible, with the last of these being particularly prominent to the east-northeast. Sron a'Chail (SM5457) is just out of view from the stones themselves, being screened by a shoulder of Cnoc Dubh; however, from a short distance to the north, it can be seen standing prominently to the north-west.

The key factors of the monument's setting are:

- Views from the standing stones towards Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054), Ceann a'Gharaodh (SM5433), Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag (SM5437) and Cul a'Chleit (SM6019)
- Reciprocal views towards and from Cul a'Chleit (SM6019) and interconnecting routeways
- Wide outward views and the upland character of its surroundings

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant notes that the monument *'is not a prominent feature'* (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.29.3). Their assessment states that the monument's positioning limits its intervisibility with other members of the Calanais group; however, our site visit demonstrated that several of the other monuments of the group are visible from this monument.

The applicant states that the turbines would not impact on how the connections between the Calanais monuments are understood.

The applicant states that between five and 37 turbines would be visible from the monument. Figure 15.1.25a indicates that 24 turbines would be theoretically visible from VP27, with the hubs, and much of the masts, of five turbines visible. However, this visualisation has been provided from an arbitrary point, approximately 50m east and downslope from the standing stones, so is unlikely to be an accurate representation of impacts on the monument.

Our Assessment

It is unclear from wireframe Figure 15.1.25a where the visible turbines would stand in relation to Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054).

Without a planar-projection photomontage from the location below it is not possible to come to a fully informed view:

- The view towards Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and the proposals from the monument, including the standing stones in the foreground (NGR: 123425 E, 929878 N approximately)

Cul a'Chleit, standing stones, Garynahine (SM6019)

The monument consists of two standing stones set on a rocky knoll, plus large slabs which probably represent fallen stones. These stones are probably the remains of a larger stone setting, disturbed by the construction of nearby shielings, and later settlement and agriculture. The two standing stones are aligned on a northeast-southwest orientation.

Setting of the Monument

The monument stands on the summit of a locally prominent rocky knoll, rising out of the surrounding boggy moorland. Like many of the other Calanais sites, this affords the monument panoramic views, particularly over the lower ground to the south, west and northeast. These views include Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054), Sron a'Chail (SM5457) and Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018).

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- The monument's solitary prominence relative to its surroundings
- Its wide-open views
- Views towards Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054), Sron a'Chail (SM5457), and Cul a'Chleit (SM6019)
- Reciprocal views towards the monument from Sron a'Chail (SM5457) and Airidh nam Bidearan (SM6018)

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant states that up to 25 turbines would be visible from the monument. Figure 15.1.27a suggests that parts of 15 turbines would be visible, with the hubs, and parts of the masts of two of these also visible. Again, the applicant states that the turbines would not impact on how the connections between the Calanais monuments are understood.

Our Assessment

It is unclear from wireframe Figure 15.1.27a where the visible turbines would stand in relation to Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054).

A planar-projection photomontage will be required in in order to come to a fully informed assessment:

- The view towards the proposals and Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) from the summit of Cul a'Chleit (NGR: 124664 E, 930335 N)

Mitigation

Additional information is required in order to provide detailed advice on potential mitigation for the Calanais complex: this includes the asset-specific visualisations outlined above as well as further information on the 60-turbine design. In broad terms, turbines should not infringe on the key views from, of, or between the monuments listed above. This would likely require the reduction in height or deletion of visible turbines, so that they do not break

the ridgelines that are important in defining the setting of the Calanais Standing Stones (SM90054) and the other associated monuments.

Arnol, Blackhouses no. 39 and no. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022)

The monument consists of a group of domestic buildings and related enclosures situated at the north end of Arnol township. These include two blackhouses – a traditional form of housing found in Lewis, used from at least the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century – one roofed and one unroofed, and two stone-and-mortar-built croft houses. The monument is a Property in Care, managed by Historic Environment Scotland on behalf of Scottish Ministers. It is actively promoted and widely visited.

The two blackhouses were built around 1880. Blackhouse no. 42, on the east side of the road, was occupied until 1964. It was restored after being taken into care in 1966 and retains many of its original fixtures, fittings and furnishings. The building consists of two main spaces, laid out north-south, with a central lobby dividing the byre, where stock would have been kept, from the living room and bedroom, where the people would have lived. A barn is attached to its east side and a stack yard, enclosed by a drystone dyke, sits to its north. To the north of this lies a single-storey croft house of standard Department of Agriculture design, into which the inhabitants of the blackhouse moved around 1964. This building now serves as the site's visitor centre.

Blackhouse no. 39 lies west of the road but, unlike no. 42, it was already abandoned as a house by the 1960s and is now roofless. The house-end of the byre-house was evidently uphill towards the east, with the entrance through the byre in the south wall. The northern annexe would have been a barn and the southern one a porch. A vegetable patch or stack yard, enclosed by a drystone wall, lies north of the building. In the 1920s the inhabitants moved into the adjacent, surviving two-storey croft house, or 'whitehouse'. It remains roofed and is displayed to show the change in living styles from Blackhouse 42.

The monument is highly significant and evocative. It demonstrates a past, traditional way of life and culture, many aspects of which were shared across Gaelic Scotland. Recent research has led to acknowledgement of the sophistication of this traditional building design. The blackhouse at no. 42 was one of the last to be built without windows or a chimney. Blackhouse 42 is largely authentic and has retained some aspects of its original interior fixtures, making it an exceptionally rare example of Scottish vernacular architecture. Arnol provides a tangible and easily understood representation of the culture of western Gaelic Scotland. The state of survival, the ruined condition of no. 39, and shift from traditional lifestyles adds to sense of abandonment. The monument as a whole helps demonstrate changes to the communities of Lewis over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This resonance with past lifeways adds substantially to Arnol as a visitor destination and the visitor experience.

Setting of the Monument

The houses at Arnol were part of a crofting township, including the housing of the wider community and sitting at the centre of wider system of land management. Evidence of crofting survives throughout the surrounding area. This land is still partly worked, and croft boundaries are still discernible. Elsewhere, the remains of field systems and lazybeds – raised beds, predominantly for potato cropping – scatter across the outer fields. The

township lands continue to be grazed throughout the year. Other ruinous blackhouses are also visible in the vicinity, often amongst the houses of today's community, illustrating that the examples at no.39 and no. 42 are rare survivals of a now-lost Gaelic way of life. The inhabitants of Arnol would have been heavily integrated into the larger community and their subsistence would have depended on careful negotiation and exploitation of the resources all around them, from the inland peat bank to the fishing banks out to sea.

Approached from the modern township, which more or less occupies the same position of the township when the houses at the monument were first built, the Arnol blackhouses appear as part of a small, discrete cluster of buildings alongside the later houses. The four modern houses beyond the blackhouses only become visible once arriving at the monument. The remains of the earlier, pre-crofting township of Arnol, which was situated closer to the coast, are also visible from the site itself.

The expanse of the Atlantic Ocean lies beyond the monument. This provides a dramatic backdrop for modern visitors coming to Arnol. The sea would have provided fish and other resources for Arnol's community. Together with the open rural land around the houses, the sea adds to the site's sense of place, including a perceived sense of isolation on the edge of a rugged, and often unforgiving, island. As well as its constant visual presence, the Atlantic and the wind that blows in from it is constant, both audibly and tangibly.

The separation of the now-unoccupied houses from the modern Arnol township and the surrounding remains of a relict crofting settlement and farming system around them, adds to the sense of abandonment at the blackhouses, which strongly illustrates their status as rare survivals of a now-lost Gaelic way of life, as well as the mechanisms which caused those changes.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- The relationship between the successive phases of buildings
- The relationship between the houses and the surrounding crofting landscape, including agricultural and maritime resources, culminating in wider associations with traditional Gaelic lifeways
- The relationship with the nearby current and relict Arnol townships
- Its sense of remoteness and sense of isolation
- Its relationship with the Atlantic Ocean

Applicant's Assessment

Seaward views are characterised as making a minor contribution to how the monument is understood and appreciated. The applicant states that all 44 turbines would be visible from the monument, characterising this as a *'notable change in views from the monument itself and from the immediate approach'* (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.10.10) while suggesting the connections between the blackhouses and the surrounding historic crofting communities would be unchanged.

Our Assessment

We disagree with the applicant's assessment. The proposals would be highly and dominantly visible on the approach to the monument from the main area of Arnol township,

the main historic and modern approach to the site, and while moving around the monument itself. Turbines would even be framed by the doorway when exiting blackhouse 42 through its main doorway. The windfarm would become the most prominent feature across the skyline in views of and from the monument and thereby would become the most dominant feature within the monument's setting. Rather than being situated on the edge of the open expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, the monument would be situated on the edge of a particularly large, expansive, and highly visible wind farm. This dominant modern intrusion would reduce the monument's sense of place and the associations which contribute to the monument's cultural significance: its relationship with the resources that sustained its inhabitants; its link with traditional Gaelic culture and lifeways; and its sense of abandonment and isolation. This would lessen the ability to understand, appreciate, and experience the evolution of the site through time. The proposals would therefore result in a fundamental change to the monument's setting, undermining how it is understood, appreciated, and experienced.

The photomontage provided for VP15 (Figure 18.39) demonstrates the view towards the monument; however, much of the monument is obscured in this specific location by intervening vegetation. This visualisation is therefore limited in its usefulness. It would be more helpful in making an informed assessment if a revised visualisation were provided:

- A planar-projection photomontage, depicting the view towards the monument from the road leading north from Arnol township, taken from NGR 131103 E, 949003 N.

Mitigation

Addressing these concerns would require significant modification to the windfarm layout and include a substantial reduction in turbine numbers or a redesign to enable a large sweep of the view on the approach to and in views from Arnol to remain open.

Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661)

The monument consists of a very tall standing stone of prehistoric date, and an area around it in which other, related stones would have been positioned. At 5.75m tall, Clach an Trushal is the tallest standing stone in Scotland. Nearby are several other large stones, one of them fractured and others built into a bank bounding the strip of land in which the stone stands. It is likely that these once formed a stone setting alongside the sole surviving upright stone. Local oral tradition suggests that the stone was once one of a circle, with these other stones broken up and incorporated into dykes or used as lintels in houses. Excavation in the area has revealed the sockets of three other stones, one of which was preceded by a timber post, to the north-east.

Setting of the Monument

The sheer size of this standing stone gives it a commanding presence within its immediate surroundings. It has wide views across lower-lying land northwards to the cove at Siadair, and the Atlantic Ocean beyond. the land rises to the south, sharply curtailing views out from stone in this direction. The stone appears prominently on the skyline on approaches from the north-west. This is now also the route from which modern visitors access the site. This approach allows the massive size of the stone to be readily understood, appreciated and experienced. The surrounding field dykes also accentuate this view. From the south-east, the stone's size and vertical appearance relative to the various other components in its

surroundings can be best seen. This also allows for an appreciation of the human effort involved in its erection.

A number of other prehistoric sites have been identified in the lower-lying land around Abhainn Siadair and from some of these were likely to have been intentionally intervisible with the standing stone at Clach an Truiseil.

The stone now stands on the periphery of the small township of Baile an Truiseil. The township is characterised by scattered development, largely of individual 1.5-storey houses and agricultural buildings.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- The scale of the standing stone relative to its surroundings
- The intervisibility between the standing stone and other monuments in the vicinity
- Views towards the monument on approaches from the car park to the north-west, and from the small area of land immediately to the south-east of the stone.
- Outward views from the stone, particularly to the north, over the low-lying ground towards the coastline and the sea.

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant anticipates that all 44 turbines would be visible from the monument. They also note *'several wind turbines within the local vicinity of the standing stone which [have] already added modern infrastructure into the setting of the monument'* (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.12.5). The applicant suggests that the distance between the proposals and the monument *'has softened the visual impact of the Turbine Area allowing the stone to dominate the view'*. The applicant concludes there would be a minor adverse impact on the monument's setting.

Our Assessment

We disagree with the applicant's assessment and their conclusions. The supplied visualisations (Figure 18.31) illustrate that the proposals would be a dominant and distracting presence on the horizon in views towards the standing stone from the south-east. This visualisation also helps demonstrate views from around the stone.

The proposals would introduce large, vertical, and kinetic structures across the seascape and horizon in views of/behind the monument and from it. The windfarm would detract from its solitary and dominant presence within otherwise sparsely developed surroundings and be of a significantly larger scale than the 1.5 storey houses closer to the stone. The proposals would compete with the strong, solitary, vertical presence of the standing stone within its surroundings. The north-easternmost parts of the proposals would have the greatest impact, with a row of five turbines stacked behind and left of the standing stone in these views. The proposals would significantly disrupt how the monument is understood, appreciated, and experienced, and consequently have a significant adverse impact on the monument's setting.

The existing nearby turbines at Druim nan Carnan, south and upslope of the monument, have an impact on the monument's setting. However, the turbines are relatively small and

set back from the monument; the stone's size and prominence on the skyline can still be readily understood, appreciated, and experienced.

Mitigation

Deleting the north-easternmost row of turbines, visible to the left of the standing stone in Figure 18.31, would be likely to address our concerns.

Cnoc na Moine, burial cairn, Dalmore (SM5402)

The monument consists of the remains of a prehistoric burial cairn. Measuring 8m in diameter, the cairn is circular and slightly raised with an outer kerb that is especially well defined in the south-west portion. Some of the cairn material has been stacked in its middle, restoring its visual prominence in inward views. There is a boulder containing possible cup marks approximately 14m to the north-west of the cairn.

Setting of the Monument

The monument has been deliberately sited to make it highly visible from its surroundings, especially the lower ground, where the main area of settlement would have been, and from the coastline. To the west, it is visible from the lower reaches of Dalmore and the western parts of Dalmore Beach. From the east, the cairn is particularly visible from the area around Dalbeg. It has wide panoramic views across much of surrounding area, with Muirneag visible 26km to the north-east, and the mountains of An Cliseam visible in Harris to the south. The wide, open expanse of the Atlantic Ocean is visible across a wide arc from the north-east to the south-west. From this position, the monument would have been a prominently visible monument of remembrance for people living and working in this landscape throughout the Neolithic.

The key factors of the monument's setting include:

- Views towards the cairn from the lower-lying land around Dalmore and Dalbeg
- Reciprocal views from the cairn towards the lower-lying land around Dalmore and Dalbeg
- Its prominent position and wide panoramic outward views out over the lower lying land nearby, the coastline and sea, and long distant views beyond, which are broadly similar to that which existed when it was constructed

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant suggests that as *'a much-diminished monument, the cairn is not visible from the lower ground'*. This is not the case; as seen during our site visit, the monument is visible from much of the lower-lying land around Dalmore beach and Dalbeg. The applicant suggests that, because the monument is less visible than it would have been originally, its setting is less likely to be impacted (Appendix 15.2, para. 3.1.1.8). As noted above, the level of preservation of a monument has no bearing on the contribution that setting makes to its cultural significance. The role of setting in how a monument is understood, appreciated, and experienced does not depend on how visible that monument is. In this case, the monument's setting continues to make a significant contribution to its cultural significance.

Our Assessment

We disagree with the applicant's assessment. The supplied wireframe from the monument strongly suggests that the proposals would fundamentally alter the monument's setting, with views towards the open expanse of the Atlantic Ocean being dominated by the wind farm, which would be visible to its full extent. The proposals would occupy such an expansive area in views out from the monument that they cannot be fully accommodated on a single cylindrical-projection wireframe. The proposals would become the dominant presence in views out from the monument particularly out to sea, drawing the eye away from the cairn's panoramic views. The height of the turbines means that the proposals would also be likely to challenge the cairn's prominence in its relationship with Dalmore and Dalbeg.

Figures 18.48 and 18.49 suggest that the impacts on views towards the cairn, while considerable, would be unlikely to significantly reduce the prominence of the monument in these views. However, insufficient information has been provided to allow for a fully informed assessment of the proposal's impacts to the monument's setting, especially as the supplied wireline does not show the variations in topography in sufficient detail to allow for an accurate comparison (Figure 15.1.2.a).

At the very least, planar-projection photomontages illustrating the view from the cairn itself are required in order to come to a fully informed view.

Potential Setting Impacts to Category A-Listed Buildings

Butt of Lewis Lighthouse (LB5768)

Situated at the northerly point of the Isle of Lewis/ Eilean Leòdhais, the lighthouse is the work of D & T Stevenson, engineers, 1862. Composed of the lighthouse tower with contrasting ashlar dressings (other buildings mostly whitewashed). Plain and unusually tall battered circular tower capped by standard domed lantern.

Setting of the Asset

The asset is prominently situated at the northerly end of the Isle of Lewis with extensive views over the sea and landscape of the island.

Applicant's Assessment

The applicant's assessment identifies that the lighthouse is a Category A listed building which is considered to be nationally significant and of high heritage value. (Chapter 15, para. 3.2.4.6). It predicts that a magnitude of change of negligible adverse on an asset of high value would result in a negligible adverse significance of effect, which is not significant in EIA terms (Chapter 15, para. 3.2.4.7).

The EIAR states that:

> *As illustrated in Figure 15.7, Volume 2b, (Figure 15.7: Historic Assets Overlain on Blade Tip Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)) the Turbine Area would be at a distance of approximately 21.2 km but would not be visible from ground level at the Category A listed lighthouse. The view from the listed lighthouse would be restricted by the topography between it and the Turbine Area; however, there is the possibility that some of the WTGs may be visible from the top of the lighthouse.*

The view of the Turbine Area from west of the lighthouse is illustrated in photomontage Viewpoint 1 (Figure 18.25, Volume 2b). The EIAR concludes that:

This possibility would mean that the way in which the heritage asset is appreciated and experienced would be barely changed and therefore, it is considered that the magnitude of change would be negligible to the building's value.'

Our Assessment

We agree with this assessment of this asset. As shown in the ZTV, the proposed development would not be visible in views from the ground at the lighthouse due to the rising landform immediately to the south of the listed building. There would also be no views of the proposed development in close relation to the lighthouse on approach towards it along the road to the south-east. Where the development would be visible from either the top of the lighthouse or in views from the land to its west, as illustrated in the submitted visualisation – Viewpoint 1 (Figure 18.25, Volume 2b), it would appear as one element of a much more panoramic view over the sea and land.

We are therefore satisfied that this proposal would not have a significant adverse impact on our ability to understand, appreciate and experience the setting of the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse.

Our Position

The proposed development would have a significant adverse impact on the settings of **Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054) and the wider Calanais complex; Arnol, Blackhouses no. 39 and no. 42 and associated croft houses (SM90022);** and **Clach an Trushal, standing stone, Ballantrushal (SM1661).**

The limited information supplied indicates that the proposals would have a significant adverse impact on the setting of **Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones (SM90054)** and other monuments in the wider Calanais complex, insufficient information has been supplied to enable a full assessment of how the monuments' setting would be affected. It is likely that several more key factors of setting would be impacted than those which can be assessed on the basis of the single visualisations provided for each asset; therefore, the applicant should provide the photomontage visualisations detailed in this response. These will enable a fully informed assessment and consideration of appropriate mitigation.

The applicant has also not supplied information sufficient to allow for a fully informed assessment of the likely impacts on the setting of **Cnoc na Moine, burial cairn, Dalmore (SM5402),** where there is the potential for significant impacts.

Furthermore, the applicant has not assessed the potential impacts of the 60-turbine layout and we disagree that the 44-turbine layout would necessarily result in the greater impact, as it would have a different spread and distribution and different turbines would appear in specific views of and from a number of monuments. The applicant should assess the potential impacts of the 60-turbine layout, supported by appropriate visualisations. As a minimum, these visualisations should be for the assets we have commented on in this letter.

Therefore, we **object** to the proposals because:

1) the limited information provided indicates the proposals would have a significant adverse impact on the scheduled monuments listed above; and

2) there is insufficient information to assess the scale of impacts on other scheduled monuments, or to inform potential mitigation.

The proposed development therefore does not align with national policy as set out in policy GEN6 of Scotland's National Marine Plan. It also does not align with policies HEP1, HEP2 and HEP4 of the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland. The proposed development has not been informed by an inclusive understanding of the breadth of the cultural significance of the above scheduled monuments impacted and is therefore not in accordance with HEP1. The proposed development would not secure the understanding, enjoyment and benefits of these scheduled monuments for present and future generations and therefore does not align with HEP2. The changes which would be brought about by the proposed development would not protect the historic environment and has not minimised the detrimental impacts of the proposals on these scheduled monuments as required by HEP4.

On provision of the additional information requested we will be happy to review our comments.

Historic Environment Scotland
05 June 2026

Joint Radio Company

From:	Joint Radio Company
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Subject:	Re: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date:	18 March 2026 10:59:49

If any details of this proposal change, particularly the position or scale of any turbine(s), this clearance will be void and re-evaluation of the proposal will be necessary.

Dear Marine Directorate

Planning Ref:MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

Name/Location: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

Turbine(s) at NGR:

Hub Height & Rotor Radius:

	Option 1	Option 2
Number of Turbines	60	44
Tip Height (m)	293.8	338.4
Blade Radius (m)	118	140

Regardless of Option 1 or Option 2 being chosen, the **offshore element** of this proposal is **cleared - subject to *50m* Micrositing -** with respect to radio link infrastructure operated by the local energy networks.

JRC analyses proposals for wind farms (and other developments) on behalf of the UK Fuel & Power Industry. This is to assess their potential to interfere with radio systems operated by utility companies in support of their regulatory operational requirements.

In the case of this proposed wind energy (or other) development, JRC does not foresee any potential problems based on known interference scenarios and the data you have provided. However, if any details of the wind farm (or other development) change, particularly the disposition or scale of any turbine(s) or structure(s), it will be necessary to re-evaluate the proposal.

In making this judgement, JRC has used its best endeavours with the available data, although we recognise that there may be effects which are as yet unknown or inadequately predicted. JRC cannot therefore be held liable if subsequently problems arise that we have not predicted.

It should be noted that this clearance pertains only to the date of its issue. As the use of the spectrum is dynamic, the use of the band is changing on an ongoing basis and consequently, developers are advised to seek re-coordination prior to considering any design changes.

Regards

Wind Farm Team

Friars House
Manor House Drive
Coventry CV1 2TE

United Kingdom

Office: 02476 932 185

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We maintain your personal contact details and are compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) for the purpose of 'Legitimate Interest' for communication with you. If you would like to be removed, please contact [Redacted]

Magnora Offshore Wind

From:	[Redacted]
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Subject:	RE: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date:	21 April 2026 13:43:44
Attachments:	image001.png image002.png

Subject: Representation in Support of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing on behalf of Magnora Offshore Wind, developer of the proposed Talisk Floating Offshore Wind Project, to express our support for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, currently under consideration by the Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations Team.

As a fellow ScotWind project, we recognise the importance of progressing a coordinated and deliverable pipeline of offshore wind developments across Scotland. Projects such as Spiorad na Mara form a key part of this wider portfolio, supporting efficient infrastructure planning, supply chain development, and the long-term growth of the sector.

The timely delivery of offshore wind is critical in the context of the climate emergency and the need for Scotland and the UK to meet their legally binding emissions reduction targets. The development of projects such as Spiorad na Mara will play an important role in expanding renewable energy capacity, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and strengthening long-term energy security.

We also recognise the significant economic opportunities associated with offshore wind development. Projects of this scale can deliver substantial local, regional, and national benefits, including the creation of high-quality, long-term jobs, the development of a skilled workforce, and the growth of a resilient and competitive supply chain. A consistent pipeline of projects is essential to sustaining investment and maximising these benefits over time.

More broadly, the progression of Spiorad na Mara contributes positively to investor confidence in the Scottish offshore wind sector and supports the continued maturation of the market.

On this basis, we are supportive of the application and its progression through the consenting process.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

Project Director – Talisk Offshore Wind
Magnora Offshore Wind

Marine Directorate - Marine Analytical Unit

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

Marine Analytical Unit ("MAU") Response
Marine Directorate

A section 36 consent, marine licence application, Environmental Impact Assessment ("EIA") report and supporting documentation has been provided by Spiorad na Mara Limited. The EIA report includes a description of a range of potential impacts, of which this response focuses only on the assessment of social and economic impacts.

Methodology

The potential effects have been considered at a number of different geographies:

- Smaller study areas (SSAs): West Side SSA (wards of An Taobh Siar agus Nis and Sgìr' Ùige agus Càrlabhagh) and Stornoway SSA (electoral wards of Steòrnobhagh a Deas and Steòrnoabhagh a Tuath).
- Island study area: Isles of Lewis and Harris
- Local study area: Local authority area of CnES (referred to as the Western Isles)
- National study area: Scotland

Different study areas have been used throughout the application process. Employment and GVA have been assessed at the national and local study areas, wider socio-economic effects at the local, island and SSAs, and the socio-cultural effects have been assessed at the island and SSAs. The MAU recommends that all effects should be assessed at the smallest study area where possible. Moreover, the developer combines the employment and GVA impacts of both the offshore and onshore aspects of the development. MAU are therefore unable to comment on the impact as a result of the development, construction, and operation and maintenance of the offshore component of the project, in isolation.

The applicant states that the entire lifetime of the offshore project including construction, operation and maintenance and the decommissioning phase has been considered. As there is currently insufficient information on the decommissioning, the applicant has assumed that the effects during decommissioning will be similar or less than those during construction. Once the decommissioning plan has been developed, these effects can be fully assessed. The MAU suggested that the development phase should also be considered. The application notes that there will only be a few jobs created locally during development and so does not expect there to be any significant effects.

The assessment uses a bespoke criteria to assess the magnitude of impacts and sensitivity of receptors that was produced in collaboration with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). The magnitude is determined by the following factors:

- The size of the impact;
- The scale or extent of the impact;
- The duration of the impact;
- The frequency of the impact;
- The reversibility of the impact;
- Whether the impact would be beneficial, adverse or negligible.

The sensitivity is determined by:

- Social, economic, or environmental value in relevant local, regional or national policy;
- Resilience and capacity to absorb change;
- Scarcity value, or the availability of suitable alternative resources;
- The extent to which the local community depend on it

The magnitude and sensitivity are combined to identify the significance of the effect, with a major or moderate effect considered to be significant in EIA terms. Professional judgement has also been used, where appropriate, to determine significance.

A maximum design scenario has been used to assess the magnitude and significance of the potential effects. This means that impacts of greater adverse significance would not arise should the developer progress any other development in the final scheme design. For the economic effects, two scenarios representing a lower and upper operating capacity have been used due to uncertainty in the project design in the final operating capacity of the Project. The maximum design scenario has then been applied.

Assessment of impacts

A theory of change was used to determine socio-economic impact causal pathways that could arise during the development, construction, and operation and maintenance phases of the project.

The assessment considers the following effects:

- Employment effects (for both the onshore and offshore projects combined)
- GVA effects (for both the onshore and offshore projects combined)
- Effects on tourism sector
- Effects on the fisheries, aquaculture and fish/shellfish processing sector
- Effects on the transport and storage sector
- Population change
- Effects on housing availability
- Effects on availability of community services and infrastructure
- Effects on availability of transport
- Effects on culture and identity

Cumulative, transboundary, combined and the impact of the offshore project in-combination with the onshore transmission works project has also been assessed.

<u>Impacts</u>

During the construction phase, the assessment does not anticipate the socio-economic and wider socio-economic impacts to be significant in EIA terms.

The assessment anticipates a moderate (significant) beneficial effect in terms of employment effects during the operation and maintenance phase in the Western Isles study area. This is for both the offshore and onshore components of the project combined. At the West Side SSA, the effects on the tourism sector are anticipated to be moderate (significant) adverse.

The effects on the fisheries, aquaculture and fish/shellfish processing sector are assessed to be not significant during construction and operation and maintenance due to the mitigation measures that are identified. The MAU recommends that these effects should be assessed prior to any mitigation measures.

All socio-cultural impacts were predicted to be non-significant in EIA terms for the operation and maintenance phase of the development.

The impacts during the decommissioning phase, which are assumed to be similar or less than the anticipated impacts during construction, are all assessed to be non-significant in EIA terms.

While the applicant does not anticipate there to be any significant transboundary effects, the MAU cannot comment as the applicant has not been able to quantify the effect.

With regards to cumulative effects, no impact greater than for the project alone has been anticipated. Similarly, no additional impacts are anticipated when assessing the overall impact of the offshore project and the onshore transmission works project. The combined effects across the project lifetime are not assessed to be of greater significance than is reported in each phase.

A number of mitigation and enhancement measures have been outlined within the socio-economic impact assessment. However, applicants should endeavour to include affected communities in decision-making, in line with the MAU's advice on best practice.

Consultation and engagement

The applicant mentions that stakeholder engagement took place throughout the process including focus groups and community interviews. Stakeholder interviews took place with:

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Western Isles Fishermen's Association/ Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group
- Outer Hebrides Tourism
- Surf Lewis/ Outer Hebrides Surfing Association
- Barvas Estate
- CnES

- Gaelic representative
- Stornoway Police

Summary

Overall, the assessment of socio-economic and socio-cultural impacts during construction and operation and maintenance is conducted to a satisfactory methodological standard, albeit that the economic impacts are combined for both the onshore and offshore components of the project, meaning the MAU are unable to comment on the offshore development impacts in isolation. The wider socio-economic impacts related to fisheries, aquaculture and fish/shellfish processing were assessed post-proposed mitigation measures on the direct impacts. The MAU cannot comment on whether these proposed measures suitably mitigate against any wider impacts as well. The MAU suggests that the same study areas are consistent across all effects and that impacts should be assessed prior to any mitigation.

Marine Directorate - Science, Evidence, Data and Digital

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

E: [Redacted]

[Redacted]

CASEWORK OFFICER

LICENSING OPERATIONS TEAM

MARINE DIRECTORATE

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

07 May 2026

RE: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis

Advisors from the SEDD Marine Renewables & Ecology Team have reviewed the above request and provide the following advice.

Commercial Fisheries

Environmental Impact Assessment and proposed mitigation

To summarise the impact assessment, the EIA found potential significant impacts during the construction and operations and maintenance (O&M) phases relating to the array area and the offshore cable corridor area of search for the following fleets:

- Potting for lobster, brown crab and ballan wrasse etc. For both local inshore potting vessels (<12 m) and larger vessels (>12 m),
- Handline targeting mackerel (and occasional blue fin tuna), and
- Set nets for white fish and rays.

The significant impacts are related to the following impact pathways during the construction and the O&M phase:

1. Reduction in access to, or exclusion from established fishing grounds within the array area during construction
2. Reduction in access to, or exclusion from established fishing grounds within the offshore cable area of search during construction
3. Displacement leading to gear conflict and increased fishing pressure on adjacent grounds during the construction phase
4. Physical presence of infrastructure leading to gear snagging to CF during the construction phase
5. Physical presence of infrastructure leading to gear snagging to CF during the O&M phase

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However, the assessment of the significance of the residual effect is reduced to minor adverse (not significant in EIA terms) for all potential significant impacts with the proposed mitigation measures:

- A001 - The use of rock bags or rock berms for Offshore Cable protection within the Array Area will be limited to within 50 m of WTG and Offshore Substation Platform infrastructure.
- A002 - The Offshore Project will endeavour to route the Offshore Cables network to maximise resumption of fishing where possible.
- A003 - Disruption Agreements will be implemented to coordinate and agree appropriate co-operation and establish evidence based disruption payments to fishermen, where identified as significant within the EIA.

MD-SEDD agree with this assessment but provide the following detailed advice on the mitigation measures:

With regards to 'A002 - The Offshore Project will endeavour to route the Offshore Cables network to maximise resumption of fishing were possible', MD-SEDD note that the applicant has already refined the offshore cable area of search to minimise overlap with the most intensively used fishing zones, where practicable. This was based on discussions and plotter data provided by the local fishing industry.

With regards to 'A003 - Disruption Agreements will be implemented to coordinate and agree appropriate co-operation and establish evidence-based disruption payments to fishermen, where identified as significant within the EIA', MD-SEDD advise that the Scottish Government have no remit on compensation for fisheries, and therefore have no control over the use of this method as a way to reduce the potential significant impacts to not significant in EIA terms.

Monitoring

MD-SEDD note that the applicant has committed to undertaking commercial fisheries monitoring. This includes 'Desk based monitoring of fishing operations surrounding the Offshore Project and periodic assessment of fisheries activity data pre, during and post construction (M035)'.

MD-SEDD advise using the recently published 'Monitoring offshore wind farm impacts on the commercial fishing industry: a good practice guidance' (2025) - Offshore windfarms - monitoring impacts on the commercial fishing industry: good practice guidance - gov.scot when designing monitoring approaches.

MD-SEDD advise that this commitment towards undertaking commercial fisheries monitoring forms part of consent and licence conditions.

Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communications Plan (FMMCP)

MD-SEDD advise including commitments to record and communicate the position of relocated boulders or seabed obstructions (M030) in the FMMCP as per Table 21-2 in the Commercial Fisheries chapter.

Physical processes advice

The MD-SEDD oceanography advisor has reviewed chapter 9 and appendix 9.2 of the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm EIA report focusing on the potential impact to water column processes including tides, waves, and stratification and frontal systems. The MD-SEDD oceanography advisor has also previously reviewed the Spiorad na Mara scoping report, advising that water column and wave processes should be considered for the operational phase, including assessing potential changes wave field and to mixing and stratification. MD-SEDD confirm that these potential impacts have been considered in the EIA report the difference between surface and bottom temperatures are presented to describe baseline stratification. It is not clear what year the Scottish Shelf Model data are from, or whether it includes climatology. Ideally data from a range of years would be presented in order to determine interannual variations. MD-SEDD advise a clarifying note should be sought from the applicant.

MD-SEDD overall agree with the conclusions of the physical processes chapter (volume 2a, chapter 9) on the potential impacts to tides, waves, and stratification and frontal systems. MD-SEDD advise that the impact assessments are practical and sufficiently robust. All previous MD-SEDD comment have been acknowledged and adequately addressed in the EIA.

Yours sincerely,

Marine Renewables and Ecology Team
Marine Directorate – Science, Evidence, Data and Digital

Maritime & Coastguard Agency

[Redacted]
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
UK Technical Services Navigation
105 Commercial Road
Southampton
SO15 1EG

www.gov.uk/mca
6th May 2026

Licensing Operations Team,
Marine Directorate,
Scottish Government,
Marine Laboratory,
Aberdeen.
AB11 9DB.

By email to MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

Dear Marine Directorate,

APPLICATION FOR CONSENT UNDER SECTION 36 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 AND MARINE LICENCES UNDER PART 4 OF THE MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND PART 4 OF THE MARINE AND COASTAL ACCESS ACT 2009 FROM SPIORAD NA MARA LIMITED TO CONSTRUCT AND OPERATE THE SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the applications for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and marine licences under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport and is responsible throughout the UK for implementing and developing the UK Government's maritime safety and environmental protection policy. This includes co-ordinating maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) through His Majesty's Coastguard 24 hours a day and checking that ships meet UK and international safety rules. The MCA works to prevent the loss of lives at the coast and at sea, to ensure that vessels are safe, and to prevent coastal pollution. The UK Technical Services Navigation Branch is responsible for UK radiocommunication and navigation policy. This primarily covers SOLAS Convention (Safety of Life at Sea Convention 1974, as amended) Chapters IV and V; the COLREG Convention (International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972, as amended); and the ITU Convention (International Telecommunications Convention 1932, as amended).

The Navigation Risk Assessment (NRA) and the shipping and navigation elements of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report have been reviewed, and we would like to comment as follows:

Navigation Risk Assessment
Anatec Limited has undertaken a detailed NRA in accordance with MCA guidance (MGN 654) and NRA risk assessment methodology. This NRA, which is presented in Volume 2c, Appendix 16.1, informs the Shipping and Navigation chapter of the EIA presented in Volume 2a, Chapter 16.

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We are satisfied that appropriate traffic data has been collected in accordance with MGN 654, which includes two 14-day marine vessel traffic surveys. We note from Table 5-1 that full surveys were carried out in winter 2024 (21st February – 6th March) and summer 2024 (18th June – 2nd July). It is noted that the full traffic surveys were land based, owing to the proximity of the study area to the Isle of Lewis. MCA are content with this approach.

Additionally, 13.8 days of vessel based MGN 654 compliant data were collected between 18th July and 14th August 2023 and 12 months of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data for the study area (1 July 2023 - 30 June 2024). These data have been used for validation of the study area survey. This is welcomed by the MCA.

The MCA is content that the hazard log presented in Appendix B, Table B.1 of the NRA is a reasonable and proportional assessment of the risks. A completed MGN 654 Checklist has also been provided in Annex A, Table A.1 as part of the NRA, and we are satisfied that all recommendations have been addressed.

It is noted that some of the older studies carried out by the MCA regarding Navigation, Communication, and Position Fixing Equipment are referred to in Section 13 of the NRA. These are supported by other more recent studies which is welcomed. There may be additional benefit in referring to more recent helicopter trials and documents written by the MCA in 2019, titled: “MCA report following aviation trials and exercises in relation to offshore windfarms” and “MCA report following aviation trials at Hornsea Project 1 windfarm”. However, we are content with the conclusions of the impact on navigation, communication and position fixing equipment presented by the applicant.

Emergency Response and Search and Rescue
A SAR checklist based on the requirements in MGN 654 Annex 5 will need to be completed in agreement with MCA before construction starts. This will include the requirement for an approved Emergency Response Co-operation Plan (ERCoP) and will be incorporated as a condition of the Marine Licence.

During SAR discussions, particular consideration will need to be given to the implications of the site size and location. As there are various possible scenarios regarding the final layout of the array at Spiorad na Mara as discussed in Chapter 3 : Project design and illustrated in figures 3.2a and 3.2b (Volume 1b, Figures) it would be beneficial for the applicant to confirm the final build out scenario as early in these SAR discussions as possible.

Attention should be paid to the level of radar surveillance, AIS and shore-based VHF radio coverage and give due consideration for appropriate mitigation such as radar, AIS receivers and in-field, Marine Band VHF radio communications aerial(s) (VHF voice with Digital Selective Calling (DSC)) that can cover the entire wind farm sites and their surrounding areas.

Cumulative Impacts
A Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) has been made based on existing and proposed developments in the study area as explained in Volume 1a, Chapter 5: Approach to Environmental Impact Assessment. The cumulative considerations are further analysed in sections 3, 14 and 19 of the NRA as well as being considered in section 20: Risk Control Log.

The main commercial routes and those with potential for deviations have also been identified. 10 routes are highlighted and presented in Table 11-1 of the NRA. Expected cumulative deviations are

also represented, with 2 routes being identified and presented in figure 14-2. We are content with this approach to the CEA at this stage.

Layout Design
The turbine layout design will require MCA and Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) approval prior to construction to minimise the risks to surface vessels, including rescue boats, and search and rescue aircraft operating within the site. The MCA will seek to ensure all structures are aligned in straight rows and columns with a minimum of two lines of orientation. Further advice will be provided to the project once the layout discussions have started.

Marking, Lighting and Construction Programme
The MCA will seek to ensure the turbine numbering system follows a 'spreadsheet' principle and is consistent with other windfarms in the UK. All lighting and marking arrangements will need to be agreed with the MCA and the NLB. The MCA requires all aviation lighting to be visible 360° and compatible with night vision imaging systems, as detailed in CAP 764 and MGN 654 Annex 5. We would also expect to see some form of linear progression of the construction programme avoiding disparate construction sites across the development area, and the consent needs to include the requirement for an agreed construction plan to be in place ahead of any works commencing.

Wet Storage
It is noted from the non-technical summary and project description that Spiorad na Mara will be utilising fixed bottom structures in the final design of the wind farm. Therefore, storage of floating structures is not expected. However, as a reminder to the developer regarding any storing of components on the seabed within the array area or export cable corridor the MCA will need to be informed of materials to be stored and made aware of any that will exceed a 5% reduction in surrounding depth referenced to Chart Datum.

Hydrographic Surveys
MGN 654 requires that hydrographic surveys should fulfil the requirements of the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO) Order 1a standard, with the final data supplied as a digital full density data set, and survey report to the MCA Hydrography Manager. Further information can be found in MGN 654 Annex 4 supporting document titled 'Hydrographic Guidelines for Offshore Developers', available on our website: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/offshore-renewable-energy-installations-impact-on-shipping. This includes surveys during the pre-construction, post-construction and post-decommissioning stages. We would like to highlight the need to provide the data in either GSF or CARIS format and that Total Vertical and Horizontal Uncertainty (TVU & THU) calculations must be provided.

Cable Routes
The export cable route to the landfall is reasonably developed as presented in Figures 3.1b and 3.1c of Chapter 3: Project Description - Figures, Volume 1b. It is noted in embedded measures (as Mitigation M002) that a Cable Burial Risk Assessment (CBRA) is to be carried out and a cable plan (CaP) as discussed in mitigation measure M030, produced. Any consented cable protection works must ensure existing and future safe navigation is not compromised. The MCA would accept a maximum of 5% reduction in surrounding depth referenced to Chart Datum.

We note from Table 4-1 and section 6 of the NRA and Chapter 3 Volume 1a (Project Description) that High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission infrastructure is no longer under consideration. Therefore, a pre-construction compass deviation study will not be required. MCA are content that regarding this, the risk to shipping and navigation remains low on this occasion.

Safety Zones
The requirement and use of safety zones has been detailed in the application. Specifically in section 3.5.13 of the Project Description. They are also listed as mitigation measure M013 in table 25.11 of Volume 2a Chapter 25, in Table 16.14 in chapter 16 and in Table 17-1 (embedded mitigations) of the NRA. MCA supports the use of safety zones and will comment on the safety zone application once submitted, as a statutory consultee.

Liaison with local MCA Marine Office
The applicant should be reminded that their contractors and subcontractors must have the required certification for all vessel operations, and early engagement with the local MCA Marine Office should be undertaken where necessary to ensure there are no issues with regards to survey and inspections, towage, and safety requirements. Various additional certificates including a load line exemption for any floating turbine platforms will be required prior to any towage to site and the applicant must ensure any ballast water requirements are addressed.

Embedded Mitigation
We have the following comments on the proposed risk controls in section 17, Table 17-1 of the NRA:

1. Cable Burial Risk Assessment;
    - In case of damage to, or destruction or decay of, the authorised project seaward of MHWS or any part thereof, excluding the exposure of cables, notification must be issued to MCA, NLB, the Kingfisher Information Service of Seafish and the UKHO within 24 hours of becoming aware.
    - In case of exposure of cables on or above the seabed, the undertaker must within three days following identification of a potential cable exposure, notify mariners and inform Kingfisher Information Service of the location and extent of exposure. Copies of all notices must be provided to the MCA, NLB, and the UKHO within 5 days.
    - The plan must include proposals for monitoring offshore cables including cable protection during the operational lifetime of the authorised scheme which includes a risk-based approach to the management of unburied or shallow buried cables.
    - Attention should be paid to cabling routes and where appropriate burial depth for which a Burial Protection Index study should be completed and subject to the traffic volumes, an anchor penetration study may be necessary.

2. Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan (NSVMP);
    - Local notification to mariners must be issued at least 14 days prior to the commencement of the authorised project or any part thereof advising of the start date of each work and the expected vessel routes from the construction ports to the relevant location. They must be updated and reissued at weekly intervals during construction activities and at least 5 days before any planned operations (or otherwise agreed) and maintenance works and supplemented with VHF radio broadcasts agreed with the MCA.
    - The Kingfisher Information Service of Seafish, must be informed of details of the vessel routes, timings and locations relating to the construction of the authorised project or any part thereof by email to kingfisher@seafish.co.uk :-
        i. at least 14 days prior to the commencement of offshore activities, for inclusion in the Kingfisher Fortnightly Bulletin and offshore hazard awareness data, and;
        ii. as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 24 hours of completion of all offshore activities.
    - Post construction monitoring is required and must include vessel traffic monitoring by automatic identification system for a duration of three consecutive years following the

completion of construction of the authorised project. An appropriate report must be submitted to the MCA and NLB at the end of each year of the three-year period.

Conclusion

The comments detailed above are not considered to be blocks to development, but they are provided to highlight any areas which may require further discussion. Subject to the applicant meeting requirements addressed in this letter and meeting the licence conditions, it provides a cautious acceptance of the application for consent.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]
Offshore Renewables Project Lead
Marine Safety and PNT Services

Ministry of Defence

Defence Infrastructure Organisation

[Redacted]
Assistant Safeguarding Manager
Ministry of Defence
Safeguarding
Defence Infrastructure Organisation
St George's House
DMS Whittington
Lichfield, Staffordshire
WS14 9PY
United Kingdom

Application Ref: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

Our Reference: DIO10060542

E-mail: DIO-Safeguarding-Wind@mod.gov.uk

Planning Officer
Scottish Government
Licensing Operations Team
Marine Directorate
Marine Laboratory
ABERDEEN
AB11 9DB

18 May 2026

Dear Sir / Madam

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990
MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010
The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 – Spiorad na Mara Limited – Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – approximately 5km off the west coast of the Isle of Lewis.

Thank you for consulting the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in relation to the above Section 36 application and Marine Licences through your communication dated 16 March 2026.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) Safeguarding Team represents the MOD as a consultee in UK planning and energy consenting systems to ensure that development does not compromise or degrade the operation of defence sites such as aerodromes, explosives storage sites, air weapon ranges, and technical sites or training resources such as the Military Low Flying System.

I write to advise the safeguarding position of the MOD in relation to the above applications to construct and operate the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

This scheme will comprise of:-

- up to 60 wind turbine generators (WTGs), with a maximum height to blade tip of up to 338.4 metres above Mean Sea Level (MSL), located approximately 5km offshore off the west coast of the Isle of Lewis;
- up to one Offshore Substation Platform (OSP) with a maximum height of 110 metres including lightning protection and ancillary structures;

- interconnector cables and up to twelve offshore export cables connecting the OSP to the landfall on the north west coast of the Isle of Lewis at Barvas;
- up to twelve onshore export cables connecting to a Landfall Substation (approximately 15m Above Ground Level [AGL]) near Barvas; and
- up to two cable circuits connecting to the Grid Substation and from there on to the Lewis Hub northwest (approximately 20m AGL) of Loch Cnoc a´ Choilich.

The principal concerns of the MOD with respect to this proposed wind farm relate to the impact of the development on the operation and capability of air defence radar systems and the potential to create a physical obstruction to air traffic movements.

At this time the MOD must **object** to the proposed development on the basis that the scheme would have a significant and detrimental impact on the effective operation and capability of air defence radar deployed at Remote Radar Head (RRH) Benbecula.

Air Defence (AD) radar

The proposed WTGs would be located approximately 88.9km from, detectable by, and will cause unacceptable interference to the AD radar deployed at RRH Benbecula.

WTGs have been shown to have detrimental effects on the operation of radar. These include the desensitisation of radar in the vicinity of the WTGs, and the creation of "false" aircraft returns. The probability of the radar detecting aircraft flying over or in the vicinity of the WTGs would be reduced, hence WTG proliferation within a specific locality can result in unacceptable degradation of the radar's operational integrity. This would reduce the RAF's ability to detect and deter aircraft in United Kingdom sovereign airspace, thereby preventing it from effectively performing its primary function of Air Defence of the United Kingdom.

Our assessments have determined that, when operational, the proposed wind farm will cause unacceptable and unmanageable interference to the effective operation of an air defence radar deployed at RRH Benbecula.

The need to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development upon the effective operation of RRH Benbecula has been recognised by the applicant and is set out in Volume 2a, Chapter 17, Military and Civil Aviation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). To overcome a radar objection the MOD expects a technical mitigation proposal to be submitted, which will be subject to technical and operational assessments. If deemed viable, the MOD may then be in a position to offer a suspensive planning condition to secure radar mitigation. Whilst mitigation is discussed within the Military and Civil Aviation chapter of the EIAR, at this stage the applicant has not proposed or submitted a mitigation proposal to the MOD. It is an applicant's responsibility to provide mitigation. At paragraph 17.9.3.14 of EIAR Chapter 17 it states that engagement with the MOD is ongoing in respect of identifying a suitable mitigation solution with regard to RRH Benbecula AD. The MOD would welcome engagement on this matter and the submission of a technical mitigation proposal.

Therefore, on the basis of the information provided, and until a suitable mitigation scheme has been submitted, assessed, and accepted, the MOD must **object** to this proposal due to the impact it will have on the AD radar deployed at RRH Benbecula.

Physical Obstruction

In this case the development falls within Low Flying Area 14 (LFA 14). Within this area fixed wing aircraft may operate as low as 250 feet or 76.2 metres above surface level to conduct low level flight training. The addition of turbines and other structures in this location would introduce a physical obstruction to low flying aircraft operating in the area.

In the event that the applicant is able to overcome the objection listed above regarding air defence radar the MOD would require that conditions are added to any consent issued requiring the submission, approval and implementation of an aviation lighting scheme, and that sufficient data is submitted to ensure that structures can be accurately charted to allow deconfliction. The Applicant has acknowledged the MOD requirement for MOD accredited aviation safety lighting and the need to submit sufficient data to enable charting of the structures at Table 17.2, Section 17.7.2 Embedded Mitigation Measures, and Sections 17.8.1, 17.9.1 & 17.10.1 Creation of an Aviation Obstacle Environment in Volume 2a, Chapter 17, Civil and Military Aviation. However, Embedded Mitigation Measure M017 (Table 17-12) states a height for those temporary obstacles which need to be identified to military aviation crews as over 100m whereas the height criteria required by the MOD is **50m or more**. The MOD have reviewed indicative specifications for the lighting at Tables 2-6 and 2-7 of the Volume 3, Outline Lighting and Marking Plan alongside the Array Area and Indicative Turbine Layouts (Figures 3.2a and 3.2b) noting WTGs with Aviation Warning Lights in Volume1b, Chapter 3, Project Description – Figures, and are content that the proposed lighting looks to be sufficient for the MOD requirements.

As this development includes structures other than WTGs that exceed a height of 50m above Lowest Astronomical Tide these structures would be subject to the lighting requirements set out in the Air Navigation Order 2016. In addition to any CAA requirements, the MOD will require the submission, approval, and implementation of an aviation safety lighting specification that details the installation of MOD accredited aviation safety lighting.

Offshore and Onshore Transmission Assets, including Landfall

The offshore Transmission Assets will make landfall at Barvas, on the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. Neither the offshore Transmission Assets nor onshore landfall or onshore Transmission Assets elements of the development pass through any statutory safeguarded zones and assessments completed by the MOD have identified that there are no safeguarding concerns with either the offshore Transmission Assets, onshore landfall or onshore Transmission Assets elements of the proposed development.

Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)

The potential for UXO to be present within the development area and the necessity for clearance should be considered. Volume 1a, Chapter 3, Project Description, paragraph 3.5.3.8 identifies that following initial site investigations it is not anticipated that UXO clearance is required. However, should UXO be identified as a requirement following pre-construction surveys the activity would be consented separately. The MOD sees no reason not to agree with this approach.

Summary

For the avoidance of any doubt, MOD must **object** to the proposal on the grounds of the unacceptable impact that the development would have on air defence radar systems deployed at RRH Benbecula.

I trust this is clear however should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted]

Assistant Safeguarding Manager

National Parks and Wildlife Service

From:	Housing Manager DAU
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Cc:	[Redacted]
Subject:	RE: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date:	28 July 2026 09:57:31
Attachments:	image001.png image002.png image005.png image009.png image011.png image012.png image013.png image014.png

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A Chara

The Department is not in a position to provide observations on this referral at this time.

Kind Regards
[Redacted]

—

[Redacted]
Executive Officer
—
Aonad na nIarratas ar Fhorbairt
Development Applications Unit
Oifigí an Rialtais
Government Offices
Bóthar an Bhaile Nua, Loch Garman, Contae Loch Garman Y35 AP90
Newtown Road, Wexford, County Wexford Y35 AP90
—

Natural England

Date: 01/05/2026
Our ref: 543809
Your ref: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

Licensing Operations Team
Marine Directorate
Scottish Government
Marine Laboratory
Aberdeen
AB11 9DB

Tyneside House,
Skinnerburn Road,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne,
NE4 7RA

0300 – 060 3900

Via email only

Dear [Red

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application – Consultation

Thank you for seeking our advice on Spiorad na Mara OWF in your consultation which we received on 16/03/2026.

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990

MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010
The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

The advice contained within this letter is provided by Natural England, which is the statutory nature conservation body within English territorial waters (0-12 nautical miles). As the application is located outside English territorial waters then the advice from NatureScot, the statutory nature conservation body in offshore Scottish waters should be sought.

Due to our remit, our advice on this consultation is restricted to species within England and to protected species from English designated sites which may be impacted by the proposed wind farm.

We provide our advice based on the following documents:
- Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment - SNM-SNM-PAC-RPT-1001

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

We have considered the documents provided with the consultation request in our review, and the measures proposed to mitigate for all identified adverse effects that could potentially occur as a result of the proposal. We advise that, providing there are no substantial changes to the project design envelope, this project alone will not have an Adverse Effect on Site Integrity (AEoSI) on any English SPA or SAC. We also advise that any addition to in combination impacts with other projects will be *de-minimis* and as such are unlikely to significantly contribute to AEoSI for any English SPA or SAC in combination with the other Plans or Projects assessed.

Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

The works, as set out in the information supplied by the applicant, are not sited within or near to a Marine Conservation Zone. Natural England have not identified a pathway by which impacts from the development would affect the interest features of any MCZ. We are therefore confident that the works will not hinder the conservation objectives of such a site.

Other Relevant Matters

Should the proposal be amended in a way which significantly affects its impact on the natural environment then, in accordance with Section 4 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Natural England should be consulted again.

For any queries relating to the content of this letter please contact me using the details provided below. To provide the further information requested in this advice and for subsequent consultations, please email consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Marine Higher Officer
Northumbria Marine Team
Email: [Redacted]

Natural Resource Wales

Eich cyf/Your ref: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743
Ein cyf/Our ref: AOS-26047-0001

Natural Resources Wales
Welsh Government Offices
Cathays Park
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Ebost/Email:
marine.advice@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Licensing Operations Team, Marine Directorate
Scottish Government
Marine Laboratory
Aberdeen
AB11 9DB

Ebost/Email: MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

Dyddiad/Date: 25/06/2026

Annwyl/Dear Sir/Madam,

CONSULTATION: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

APPLICANT: Spiorad na Mara Limited

EICH CYFEIRNOD / YOUR REFERENCE: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

EIN CYFEIRNOD / OUR REFERENCE: AOS-26047-0001

Thank you for your consultation received by Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru / Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

We understand that the Scottish Ministers have received an application in accordance with the below legislation, to construct and operate the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990

MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010
The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

Please find NRW Advisory's (NRW (A)) comments on this application below.

NRW Advisory Comments:

Considering the location of the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, NRW (A) conclude that the project is unlikely to significantly impact Welsh designated sites and have taken the decision to not provide detailed advice on this application at this stage. Accordingly, we defer to NatureScot as the Statutory Nature Conservation Body (SNCB) for Scotland.

Please do not hesitate to contact marine.advice@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk should you require any further clarification.

Yn gywir / Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]

Senior Marine Advisory Officer
Marine Area Advice and Management Team
Natural Resources Wales.

NatureScot

NatureScot
Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

Marine Directorate
Scottish Government
5 Atlantic Quay
Glasgow
G2 8LU
Sent by email only

07 May 2026

Our ref: CNS REN OSWF – Spiorad na Mara

By email only

Dear Marine Directorate

SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

APPLICATION FOR CONSENT UNDER SECTION 36 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 AND MARINE LICENCES UNDER THE MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT AND PART 4 OF THE MARINE AND COASTAL ACCESS ACT 2009 TO CONSTRUCT AND OPERATE THE SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Thank you for consulting NatureScot on the Section 36 and Marine Licence applications submitted by Northland Power (the Applicant) for the proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm (the Project). These are accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (hereafter referred to as the Offshore EIAR), Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA) and Shadow Derogation Case provided on a without prejudice basis.

Our advice in this letter is in relation to the Spiorad na Mara Array Area, the Export Cable Corridor (ECC) and landfall (up to Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) only), hereafter referred to as the Proposed Development. Onshore components will be subject to separate terrestrial planning applications.

Policy context

Working within the context of a climate emergency and a biodiversity crisis, we seek to provide advice that is enabling and secures the right development in the right place with most benefit for climate change reduction and that which avoids damage, and where possible, achieves restoration and enhancement of biodiversity.

As a statutory consultee, NatureScot works in support of the Scottish Government's vision for a Blue Economy with its six outcomes acting as focal points to ensure the marine environment supports ecosystem health, improved livelihoods, economic prosperity, social inclusion and wellbeing. We provide advice in the spirit of Scottish Government's ambition for Offshore Wind as outlined in the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (SMP-OWE) published in 2020 and now undergoing an Iterative Plan Review (IPR) and due to be published later this year and the Offshore Wind Policy Statement, published in January, stating an ambition of 40 GW to be delivered by 2040. We also acknowledge the Energy Act 2023 will provide for the reform of the consideration and delivery of strategic compensation, where required. We anticipate the guidance on the changes to be published later this year. The SMP-OWE aims to balance the promotion of the sustainable development of offshore wind, whilst protecting and restoring our biodiversity.

In response to the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045, we support the current work of the Scottish Government in considering a new policy direction of nature positive requirements for marine industries, including Offshore Wind. We seek further consideration and engagement on what can be delivered in terms of biodiversity enhancement that would also align with the renewable energy production aims and objectives of this proposal, in the context of the climate emergency and biodiversity loss crisis, if consented.

The Proposed Development

The Applicant proposes to develop an offshore windfarm with fixed turbines as part of the ScotWind Leasing Round in the N4 Plan Option Area.

The Proposed Development is located between 5 and 13 km off the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. The array area is 161 km^2. Water depths range from 37 – 67 m. The proposals are described in the Project Description (Chapter 3, Volume 1a) and consist of the following:

- An installed capacity of 900MW with a lifespan of 35 years.
- Two build out scenarios:
    - Up to 44 of the largest offshore wind turbine generator (WTG) type, with a maximum blade tip height of 338.4 m above mean sea level (MSL), with a minimum 30 m blade clearance above MSL, and associated foundations.
    - Up to 60 of a smaller WTG type, with a maximum blade tip height of 293.8 m above MSL, with a minimum 30 m blade clearance above MSL, and associated foundations.
- Foundations will be fixed base and both multileg jacket with pin piles, and hybrid multi leg jacket with gravity base are within the design envelope. For the hybrid multi leg jacket the structure will have either 3 or 4 legs secured to the seabed via percussive piling (maximum 240 piles, with an additional 16 if a substation is located offshore).
- The windfarm transmission requires 2 High Voltage Alternating Current (HVAC) substations, one on the west side of Lewis and one on the east. A grid substation is proposed on the east side of Lewis. On the west, 2 transmission options are retained by the applicant, either an Offshore Substation, or a Landfall substation:
    - In the first export scenario the array cables will connect the WTGs to the OSP in a string circuit configuration and then export cables will transmit higher voltages to the transmission joint bays where they will connect to the onshore cables. The maximum length of array cables to the OSP will be 160 km with an export cable of 30 km length
    - In the second export scenario the array cables will be installed in several string circuits, and the final WTG in each chain will transmit the power directly to landfall. The length of array cables in this scenario will be 350 km

- Landfall will be by Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD). The HDD operations below MHWS and the exit pits form part of this application consultation.

Pre-construction site preparation activities, such as debris and boulder removal, dredging and seabed levelling and unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance, will take place and will be informed by detailed site investigation.

It is anticipated that the construction will commence in 2028/2029 for a duration of 5 years.

Turbine and OSP components will be transported to the site from a suitable port (as yet unconfirmed) on a wind turbine installation vessel. Decommissioning and repowering are mentioned in broad terms in section 3.9 in the Project Description (Chapter 3, volume 1a).

Assessment approach

The applicant has largely followed standard EIA and RIAA processes. The information within the EIA has been set out with sufficient clarity to allow us to understand and assess the proposals. We consider the SLVIA to be a robust assessment of the likely impacts of the proposal.

NatureScot advice

Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The Proposed Development would introduce visibility of a very large-scale offshore wind farm in the seaward skyline in northward looking views from the distinctive northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis (approximately between Callanish and the Butt of Lewis) and would become a new dominant feature experienced from a wide geographical extent of this area resulting in significant adverse effects, including to a national designation – the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA).

We consider that the significant adverse effects on the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis would be extensive and widespread and, if consented and built, this will change the existing landscape character to one dominated by an offshore wind farm, such that it would be described as 'Isle of Lewis and Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm'. It will be visible within a minimum radius of approximately 20 km of the Proposed Development.

We advise that the Proposed Development does not meet:

- Scotland's National Marine Plan (NMP) Policy GEN 7 and Policy 4 c) of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) due to impacts upon the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA[1]; and
- NPF4 Policy 11e (ii) due to the extensive nature of the effects on the distinctive seascapes and landscapes of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.

These effects would result from the proposed siting, scale and type of development, which we consider could not be mitigated to an acceptable impact within the site and parameters proposed by the applicant.

The Proposed Development would result in significant adverse effects on seven of the special landscape qualities (SLQs) of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. We advise this would result in an evident and noticeable material change such that the objectives of this designation and overall integrity of the NSA would be compromised.

[1] https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/9149

The Proposed Development would also result in significant adverse effects across a widespread area of the distinctive northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis, including the sensitive coast, recreational beaches, renowned historical landmarks, numerous settlements, roads and recreational routes.

Notwithstanding our assessment of the seascape, landscape and visual impacts summarised above, and advising on the scale and significance of the adverse effects of the Proposed Development, we have also reviewed all other aspects of the EIA report and accompanying information and we provide advice on all other topics within our remit.

This covering letter provides a short summary of our advice under relevant subheadings for other receptors below. If Scottish Ministers are minded to grant consent, despite the SLVIA impacts, we provide advice for each receptor within Appendices B to I and, where necessary, request further information and clarifications.

Offshore and intertidal ornithology – EIA

We largely agree with the Applicant's conclusion of No Significant Effect for the project alone impacts, with the following exceptions:

We request clarification on the following point to enable conclusions to be made:

- figures used in the **guillemot** baseline assessment
- The closest **gannet** colony selected is incorrect; Rockall is identified as the closest, we advise this should be North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA. This requires amending.
- Intertidal and nearshore survey data has not been provided; we request clarification as to whether this is being covered in the terrestrial application. If not, this information will be required to advise on the potential impacts of cable laying and landfall construction activities on ornithological receptors

We require the following additional information in order to provide our final advice on the 'project alone' assessment:

- **Common gull** - We request that CRM is carried out for this species.
- **Great skua** – We request that the Applicant undertake Collision Risk Modelling (CRM) for great skua, using DAS data including all great skua behaviours and records across the entire study area. We advise impacts to great skua may have been underestimated due to uncertainty around the usage of the project site by great skua, and due to the use of pre-HPAI colony count data for the calculation of the regional population estimate.
- **Herring gull** – We request that the Applicant undertake project alone and cumulative PVA assessments for herring gull, using the breeding season regional population estimate for the non-breeding season. The breeding season regional population estimate should have been used for the assessment of non-breeding season impacts, and PVAs are required for project alone and cumulative impacts using this approach.
- Limited vessel traffic details have been provided. We are unable to advise on the potential impacts of increased vessel traffic on ornithological receptors until further detail is provided. This should be provided and assessed in a Vessel Management Plan.

We have identified the following points in the cumulative assessment, for which we will require additional information to provide our final advice on the assessment:

- **Gannet CEA** – the "with Berwick Bank" scenario includes fewer mortalities than the "without Berwick Bank" scenario, as the Applicant states that Berwick Bank plans to compensate for a larger number of gannets than impacted. We do not agree with this approach in the absence of an agreed seabird Compensation Plan for Berwick Bank and therefore are unable to provide a conclusion in relation to the "with Berwick Bank" scenario.
- **Great skua** – depending upon the results of a CRM reassessment for great skua, a cumulative assessment may be required.
- **Herring gull** – as per the project alone assessment, a PVA is required for the cumulative assessment when using the NatureScot guidance for calculating the annual regional population estimate and mortalities.

Offshore and intertidal ornithology – RIAA

The applicant concludes for the project alone that there will be no adverse effect on site integrity (AEOSI) for any SPA, which we provisionally support. Noting that our conclusions for gannet at Ailsa Craig SPA is currently provisional.

For the qualifying species and sites below, **we have concluded AEoSI in-combination** with other offshore wind farm projects under the second in-combination scenario (All projects, excluding consented projects with a commitment to compensation):

- Kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA
- Kittiwake at West Westray SPA
- Gannet at Forth Islands SPA
- Gannet at Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA
- Red-throated diver at Lewis Peatlands SPA

For the qualifying species and sites below, **we are unable to conclude no AEoSI in-combination** with other offshore wind farm projects:

- Kittiwake at Cape Wrath SPA
- Kittiwake at North Caithness Cliffs SPA
- Gannet at Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA
- Razorbill at St Kilda SPA
- Razorbill at Seas off St Kilda SPA

An adverse effect on site integrity was also concluded when considering in-combination effects for Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA but Natural England should be consulted on this.

For the qualifying species and sites below, we have been unable to reach a conclusion and therefore require additional information to provide our final advice:

- Lewis Peatland SPA – The assessment for black-throated diver uses the biogeographic population and will need to consider the SPA population.
- Impacts to various SPAs for Greenland white fronted geese which are likely to migrate through the area.

We will require further additional information to inform our advice on the application as follows:

- An updated impact assessment for puffin at Cape Wrath SPA using more recent colony counts

- The rounding of mortality rate outputs to 2 decimal places and undertake any additional PVAs that are required.
- It is not clear from the information presented in the application why the upper impact scenario for gannet at Ailsa Craig SPA (project alone) has a higher CPS. We have assumed this is a clerical error but request that the applicant provide clarification on this.
- The figures relating to Muir Mhor, Ossian and Caledonia have been updated by these developments so those used in the in-combination assessment will need to be updated
- In section 13.2.1.2 the applicant states they have used proxy sites, but it is not clear what this entailed. We request further details on which sites this was applied to and how the numbers were calculated.
- For Canna and Sanday SPA, the excluding Berwick Bank scenario resulted in a larger increase in mortality rate for the upper impact scenario for puffin than including Berwick Bank scenario. We believe this is an error but ask the applicant to clarify what the including and excluding upper scenario increase in mortality rate should be.
- For razorbill at North Rona and Sule Sgeir SPA an assessment was made for project alone but not in the in-combination assessment, can the applicant clarify why this is the case
- For great skua we request that the applicant undertakes a CRM assessment but includes birds seen in the survey area and buffer and includes both sitting and flying birds. This will allow us to undertake an assessment.

Marine mammals – EIA and RIAA

On the basis that an adequate MPA assessment has not been presented by the Applicant, we are unable to determine whether the activity is capable of affecting, other than insignificantly, the Risso's dolphin protected feature and thus whether there is a significant risk of hindering the conservation objectives. As a result, we advise:

- **A standalone proposal alone and cumulative NCMPA assessment for all relevant impact pathways is carried out for the North-east Lewis NCMPA as this has not been adequately assessed.**

With respect to the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, we advise **we are unable to conclude no adverse effect on site integrity (AEoSI) due to behavioural disturbance from pile driving during construction** given uncertainty on the disturbance levels used in the assessment. As a result, we request clarification on:

- **Whether the assessment presented in the RIAA is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels from piling noise.**
- **Should the assessment be based on post-mitigated noise contours, we request that assessment is carried out using pre-mitigated noise contours and presented as additional information. This should identify the distance from the impact source to the SAC and/or the percentage of overlap of the contours and the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, is presented as a minimum and if relevant.**

The EIA concludes no significant impacts alone or cumulatively for marine mammal receptors. However, we raise a fundamental concern with the assessment approach and conclusions which are predicated on the successful use of noise abatement systems (NAS) providing a 12dB noise reduction.

It is also unclear from the information presented if the WCS adopted for disturbance from piling noise is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e., with or without the use of NAS).

Considering our concerns on the feasibility of achieving a 12dB noise reduction, we require clarification on:

- **If the worst-case scenario modelled is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e., NAS).**
- **If pre-mitigated noise contours have not been used to calculate disturbance, we request that the assessment is carried out using pre-mitigated noise contours (i.e., in the absence of NAS).**

With respect to the use of NAS forming the basis of assessment conclusions, we request the following additional information to reflect a range of potential mitigated impact scenarios and to provide confidence in the assessment conclusions:

- **A sensitivity analysis for key impact metrics from piling noise using a range of lower noise level reductions (e.g., 6dB, 8dB) with minimal achievable reductions (worst case) and maximum reductions (best case) presented.**

Furthermore, should Scottish Ministers grant consent, we advise:

- **Detailed information should be outlined through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol on the type of NAS to be deployed alongside a deployment proof of concept suitable for 45 – 67 m water depths.**
- **Field data or literature demonstrating typical performance of the chosen system and how this evidence supports the assumed 12 dB reduction provided within the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol.**
- **A monitoring proposal to validate the EIA Report / PDE noise abatement predictions and to better understand the likelihood of impact for disturbance from piling and the use of NAS.**

There are several aspects of the EIA where we raise issues with magnitude and sensitivity scoring in Appendix C, and as such we disagree with the outcome of the assessment. Instead, we conclude **significant impacts** for:

- **Disturbance from piling, for the proposal alone for Risso's Dolphin within Celtic Greater North Sea (CGNS) MU and Bottlenose Dolphin within Coastal West Scotland and the Hebrides MU (CWSH). This also has the potential to hinder the conservation objectives of the NE Lewis NCMPA for Risso's dolphin and should be included in the MPA assessment that is required.**
- **Disturbance from piling, cumulatively for Risso's dolphins, white-beaked dolphin, minke whale, harbour porpoise and the coastal bottlenose dolphin population.**
- **Disturbance or displacement / temporary foraging habitat loss from presence of vessels for proposal alone for all receptors. We consider this can be reduced to not significant levels following development of the Vessel Management Plan (VMP).**

As such, should Scottish Ministers grant consent, we advise that:

- **The Applicant must consider the implications of underwater noise from piling further, through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) post-consent, for all species considered in the EIA Report.**
- **The Applicant must consider the implications of our revised conclusions further, through the development of the VMP and MMMP with updated assessments, post-consent, to identify reductions to the predicted impacts. Given these predicted impacts, we advise**

that monitoring to validate the EIA Report predictions and implementation of NAS to better understand the management and mitigation of these impacts is required.

- **A monitoring proposal to validate the EIA Report predictions and better understand the likelihood of impacts for disturbance from piling and other impacts may be required, particularly considering the utilisation of the area by a wide range of marine mammal species.**

Impacts arising from UXO clearance (auditory injury and disturbance) have not been assessed as part of the EIA or RIAA. An assessment on impacts arising from UXO should have been presented within the application, though we accept that mitigation measures for UXO clearance can be considered post consent, if required. As a result, we recommend:

- **The Applicant must consider the impacts from auditory injury and disturbance from UXO clearance events further in the MMMP post-consent and that further mitigation measures are defined and secured (if necessary). If large UXOs are identified, we recommend further consultation with ourselves and Marine Directorate to agree and finalise any mitigation, which may include seasonal restrictions.**

There are other aspects of the assessment where we request clarification and/or additional information, including:

- **Clarification on whether three drilling vessels for the installation of 25 turbines could be operating concurrently with the percussive piling activities of 35 turbines. Should drilling and percussive piling occur concurrently, then we request that this is assessed appropriately.**
- **A quantitative assessment is carried out using fixed noise thresholds to assess the disturbance potential of other construction noise sources.**

<u>Lewis Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Otter</u>

We agree with the conclusion to screen in otter as a qualifying species of the Lewis Peatlands SAC to the assessment. Due to the proximity of the landfall area to this SAC, otters which use this part of the coast are likely to be connected to the SAC, and so Likely Significant Effects (LSE) arise. On this basis we recommend that Marine Directorate will need to carry out an Appropriate Assessment to assess the impacts of the Proposed Development on the conservation objectives for this site which relate to otter. As the cable landfall is to be constructed via HDD, impacts to the intertidal area will be minimal. The exit pit of the HDD will be located below MLWS. The offshore elements of the work may cause some temporary disturbance to foraging otter, but our view is that this is likely to be localised and temporary and unlikely to result in a significant impact to the SAC population, even before mitigation is considered, so our conclusion is that the Proposed Development will have no adverse effect on site integrity.

Otter is also a European Protected Species, and individual animals, their holts, and resting places are provided with protection under this legislation. Should surveys find any nearby holts or couches, appropriate mitigation should be considered, and EPS licences obtained from NatureScot if required.

Diadromous fish ecology – EIA and RIAA

The EIA for diadromous fish concludes no significant impacts both alone and cumulatively, which we support for many impact pathways. Where we do not support the EIA conclusions, we provide our own comments and conclusions.

Due to a critical lack of evidence on Fish Aggregation Effects (see section D.3.12 below) of the Proposed Development on diadromous fish species, their prey species, and their predators, we advise that a full assessment of this impact pathway is not possible without additional site-specific data. **We therefore advise that a monitoring package is secured to validate the predictions made in the EIA.**

The RIAA for diadromous fish similarly concludes no Adverse Effects on Site Integrity (AEOSI) for any pressure. Again, primarily in relation to the Fish Aggregation Effects pressure, but also considering other pressures we are **unable to conclude no AEOSI for the following sites and species**:

- Langavat SAC – Atlantic salmon; and
- North Harris SAC – Atlantic salmon, Freshwater Pearl Mussel (via impacts to their salmonid hosts).

We therefore advise that Marine Directorate should carry out an Appropriate Assessment to assess the impacts of the Proposed Development on the Conservation Objectives of the relevant SACs.

We recommend that a monitoring package is secured, understanding that monitoring itself is not mitigation. We recommend that a Diadromous Fish Management Plan (or similar) is also secured via consent condition, with the purpose of:

- agreeing the scope and methods of diadromous fish monitoring; and
- identifying and agreeing management steps to be implemented if monitoring detects increased levels of predation on diadromous fish, by fish-eating birds, seals, or other predatory fish.

Marine fish ecology – EIA

The assessment for fish ecology concludes **No Significant effects** both alone and cumulatively, which we support.

Benthic ecology – EIA

The assessment for Benthic Ecology concludes **No Significant effects** both alone and cumulatively, which we support.

Marine and coastal processes – EIA

The assessment for Marine and Coastal Processes concludes **No Significant effects** both alone and cumulatively, which we support.

Blue carbon – EIA

The assessment for Blue Carbon concludes **No Significant effects**, which we support.

Derogation and compensation measures under HRA

Our advice on compensation measures is constrained by the limited information provided by the applicant on this topic. We will welcome further consultation about potential compensation delivery once sites have been short-listed and site-specific details are available.

We hope this advice is helpful. Please contact [Redacted] or [Redacted] in the first instance for any further advice, copying in our marine energy mailbox – marineenergy@nature.scot.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]

Head of Marine Energy – Sustainable Coasts and Seas.

NatureScot
Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

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NATURESCOT ADVICE ON SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Appendix A Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA)

A.1 Summary of NatureScot advice

The Proposed Development would introduce visibility of a very large-scale offshore wind farm in the seaward skyline in northward looking views from the distinctive northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis (approximately between Callanish and the Butt of Lewis) and would become a new dominant feature experienced from a wide geographical extent of this area resulting in significant adverse effects, including to a national designation – the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA).

We consider that the significant adverse effects on the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis would be extensive and widespread and, if consented and built, this will change the existing landscape character to one dominated by an offshore wind farm, such that it would be described as 'Isle of Lewis and Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm'. It will be visible within a minimum radius of approximately 20 km of the Proposed Development.

We advise that the Proposed Development does not meet:

- Scotland's National Marine Plan (NMP) Policy GEN 7 and Policy 4 c) of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) due to impacts upon the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA[2]; and
- NPF4 Policy 11e (ii) due to the extensive nature of the effects on the distinctive seascapes and landscapes of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.

These effects would result from the proposed siting, scale and type of development, which we consider could not be mitigated to an acceptable impact within the site and parameters proposed by the applicant.

The Proposed Development would result in significant adverse effects on seven of the special landscape qualities (SLQs) of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. We advise this would result in an evident and noticeable material change such that the objectives of this designation and overall integrity of the NSA would be compromised.

The Proposed Development would also result in significant adverse effects across a widespread area of the distinctive northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis, including the sensitive coast, recreational beaches, renowned historical landmarks, numerous settlements, roads and recreational routes.

A.2 Background information

A.2.1 The Proposed Development

The Proposed Development would be located within Plan Option (DPO) N4. NatureScot provided a Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal for Plan Options (DPO) area in its consultation response (NatureScot, 25 March 2020[3]) to Marine Scotland's Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy published in 2020.

The SLVIA is assessed on the agreed Maximum Design Scenario which is 44 Wind Turbine Generators (WTGs) up to 338.4 m blade tip height above Mean Sea Level (AMSL). Associated infrastructure is likely to include an Offshore Substation Platform (OSP) up to 90 m AMSL, x 12

[2] https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/9149
[3] Sectoral Plan Consultation - summary and design guidance

Array Cable and up to x 12 Array Cables to Landfall within the Offshore Cable Area of Search (OCAS).

As the turbines would be over 150 m in height visible aviation lighting would be required[4]. Lighting and marking requirements for the final array layout would be subject to agreement with the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB), Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) post-consent. The Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA) considers that 25 WTGs on the perimeter of the array would be lit with red medium intensity aviation warning lights on top of the nacelle with sensor-controlled dimming. Marine Navigation lights would be fitted at platform level on 12 alternate WTGs on the perimeter of the array.

The onshore elements (the OTW Project) are being submitted as separate application under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. However, potential additive interactions between the offshore and onshore aspects resulting from the introduction of the Onshore Landfall, Landfall Substation and Onshore Cable Corridor are considered in the SLVIA.

The Proposed Development would be located approximately 11 km northeast of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA.

The nearest proposed WTG would be located approximately 6 km from the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. The northwest coast of Lewis is well settled and punctuated by notable coastal features and renowned historic sites. Communities linked by the A858 and B8011 along this stretch of coast include (from west to east with approximate distance from the closest WTG): Àird Uig 14 km southwest, Cliff 16 km southwest, Kirkibost 16 km southwest, Shawbost (including North, South and New Shawbost) 6 km south, Bragar 8 km south, Arnol 8 km south, Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas) 9 km southeast, Shader 8 km southeast, Borve and Melbost Borve 9 km southeast, Galston (North and South) 12 km southeast, South Dell 18 km east, Cross 19 km east, Swainbost 19 km east, Habost 19 km east, Coig Peighinnean 19 km east, and Eoropie 20 km east.

A.2.2 NatureScot review of EIA Report

In preparing this response we have reviewed the following principal documents:

- Spiorad na Mara EIAR – Non-Technical Summary;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR – Planning Statement;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Chapter 2 - Policy and Legislative Context, Volume 1a;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Chapter 3 – Project Description;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Chapter 3 Project Description – Figures, Volume 1c;
- Spiorad na Mara RIAA Appendix A – Confirmed Screening Conclusions;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Chapter 18 - Seascape Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Appendix 18.1 - SLVIA Methodology;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Appendix 18.2 - Assessment of Effects on Viewpoints;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Appendix 18.3 - Assessment of Effects on Coastal Character;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Appendix 18.4 - Assessment of Effects on Special Landscape Qualities, Volume 2c;
- Spiorad na Mara EIAR Appendix 18.5 Visibility of Aviation Warning Lights, Volume 2c;
- PART 001 of Spiorad na Mara EIA Appendix 18.6 SLVIA Figures and Photomontage Visualisations, Volume 2a;

[4] Civil Aviation Authority Air Navigation Order 2016

- PART 002 of Spiorad na Mara EIA Appendix 18.6 SLVIA Figures and Photomontage Visualisations, Volume 2b; and
- PART 003 of Spiorad na Mara EIA Appendix 18.6 SLVIA Figures and Photomontage Visualisations, Volume 2c.

We agree with the applicant's approach to:

- The study area radius of 60 km from the Proposed Development which we consider to be proportionate to the development type proposed;
- Methodology, the SLVIA is based upon relevant guidance and includes Coastal Character Assessment based on NatureScot Guidance[5] which is helpful for understanding effects on seascape and coastal character; and
- Baseline data collection appears comprehensive, and we agree with the scoping in and out of the landscape and visual receptors considered within the SLVIA.

The applicant's SLVIA concludes the following:

For the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA the applicant has provided an Assessment of Effects on Special Landscape Qualities (AESLQ)[6] which considers five sub-areas within the study area and reports significant adverse effects on seven SLQs within three of these sub-areas. This includes significant adverse effects on five 'overarching' SLQs of the NSA and significant adverse effects on two 'geographically specific' South Lewis and Harris SLQs

- Significant adverse seascape and landscape effects on Coastal Character Areas (CCAs) (11 CCAs out of the 17 SLVIA CCAs considered) and hinterland Landscape Character Types (LCTs) associated with these. Significant adverse night-time effects resulting from visible aviation lighting are reported for the same CCAs / LCTs (we provide a summary of these in Annex 1 to this Appendix)
- The SLVIA concludes significant adverse visual effects on 21 of the 23 grouped settlements considered in the assessment.
- Significant adverse visual effects are reported on extensive sections of sequential routes.

A more detailed summary of the SLVIA findings is included in Annex 1 to this Appendix.

A.2.3 Focus of NatureScot advice and policy context

Our advice focuses on the significant adverse effects on the SLQs of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA[7] and the seascapes and landscapes of the distinctive northwest coast of Lewis [8]. This should not be interpreted as meaning there are no other significant seascape, landscape and visual effects that need to be considered when determining the application.

Scotland's National Marine Plan (2015)[9] Policy GEN7 states that development and use that affect National Scenic Areas, National Parks and World Heritage Sites should only be permitted where:

- *"It will not adversely affect the integrity of the area or its special qualities for which it has been designated; or*

[5] https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/coastal-character-assessment
[6] https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/national-scenic-area/9149/nsa-special-qualities.pdf
[7] Scottish Natural Heritage (2010) Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 374 The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas
[8] Identifying Natural Heritage Issues of National Interest in Development Proposals
[9] Scottish Government (2015) Scotland's National Marine Plan A Single Framework for Managing Our Seas

- *Any such adverse effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance".*

While we acknowledge that NPF4 applies mainly to terrestrial planning we nevertheless include references to the Framework and its Policies as important contextual information.

NPF4[10] states that under Policy 4 c) Development proposals that will affect a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Nature Reserve will only be supported where:

- *"i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or*
- *ii. 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".*

NPF4 Policy 11e (ii) states that in addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:

- *"ii. significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable".*

South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA designation reflects the open waters, coast, hinterland, and hills and mountains and includes the popular features of Gallan Head, Reef Beach and Bosta Beach, remote hilltops, and the sense of being at the very edge of Europe. Key areas of the NSA which form an important part of its identity lie approximately 11 km from the Proposed Development.

The northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis is noted for its remote strong frontier qualities, dramatic coastline, sheltered bays and beaches, renowned historical sites and traditional crofting and fishing communities. This area of Lewis is valued as a popular visitor destination nationally and internationally. An important part of the identity of this area are the relationships of land and sea.

This advice focuses on the operational and maintenance phase of the Proposed Development / OTW Project as effects of this phase are long term (35 years).

A.3 Baseline characterisation

With reference to SLVIA Figure 18.9 the Proposed Development would be located approximately 11 km northeast of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. The western part of Wild Land Area (WLA)[11] 30 Harris – Uig Hills overlaps much of the northern part of the NSA. Sensitive areas of the north coast of the Isle of Lewis within 20 km of the Proposed Development are extensive and include but are not limited to Callanish, Dalmore Beach, Dalbeg Beach, Bragar Beach, Arnol Blackhouse, Clach an Trushel standing stone, the Steinacleit stones, the Butt of Lewis, the Hebridean Way / National Cycle Route 780 and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar / Western Isles Council Core Paths.

[10] Scottish Government (2023) National Planning Framework 4

[11] https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/wild-land-area-descriptions-and-assessment-guidance

The coastline within the NSA is highly varied and complex, with offshore islands and skerries, the distinctiveness of which contributes to the high scenic qualities associated with the northern part of this national designation. The indented coastal character continues between Carloway and Barvas, becoming simpler and more uniform east of Barvas, albeit with the same overriding northeast, southwest orientation.

The northwest coast of Lewis (outside the NSA) provides both a large-scale experience of seascape and seclusion within bays and from beaches with tangible frontier qualities and a sense of remoteness.

The Array Area forms part of the wider frontier coastal setting in northward and westward looking views from many settlements[12] on the northwest coast of Lewis linked by the A858 and from key coastal and renowned historical features. In views looking northward from within the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA, the site of the Array Area forms part of the wider seaward skyline and backdrop experienced from coastal areas including, but not limited to, Mangersta Head, Gallan Head, Valtos, Reef Beach and Bosta Beach, from settlements[13] and from higher elevations including Mealaisbhal 574 m above ordnance datum (AOD).

While there is some influence of existing onshore wind farm development on the northwest coast of Lewis within 10 km of the site of the Array Area these developments (Horshader and Baile an Truesil) are relatively small in scale and below 90 m to blade tip height. Experience of operational wind farm development within the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA is either not apparent or very limited.

With reference to SLVIA Figure 18.19, operational wind farm developments (onshore) within approximately 30 km include:

- Horshader (one turbine, 81 m blade tip height) approximately 7 km south;
- Baile an Truseil (Druim nan Carnan) (three turbines, 77 m blade tip height) approximately 8 km southeast;
- Pentland Road (six turbines, 121 m blade tip height) approximately 21 km south;
- Tolsta Community (one turbine 72 m blade tip height) approximately 23 km southeast; and
- Beinn Ghrudeag (three turbines, 125 m blade tip height) approximately 25 km south.

Consented wind farm developments include:

- Druim Leathann (14 turbines, 140 m blade tip height) approximately 23 km southeast;
- Stornoway (35 turbines, 156-180 m blade tip height) approximately 23.3 km south; and
- Uisenis (35 turbines, 156-180 m blade tip height) approximately 39.3 km south.

Offshore wind farms developments in the scoping stages which could result in some future cumulative interactions include:

- Talisk Offshore Wind Project (33 turbines, 340 m blade tip height) approximately 28.9 km northeast.

Onshore wind farm developments in the scoping stages which could result in some future cumulative interactions include:

[12] Shawbost (including North, South and New Shawbost), Bragar, Arnol, Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas), Shader, Borve and Melbost Borve, Galston (North and South), South Dell, Cross, Swainbost, Habost, and Eoropie.
[13] Àird Uig, Cliff, Kirkibost, and Carishader

- Carloway, Galson and Barvas Community Wind Farm (nine turbines, 180 m blade tip height) approximately 14 km southeast;
- Grimshader Wind Farm (19 turbines, 200 m blade tip height) approximately 28 km south; and
- Heastabhal Wind Farm (potential for significant effects on the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA) (14 turbines, 200 m blade tip height) approximately 27 km south.

A.4 NatureScot appraisal of impacts

We agree with the extensive significant adverse seascape, landscape and visual effects reported in the SLVIA and the significant adverse effects on seven of the SLQs of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. Although we consider these effects would be more expansive than is asserted in the SLVIA (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.** of this response below).

A.4.1 Landscape effects

We note that the assessment of aviation lighting appears limited to the SLVIA Viewpoints, Coastal Character Areas (CCAs) and consideration of effects on SLQs of the NSA.

The assessment of effects of aviation lighting does not appear to consider landscape effects on the inland Landscape Character Types (LCTs)[14] away from the coast where significant adverse day time effects are reported.

We consider that significant day time effects on LCT 322 Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides and LCT 326 Prominent Hills and Mountains are likely to progress into significant adverse night-time effects. The aviation lighting where visible on the skyline would result in a notable effect on key characteristics of LCT 322's: "remote upland character" being: "predominately uninhabited" and conflict with the experiences of: "expansive scale and remoteness". For LCT 326 the visible aviation lights would conflict with the key characteristic: "...contrasting in character between the open remote character of the uplands, and the more diverse patterns of settlement…" and would undermine the: "uninhabited" nature of this LCT.

A.4.2 Visual effects

We disagree with the conclusion of night-time effects on the below SLVIA Viewpoints and consider that the magnitude of change would be higher and in turn the significance of effect would be higher for:

- Viewpoint 3 North Galston, despite the partial screening of the Proposed Development we consider it is likely that significant adverse night-time effects could be experienced. This is due to the strong dark sky qualities found along the northwest coast which would be interrupted by the visible aviation lights on the skyline; and
- Viewpoint 37 Callanish, despite the presence of some baseline lighting we consider that the introduction of aviation lights seen above the skyline is likely to result in significant adverse night-time effects given. This is due to the sensitivity of the receptor/s and that people are likely to be visit this area at night to experience night skies from within and around the Callanish standing stones.

[14] https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions

The night-time assessment does not appear to be considered in detail for the below settlements where significant adverse day time effects are reported within the SLVIA, which we consider would be significant and adverse for:

- Kirkibost, where effects are likely to be similar to those reported in the SLVIA for Viewpoint 29 Bosta and Viewpoint 37 Callanish; and
- South Dell (including North Dell and Àird Dell) where effects would be similar to those reported in the SLVIA Viewpoint 2 Cross.

The night-time assessment does not appear to be considered in detail for the sequential routes where significant adverse day time effects are reported within the SLVIA. We consider that significant day time effects would extend into significant night-time effects on extensive sections of the below routes (we would anticipate similar effects to those reported in the SLVIA for VPs noted in brackets):

- A857 (VP2, VP6, VP9, VP13, VP17, VP19, VP20, and VP23);
- A858 (VP21);
- Hebridean Way / National Cycle Route 780 (VP2, VP6, VP9, VP13, VP17, VP19, VP20, and VP23);
- Core Path 1 Butt of Lewis West Coast Path (VP1 and VP3);
- Core Path 3 Na Gearrannan to Bragar (VP16);
- Core Path 5 Great Bernera Circular Route (VP29); and
- Barvas and Brue walking route (VP8, VP10 and VP 1).

A.4.3 Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind: NatureScot Design Guidance (2020)

It should be noted that the SNH/ NatureScot Sectoral Plan for Offshore Wind Design Guidance[15] identified the following key considerations for DPO N4:

- *"Inshore site and proximity to the overriding low lying flat plain of Lewis entails that effects on coastal and interior landscape character and visual receptors will be significant, widespread and extensive from all three turbine heights modelled.*
- *Very different set of landscape and visual issues arising from the siting of this relatively smaller DPO so closely inshore (in comparison to the majority of larger DPO sites further offshore).*
- *Potential for significant effects on NSA nationally designated.*
- *Focus of scattered populations and small-scale hamlets.*
- *Tangible frontier qualities from western coastal extremities with attributes of remoteness and seclusion.*
- *Potential for significant effects from aviation and marine lighting".*

Our advice stated that: We advise that any scale of turbine will introduce widespread significant day and night-time effects on sensitive coastal, landscape and visual receptors, and advised for: *"due consideration be given to turbine heights below the 200m height to mitigate significant effects".*

A.4.4 Effects on South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA

From north to south the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA extends to cover the complex coast of south-west Lewis. including some open waters, sea lochs, and lochans, inland to the

[15] Sectoral Plan Consultation - NatureScot Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Design Guidance

Lewis Hills and Mountains and south to the North Harris Hills and Mountains, then southeast across the Sound of Harris and the northern coasts and landscapes of North Uist.

We broadly agree with the approach to the study area and sub-areas considered within the SLVIA / AESLQ, which reference the NSA description: *"Around the rugged hills, there are a number of different contrasting lowland and coastal landscapes. These have been identified as knock-and-lochan, rocky indented coast, and wide sandy machair beaches contained between rocky headlands. Each type has elements of its own which combine to produce landscapes with a variety of form, colour and grain, which are further diversified by changes of scale and aspect".*

A palpable sense of the remote is experienced from the coastal edges such as Gallan Head, Mangersta and beaches such as Reef Beach and Bosta Beach reinforced by the sense of *"…dead-end journeys…"* as described in the SLVIA / AESLQ.

We agree with the significant adverse effects reported on the seven SLQs considered within Sub-area 1 – The Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline, Sub-area 2 – Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan and Sub-area 4 - The Lewis Hills and Mountains.

No significant adverse effects are reported for Sub-area 3 – The Teathaval and Uig Rocky Peatlands or for Sub-area 5 – The North Harris Hills and Mountains.

We disagree with the reporting of no significant adverse effects on some of the grouped SLQs within Sub-area 3 – The Teathaval and Uig Rocky Peatlands, and consider that effects on the following SLQs would be higher than reported for:

- A rich variety of exceptional scenery; and
- Intervisibility between landscapes.

Our consideration of effects on South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA SLQs with reference to the SLVIA / AESLQ study area, sub-areas, grouped SLQs and reported effects are provided in Table 1 below. Note that EIA text extracts in this table refer to the Proposed Development as the 'Offshore Project'.

Table 1: NatureScot consideration of effects of the Proposed Development on the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA SLQs

Sub-area 1 – The Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline	
SLQ	Significance of Effect
• *The very edge of Europe*	With regards to SLVIA Viewpoints 29 Bostadh, 30 Gallan Head and 38 Mangersta Head this SLQ is well expressed from the coastal edge and hinterland, where the applicant notes that: *The 'very edge of Europe' experience relies fundamentally on intervisibility to open waters, the extent of which are perceived as infinite, with no tangible features which could interrupt or alter this perception or where the experience of open infinite water dominates but which contains infrequent offshore islands, the scale of which appear subservient to the expanse of water, such that there is the perception of 'nothing' (no major land masses or development) and that the very edge has been reached – the open waters extending to the sea-sky horizon"*. We largely agree with the applicant that: "*The Offshore Project would introduce visibility of WTGs into these areas where previously there was none, ranging at distances of between approximately 11 km at Bernera/Beàrnaraigh, 14 km at Gallan head and 20 km at Mangersta/Mangurstadh"*, and that: *"The introduction of development*

	and a new focus would interrupt the expanse of sea, reducing the appreciation of remoteness from human influence. The appreciation of 'infinite' sea views and 'emptiness' and the simple balance of the wide expanse of sea to sky, changed and by turn the 'edge of 'quality would be significantly affected (the appreciation of which relies on the open undeveloped expanse of the Atlantic Ocean). The sense of anticipation, expectation and then reveal arriving at these western extremities would be affected with views of the Offshore Project at increasing frequency and intervals moving northwards to the coast). The WTGs would signify the coastal edge before views of the Atlantic Ocean are realised". We agree with the significant effects reported and consider that effects on this SLQ would be significant adverse. We agree that significant adverse day time effects would progress into significant adverse night-time effects with the introduction of visible aviation lights where as stated in the SLVIA: "*The potential significant effect would affect the nightscape along the coastal edge where frontier qualities are still expressed with the dark waters act as a foil to the clarity of night sky, where the visible aviation lights are likely to contrast with the remoteness of the rugged coast and headlands, and the dark profiles of headlands and islands of this part of the NSA".*
• *A rich variety of exceptional scenery* • *A great diversity of seascapes* • *Intervisibility* • *The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture*	We broadly agree with the grouping of these SLQs and the description in the SLVIA / AESLQ: "*Views are possible both inland and out over the Atlantic Ocean, but it is the interplay, the intervisibility between these 2 experiences along the coastal seascape which continually draws the eye and where the great diversity of seascapes, the exceptional scenery and the close interplay of the natural world, culture and settlement are strongly expressed. From indented coast appearing as a series of overlapping headlands extending out into the water, to other locations where the seascapes appear as a mix of flatter moorland and sea loch as backed by the mountains to the south.* *The appreciation of the natural world and environment, along the coast, balanced between the land and sea dominate the experience, imparting qualities of wildness, remoteness and seclusion. Settlement, land-use and the general experience of culture are small in scale and sporadic in locations, and as such, are appreciated as subservient and recessive, introducing a relatively 'light touch' of human intervention, the balance of land and sea enduring."* The applicant states that: *"From these headlands and coastal edges there would be greater visibility to the Offshore Project, both in turbine numbers and the vertical extent of the WTGs".* We agree that: "*Appreciation of the exceptional scenery and diversity of seascapes would be interrupted, due to the scale of change introduced by the Offshore Project, which would likely to compete with the existing points of focus, drawing attention away from the rugged irregular qualities of the fractured coastal edge. Whilst there can be wide panoramas from many of these coastal edges encompassing a wide expanse of open water (to both east and west), the location and extent of*

	the Offshore Project, proximal to or in juxtaposition with the coast, creates a defining new focus which competes with the appreciation of scenic coastal quality. *By its very nature, the Offshore Project comprises WTGs which are contemporary and functional in design, their vertical scale, uniformity and repetition within an array contrasts with the irregular rugged landform and complex, indented coastal edge detracting from the strong expression of perceived naturalness and absence of human influence which define the SLQs. The appreciation of the natural world within which settlement and culture are subservient in focus would be disrupted by views to large scale WTGs at a significant part of the coastal landscape in this area of the NSA…"*. We agree with the significant effects reported and consider that effects on these SLQs would be significant adverse. We agree that significant adverse day time effects would progress into significant adverse night-time effects as shown by Viewpoint 30. Gallan Head. The introduction of visible aviation lights would as undermine the identified SLVIA / AESLQ characteristics that: "*Reflecting this relative lack of human influence, dark sky character prevails, contributes to the extent of exceptional scenery experienced (from day into night) and the interplay between the natural world and settlement SLQs"*.
Sub-area 2 – Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan	
SLQ	Significance of Effect
• *A rich variety of exceptional scenery* • *A great diversity of seascapes* • *Intervisibility* • *The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture* • *The indivisible linkage of landscape and history* • *The very edge of Europe* • *Extensive machair and dune systems with expansive beaches (South Lewis and Harris)*	With reference to SLVIA Viewpoints 31 Valtos, 32 Reef Beech, 34 Camas na Clibhe and 36 Carishader, we note that these SLQs have been grouped by the applicant as being: "*inextricably linked in their contribution to the scenic quality and attributes of the NSA"* and that: *"It is a landscape appreciated by constantly changing and contrasting containment and reveal, journeying through the landscape".* Regarding the existing and small scale human interactions we agree that: *"What limited signs of human influence there is, crofting patterns, inbye, field boundaries, individual buildings, narrow bands of cultivation, jetties, etc are all typically small in scale, inferior to the landform and set within the cnocs and it provides localised points of interest and focus and high scenic variety…"*. That beaches are important: *"The presence of sandy beaches and machair is a coastal type more associated with Harris/Na Hearadh and the Uists/Uibhist further south, than within the northwest of the NSA, their scarcity heightens the variety and diversity of coastal scenery, the whiteness of sands juxtaposed with deep aquamarine waters contributing to that quintessential idyl of 'unspoilt Hebridean' beaches, combining to create breathtaking and wide vistas…"*. That for notable cultural links: *"The indivisible linkage of landscape and history is strongly expressed and acutely experienced when containment is afforded"*.

	We agree with the reporting that the Proposed Development would be visible in views northward from within this sub-area of the NSA at: *"…distances ranging between 7 km at Bosta/Bostadh (north of Bernera/Beàrnaraigh) and approximately 16-17 km around the southern coast of Loch Roag/Ròg"*, where: *"The Offshore Project would significantly detract from the exceptional scenic quality and diversity from the layering and overlapping of the small scale cnocs, existing small scale built features, such as dwellings, stone walls and jetties would accentuate the perceived scale of the WTGs when viewed in combination in the same vistas, the WTGs detracting from the composition of views where natural features dominate"*. *"The location of the Offshore Project north of the NSA at this location, means that the WTGs would be viewed from the south looking north. This spatial relationship means that the WTGs would be lit by the sun during midday, which may accentuate their contrast with the backcloth of darker waters"*. We agree with the significant effects reported and consider that effects on these grouped SLQs would be significant adverse, where the Proposed Development would introduce a dominant new focal point albeit partly screened in northward looking views as shown by Viewpoints 31 Valtos, 32 Reef Beech, 34 Camas na Clibhe and 36 Carishader. We agree that significant adverse day time effects would progress into significant adverse night-time effects with the introduction of visible aviation lights where as stated in the SLVIA / AESLQ: "*There are strongly expressed characteristics of remoteness and seclusion, with prevailing dark sky character, and whilst the textures and features of the sub-area are less apparent in lower light levels, colours of evening sunsets pick out water bodies and coastline, creating a different experience of light and dark, but one that is very much scenic and derived from the pattern of landscape and water distinctive to this sub-area"*.
Sub-area 3 – The Teathaval and Uig Rocky Peatlands	
SLQ	Significance of Effect
• *A rich variety of exceptional scenery* • *Intervisibility*	These SLQs are well expressed from the highpoints within ZTV coverage, including from Viewpoint 33 Forsnabhal and from the hills behind Carishader, including Beinn Miabhaig 140 m AOD, Floidreabhal a-staigh 190m AOD and Cairisiadar106 m AOD. From these locations views northward towards the WTGs are likely to be largely unrestricted with screening (if any) limited by coastal landform to the lower parts of the array. The SLVIA notes that: *"The Offshore Project would introduce visibility of the full array of WTGs in views from the elevated rocky knolls and north facing slopes (in the event they are visited)…".* We consider that effects on these SLQs when experienced from higher elevations within Sub-area 3 would be similar to effects reported on these SLQs for Sub-area 2 – Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan within the SLVIA / AESLQ, where: *"…the Offshore Project would result in a medium-high magnitude of change on the appreciation of the combined qualities of this sub-area, the inherent balance of land to water and the inferiority*

	of human influence and development, will be potentially changed by the introduction of the Offshore Project into views". We advise that effects on SLQs: *A rich variety of exceptional scenery* and *Intervisibility* within Sub-area 3 – The Teathaval and Uig Rocky Peatlands would be significant adverse and would extend into significant adverse night-time effects with the presence of visible aviation lights on the WTGs seen against the skyline in northward looking views towards the dark sea, partly behind the dark profiles of distinctive rocky islands that contribute to the diversity of seascape.
Sub-area 4 - The Lewis Hills and Mountains	
SLQ	Significance of Effect
• *A rich variety of exceptional scenery* • *The great diversity of seascapes* • *Intervisibility* • *The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture* • *The wild mountainous character (South Lewis and Harris)*	This sub-area within the NSA also covers a northern part of WLA 30 Harris – Uig Hills. We agree as stated in the SLVIA / AESLQ that: "*The 'mountainous' character and prominence of hills strongly express from the summits and within the deep glens orientated north to south. The rugged terrain and areas of exposed rock and steep slopes amplify the sense of naturalness, with the deep glens providing access into the hills containing views north and south"*. With regards to wildness and existing human interactions that: *"The strongly expressed wild land character underpins the appreciation of the wild mountainous qualities of this area of the NSA. The relative lack of views to any scale of development or contemporary land use (and also other walkers), heightens qualities of remoteness, seclusion and isolation (in particular when compared to walking the Clisham/An Cliseam mountains). The wild land mountainous SLQs is susceptible to changes from the introduction of large-scale development into views"*. We broadly agree that within this sub-area: *"The Offshore Project would introduce new visibility of prominent WTGs in views from north and northeast facing slopes and in panoramas from the summits and ridges of the northern Lewis mountains from distances between approximately 16 and 25 kms".* Although we note that Viewpoint 39 Mealaisbhal is located approximately 26. 8 km south from the nearest WTG. We agree that: "*The scale and character of the Offshore Project would introduce the experience of large-scale contemporary development, significantly eroding the previous close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture, where previously the experience of built forms was very much subservient and recessive in views, the natural environment dominates. Views of the Offshore Project in comparison to other existing signs of human influence (such as the scattered crofting around Traigh Uig/Ùige), would differ in that the WTGs are larger structures with blades visibly moving (the scattered crofting set within and visibly inferior to the immediate landform). The Offshore Project would also be more prominently located on the presently open sea to sky horizon which forms part of the backdrop to the main aspect of views north and west"*.

	We largely agree with the significant effects reported and consider that effects on these grouped SLQs would be significant adverse where the Proposed Development would introduce a dominant new focal point in northward looking views as shown by Viewpoint 39 Mealaisbhal. We consider that significant adverse day time effects would progress into significant adverse night-time effects with the introduction of visible aviation lights where as stated in the SLVIA / AESLQ: "*There are strongly expressed characteristics of remoteness and seclusion, with prevailing dark sky character, and whilst the textures and features of the sub-area are less apparent in lower light levels, colours of evening sunsets pick out water bodies and coastline, creating a different experience of light and dark, but one that is very much scenic and derived from the pattern of landscape and water distinctive to this sub-area*".

We advise that the introduction of the Proposed Development would very noticeably undermine the underlying characteristics of the NSA described within the SLVIA / AESLQ, including the: *"…diversity of scenic quality experienced (combinations of coastline, upland mountains, the contrast in character, sea lochs, the balance between sea and land, and the dominance of the natural environment over the narrow coastal strip of settlement) is acute, stemming from the concentration of character and elements into one smaller area (with respect to the NSA as a whole), where the grain of landform and main aspect of land to sea is northwards (rare in the context of the wider NSA)"* . Recognition of: *"…a microcosm of the rest of the NSA in one physically and visually separated and discrete area…", t*he: *"profound perceptions of naturalness and lack of views to any large scale development (mostly settlement and infrastructure, very small in scale, and subservient to landform), with strong wild land character and qualities of remoteness and isolation, prevailing throughout, along the coast, within the archipelago, within the moorland and in the Lewis/Leòdhas mountains"*, and that the: *"dark sky character is a quality experienced within this part of the NSA".*

We note that the applicant does not appear to make a judgment on whether the Proposed Development would compromise the objectives of designation or the overall integrity of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. With reference to the anticipated significant adverse effects on seven SLQs of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA and the widespread geographical extent (up to a minimum of 25 km) of these effects, we advise that **the introduction of the Proposed Development would result in such a substantial material change to the objectives of this designation that the overall integrity of the NSA would be compromised.**

A.4.5 Effects on northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis

Outside of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA, a palpable frontier 'edge-of-the-world' quality continues, approximately between Callanish in the west and the Butt of Lewis in the east. The distinctiveness of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis, the settled coast, and notable composition of coastal features and renowned historic sites is clearly expressed by the relationship between land and sea with its strong links to historical, cultural events and recreational focus. The Array Area forms part of the wider seaward skyline experienced in surrounding views from a wide geographical extent of the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean and widespread northward and westward looking views from coastal edges and hinterland associated

with the numerous settlements[16] linked by the A858, the Clach an Trushel standing stone, the Steinacleit stones, Dalmore Beach, Dalbeg Beach, Bragar Beach and the Butt of Lewis.

The northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis is one of the most culturally rich landscapes in Scotland. Its importance comes from a deep layering of prehistoric, Norse, and Gaelic heritage, as well as its continuing role in helping shape wider Hebridean identity. Few places in Britain preserve such a continuous and visible landscape link between ancient and modern cultural life.

Drawing on 'Commissioned Report No. 103 An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Scottish seascape'[17] in relation to offshore windfarm development within Seascape Unit Area 13: Butt of Lewis – Carloway, narrative relevant to the site of the Array Area includes: *"These areas are highly exposed to the full force of the Atlantic swell. They feel and are at the very edge of the British Isles. Whilst wind power would relate well to the concept of harnessing the power of the elements, the industrial nature and scale of development would conflict with the feeling of looking at a wild and untamed sea*". In terms of aspect that: *"The sun setting would be the dominant focus at night the appreciation of which would be compromised by backlighting and artificial lighting at dusk of wind development"*, and for night-time lighting that: *"There are some street lights in the larger settlements and settlements generally will provide some light. There is a lighthouse at the Butt of Lewis. However, the area of sea is dark without any significant shipping, and the lighting of such a development would be a substantial impact".*

Key indicators of distinctive characteristic seascape and landscape value which are likely to experience significant adverse effects from the introduction of the Proposed Development are drawn from the key seascape, landscape and visual characteristics of affected Seascape Units[18] and LCTs[19] informed by Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02-21[20] and NatureScot Coastal Character Assessment guidance[21] and are set out below:

Seascape / Coastal Edge / Landscape

- *Linear coastline with open views of Atlantic, occasionally limited by undulating landform;*
- *Exposed;*
- *Large scale landscape with open views;*
- *Expansive horizontal scale and remoteness;*
- *Constant views outwards to the sea and open moorland, giving a sense of remoteness;*
- *Predominantly uninhabited and sense of remoteness.*
- *Strong, simple relationship between croft houses and land holdings, with occasional views outwards to open moorlands, giving townships a feeling of rural remoteness;*
- *Visible cultural elements dominated by shielings and township boundary dykes;*
- *Callanish stone circle complex; and*

[16] Shawbost (including North, South and New Shawbost), Bragar, Arnol, Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas), Shader an Rubha, Borve and Melbost Borve, Galston (North and South), South Dell, Cross, Swainbost, Habost, and Eoropie.

[17] NatureScot (2005) Commissioned Report No. 103 An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Scottish seascape in relation to windfarms

[18] Scottish Natural Heritage (2005) Commissioned Report No. 103 An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Scottish seascape in relation to windfarms, Seascape Unit Area 13: Butt of Lewis – Carloway

[19] LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting, LCT 318 Linear Crofting, LCT 322 Bogy Moorland, and LCT 323 Rocky Moorland

[20] Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02-21: Table 1 - Range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value - LI TGN 02-21

[21] SNH (2017) Guidance on Coastal Character Assessment

- *Remote upland character.*

Visibility of operational windfarms from the Isle of Lewis is largely limited to localised views of the single Horshader wind turbine near Shawbost and the three turbines at Druim nan Carnan near Shader.

The importance of the Array Area as a seascape backdrop to settlements[22], Dalmore Beach, Dalbeg Beach, Bragar Beach, the Butt of Lewis and historic landmarks, such as Arnol Black House and the Clach an Trushel standing stone are shown as Viewpoints 1 to 28 for settlements (either within or nearby), Viewpoint 1 Butt of Lewis, Viewpoint 7 Clach an Trushal, Viewpoint 14 Arnol Blackhouse, Viewpoint 20 Bragar, Viewpoint 24 Dalbeg, Beag Beach, and Viewpoint 25 Dalmore Beach.

The Proposed Development would introduce a new dominant intrusive very large-scale focal point visible on the seaward skyline, seen from a wide surrounding area of the open Atlantic Ocean and in northward and westward looking views across a large geographical extent of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.

From settlements and from key recreation routes along the northwest coast the WTGs would clearly breach the skyline. The vertical height and extensive horizontal spread of these man-made elements would impinge on the open waters and adjacent coast and conflict with the small scale of settlement. The Proposed Development would significantly and adversely affect the current frontier qualities and appreciation of views from coasts, settlements, renowned historical sites and would notably affect the current perception of the: *"Linear coastline with open views of Atlantic"*, the: *"…sense of remoteness"* and would conflict with the: *"Strong, simple relationship between croft houses and land holdings…"* and: *"Visible cultural elements dominated by shielings and township boundary dykes".*

From renowned historical sites the Proposed Development would introduce very large-scale contemporary structures into northward looking views from the: *"Callanish stone circle complex"* (as shown by Viewpoint 37 Callanish) and the Clach an Trushel standing stone (Viewpoint 7), which would notably diminish the visible landscape link between generally small scale ancient and modern human interventions, accounting for the sheer scale of the development proposed.

We consider that effects on the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis would be widespread across a large geographical extent to a minimum radius of 20 km from the Proposed Development. Within this area we largely agree with the significant adverse effects reported on 27[23] of the SLVIA Viewpoints, on the numerous settlements[24] linked largely by the A858, on extensive sections of

[22] Shawbost (including North, South and New Shawbost), Bragar, Arnol, Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas), Shader an Rubha, Borve and Melbost Borve, Galston (North and South), South Dell, Cross, Swainbost, Habost, and Eoropie.

[23] Viewpoints 1 to 26, 28 Doune Carloway and 37 Callanish

[24] Shawbost (including North, South and New Shawbost), Bragar, Arnol, Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas), Shader an Rubha, Borve and Melbost Borve, Galston (North and South), South Dell, Cross, Swainbost, Habost, Coig Peighinnean, and Eoropie

this road and on the Hebridean Way / National Cycle Route 780, Core Paths and on seven CCAs[25] / associated hinterland landscapes[26] and inland landscapes[27].

From the surrounding open waters of the Atlantic Ocean to the settled coasts, sheltered beaches, renowned historical sites and hinterland along the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis the Proposed Development would be regularly seen against where the turbines would notably breach the seaward skyline and impinge on the settled frontier coast. **Accounting for the sheer scale of the Proposed Development and anticipated widespread area of effect, we advise these effects to be significant adverse and widespread on the experience of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis. We advise that significant adverse day time effects would extend into significant adverse night-time effects where aviation lights would be visible from the coastline, settlements, renowned historical landmarks, roads and from recreational routes above the dark seas, and / or coastal landform below.**

A.5 Whole Project effects

The applicant's Whole Project assessment focusses on potential additive effects of the Proposed Development together with the landfall, landfall substation, and onshore cable corridor components of the onshore project.

We agree with the significant adverse Whole Project effects reported on CCA3 Borve, Shader and Galston, CCA4 Barvas Sands and Àird Bharabhais, hinterland LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting, Viewpoints 7 Clach an Truiseil, 8 Upper Barvas, 10 Barvas Beach, settlements Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas) and Brue, and a section of the A857.

We advise that while Whole Project effects on a generally central area of the west coast of the Isle of Lewis would be significant and adverse they are unlikely to be greater than those of the Proposed Development alone.

A.6 Mitigation

We advise that the nature and scale of the Proposed Development at this location are such that it cannot be accommodated without significant adverse seascape, landscape and visual effects, including significant adverse effects and night-time effects on the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA and northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.

With reference to CAA Policy and Guidelines on Wind Turbines[28] and the need for visible aviation lights we would encourage the applicant to consider Aviation Detection and Obstacle Lighting Systems (ADLS) to help mitigate night-time effects.

A.7 Conclusion

We advise impacts would result in an evident and noticeable material change to the SLQs of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA such that the objectives of this designation and overall integrity would be compromised.

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[25] CCA2 Eoropie, CCA3 Borve, Shader an Rubha and Galston, CCA4 Barvas Sands and Àird Bharabhais, CCA5 Bragar and Port Arnol, CCA6 Loch Shiaboist, CCA7 Dalbeg and Dalmore/Dail Mhor coast to Aird Laimishader

[26] LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting, LCT 318 Linear Crofting, LCT 319 Dispersed Crofting, LCT 323 Rocky Moorland LCT 321 Machair, LCT 322 Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides

[27] LCT 322 Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides

[28] Civil Aviation Authority (2026) CAA Policy and Guidelines on Wind Turbines, CAP 764

We advise that outside the NSA significant adverse effects on the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis would be so extensive and widespread that where visible within a minimum radius of approximately 20 km of the Proposed Development that the character of the landscape would change to the 'Isle of Lewis and Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm'.

We advise that the Proposed Development does not meet Scottish National Marine Plan Policy GEN 7 and Policy 4 c) of NPF4, and may not meet NPF4 Policy 11e (ii) due to the significant adverse effects on the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA and extensive nature of the effects on the distinctive seascapes and landscapes of the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.

A.8 Appendix A: Annex 1: Applicant assessment of effects

The SLVIA reports significant adverse seascape and landscape effects on Coastal Character Areas (CCAs) (11 CCAs out of the 17 SLVIA CCAs considered) and hinterland Landscape Character Types (LCTs) associated with these. CCAs with an '*' indicate significant adverse Whole Project Effects for both the Proposed Development / OTW Project) Significant adverse night-time effects resulting from visible aviation lighting are reported for the same CCAs / LCTs listed below, including:

- CCA2 Eoropie / LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting / LCT 321 Machair;
- CCA3 Borve, Shader and Galston* / LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting*;
- CCA4 Barvas Sands and Àird Bharabhais* / LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting*;
- CCA5 Bragar and Port Arnol/ LCT 318 Linear Crofting;
- CCA6 Loch Shiaboist / LCT 318 Linear Crofting;
- CCA7 Dalbeg and Dalmore coast to Aird Laimishader/ LCT 318 Linear Crofting / LCT 323 Rocky Moorland;
- CCA11 Bernera Islands / LCT 324 Cnoc and Lochan;
- CCA14 An Caolas including Reef Beach and Cliff Beach / LCT 319 Dispersed Crofting / LCT 321 Machair / LCT 324 Cnoc and Lochan;
- CCA15 Gallan Head / LCT 318 Linear Crofting / LCT 323 Rocky Moorland; and
- CCA17 Mangersta Head.

Significant adverse landscape effects are reported on LCTs inland from the coast:

- LCT 322 Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides; and
- LCT 326 Prominent Hills and Mountains.

Significant adverse Whole Project Effects for both the Proposed Development / OTW Project are reported on:

- LCT 317 Gently Sloping Crofting;
- LCT 321 Machair; and
- LCT 322 Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides.

Significant adverse visual effects are reported on 37 of the 42 SLVIA Viewpoints. The applicant reports significant adverse night-time effects resulting from visible aviation lighting on 31 of the 42 SLVIA Viewpoints which are underlined below. Viewpoints with an '*' indicate significant adverse Whole Project Effects for both the Proposed Development / OTW Project:

- 1 Butt of Lewis;
- 2 Cross;
- 3 South Galston;
- 4, Melbost Borve;
- 5 Shader Core Path;
- 6 Upper Shader;
- 7 Clach an Truiseil*;
- 8 Upper Barvas Cemetery*;
- 9 Upper Barvas;
- 10 Barvas Beach*;
- 11 North of Brue;
- 12 Loch na Muilne;
- 13 Barvas;

- 14 Arnol Blackhouse;
- 15 Arnol Village;
- 16 Bragar Beach;
- 17 Sheiling near Loch Urghag (between Brue and Arnol);
- 18 Shawbost Core Path;
- 19 A858 Abhainn Arnol;
- 20 Bragar;
- 21 A857 (inland south of Barvas);
- 23 Shawbost;
- 24 Dalbeg Beach;
- 25 Dalmore Beach;
- 26 Beinn na Cloich;
- 28 Doune Carloway;
- 29 Bosta;
- 30 Gallan Head;
- 31 Valtos;
- 32 Reef Beach;
- 33 Forsnabhal;
- 34 Camas na Clibhe;
- 36 Carishader;
- 37 Callanish;
- 38 Mangersta Head;
- 39 Mealaisbhal; and
- 41 Sgalabhal.

Significant adverse visual effects are reported on 21 of the 23 grouped settlements considered in the SLVIA. The settlements underlined are those where the applicant appears to identify significant adverse night-time effects from an associated SLVIA Viewpoint (VP). Settlements with an '*' indicate significant adverse Whole Project Effects for both the Proposed Development / OTW Project:

- Àird Uig (VP30);
- Arnol(VP15);
- Barvas (including Upper and Lower Barvas) (VP9)*;
- Borve and Melbost Borve (VP4);
- Bragar (VP20);
- Brue (VP11)*;
- Carishader (VP36);
- Cliff (VP34);
- Coig Peighinnean (VP1);
- Cross (VP2);
- Dalbeg (VP24);
- Dalmore (VP25);
- Galston (North and South) (VP3);
- Eoropie (VP1);
- Habost (VP2);
- Kirkibost (no VP);
- Shawbost (including North, South and New Shawbost) (VP18);

- South Dell (including North Dell and Àird Dell) (No VP); and
- Swainbost (VP2).

Significant adverse visual effects are reported on extensive sections of sequential routes. Routes with an '*' indicate significant adverse Whole Project Effects for both the Proposed Development / OTW Project, including the:

- A857*;
- A858;
- Hebridean Way / National Cycle Route 780;
- Core Path 1 Butt of Lewis West Coast Path;
- Core Path 3 Na Gearrannan to Bragar;
- Core Path 5 Great Bernera Circular Route; and
- Barvas and Brue walking route.

For the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA the applicant has provided an Assessment of Effects on Special Landscape Qualities (AESLQ) which broadly follows the NatureScot Special Landscape Qualities - Guidance on assessing effects[29]. The AESLQ considers five sub-areas within the study area and reports significant adverse effects on seven SLQs within three of these sub-areas. This includes significant adverse effects on five 'overarching' SLQs of the NSA and significant adverse effects on two 'geographically specific' South Lewis and Harris' SLQs as grouped within the sub-areas below:

Table 2: relevant sub-areas of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA

Sub-area 1 – The Outer Northwest Lewis Coastline
The very edge of Europe
A rich variety of exceptional scenery *A great diversity of seascapes* *Intervisibility* *The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture*
Sub-area 2 – Lewis Coastal Cnoc and Lochan
A rich variety of exceptional scenery *A great diversity of seascapes* *Intervisibility* *The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture* *The indivisible linkage of landscape and history* *The very edge of Europe* *Extensive machair and dune systems with expansive beaches (South Lewis and Harris)*
Sub-area 4 - The Lewis Hills and Mountains
A rich variety of exceptional scenery *The great diversity of seascapes* *Intervisibility* *The close interplay of the natural world, settlement and culture* *The wild mountainous character (South Lewis and Harris)*

Significant adverse night-time effects resulting from the presence of visible aviation lighting are reported for the SLQs within the above three sub areas.

No significant adverse cumulative effects are identified in the SLVIA.

[29] https://www.nature.scot/doc/special-landscape-qualities-guidance-assessing-effects

NATURESCOT ADVICE ON SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Appendix B – Marine and intertidal ornithology

The documents reviewed in our assessment of the EIA Baseline, CRM and RIAA include the following:

- EIAR Chapter 14 Marine and Nearshore Ornithology
- EIAR Chapter 14 Marine and Nearshore Ornithology - Figures, Volume 2b
- EIAR Appendix 14.1 - Baseline Characterisation Report
- EIAR Annex 14.1.4 - MRSea Modelling Report
- EIAR Appendix 14.3 - Collision Risk Model Technical Report
- EIAR Appendix 14.4 - Migratory Collision Risk Monitoring Report, Volume 2c
- Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment
- RIAA Appendix E - HRA Population Viability Analysis Report
- RIAA Appendix G - Ornithology In-Combination Data Tables
- Offshore Project HRA Derogation Case
- Project HRA Compensation Plan Roadmap

B.1 EIA summary

B.1.1 Proposal alone

We largely agree with the Applicant's conclusion of No Significant Effect for the project alone impacts, with the following exceptions:

We request clarification on the following point to enable conclusions to be made:

- figures used in the **guillemot** baseline assessment
- The closest **gannet** colony selected is incorrect; Rockall is identified as the closest, we advise this should be North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA. This requires amending.
- Intertidal and nearshore survey data has not been provided; we request clarification as to whether this is being covered in the terrestrial application. If not, this information will be required to advise on the potential impacts of cable laying and landfall construction activities on ornithological receptors

We require the following additional information in order to provide our final advice on the 'project alone' assessment:

- **Common gull** - We request that CRM is carried out for this species.
- **Great skua** – We request that the Applicant undertake Collision Risk Modelling (CRM) for great skua, using DAS data including all great skua behaviours and records across the entire study area. We advise impacts to great skua may have been underestimated due to uncertainty around the usage of the project site by great skua, and due to the use of pre-HPAI colony count data for the calculation of the regional population estimate.
- **Herring gull** – We request that the Applicant undertake project alone and cumulative PVA assessments for herring gull, using the breeding season regional population estimate for the non-breeding season. The breeding season regional population estimate should have been used for the assessment of non-breeding season impacts, and PVAs are required for project alone and cumulative impacts using this approach.

- Limited vessel traffic details have been provided. We are unable to advise on the potential impacts of increased vessel traffic on ornithological receptors until further detail is provided. This should be provided and assessed in a Vessel Management Plan.

B.1.2 Cumulative assessment

We have identified the following points in the cumulative assessment, for which we will require additional information to provide our final advice on the assessment:

- **Gannet CEA** – the "with Berwick Bank" scenario includes fewer mortalities than the "without Berwick Bank" scenario, as the Applicant states that Berwick Bank plans to compensate for a larger number of gannets than impacted. We do not agree with this approach in the absence of an agreed seabird Compensation Plan for Berwick Bank and therefore are unable to provide a conclusion in relation to the "with Berwick Bank" scenario.
- **Great skua** – depending upon the results of a CRM reassessment for great skua, a cumulative assessment may be required.
- **Herring gull** – as per the project alone assessment, a PVA is required for the cumulative assessment when using the NatureScot guidance for calculating the annual regional population estimate and mortalities.

B.1.3 Summary of our EIA conclusions (these may differ to our RIAA conclusions)

Table 3: Summary of our EIA conclusions for the project alone and cumulative assessment

Species	**Project Alone conclusions**		**Cumulative conclusions**	
	Applicant	**NatureScot**	**Applicant**	**NatureScot**
Arctic tern	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Kittiwake	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Great black-backed gull	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Herring gull	Not significant	**PVA required**	Not significant	**PVA required**
Gannet	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	**Re-assessment required**
Guillemot	Not significant	Not significant	Not assessed	Not significant
Razorbill	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Puffin	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Red-throated diver	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Great northern diver	Not significant	Not significant	Not assessed	Not significant
Great skua	Not significant	**Re-assessment required**	Not significant	**Re-assessment required**
Fulmar	Not significant	Not significant	Not assessed	Not significant

Manx shearwater	Not significant	Not significant	Not assessed	Not significant
E. storm petrel	Not significant	Not significant	Not assessed	Not significant
L. storm petrel	Not significant	Not significant	Not assessed	Not significant

B.2 RIAA summary

B.2.1 Proposal alone assessment of AEoSI

The applicant concludes for the project alone that there will be no adverse effect on site integrity (AEOSI) for any SPA, which we provisionally support. Noting that our conclusions for gannet at Ailsa Craig SPA is currently provisional.

B.2.2 In-combination assessment of AEoSI

For the qualifying species and sites below, **we have concluded AEoSI in-combination** with other offshore wind farm projects under the second in-combination scenario (All projects, excluding consented projects with a commitment to compensation):

- Kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA
- Kittiwake at West Westray SPA
- Gannet at Forth Islands SPA
- Gannet at Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA
- Red-throated diver at Lewis Peatlands SPA

For the qualifying species and sites below, **we are unable to conclude no AEoSI in-combination** with other offshore wind farm projects:

- Kittiwake at Cape Wrath SPA
- Kittiwake at North Caithness Cliffs SPA
- Gannet at Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA
- Razorbill at St Kilda SPA
- Razorbill at Seas off St Kilda SPA

An adverse effect on site integrity was also concluded when considering in-combination effects for Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA but Natural England should be consulted on this.

For the qualifying species and sites below, we have been unable to reach a conclusion and therefore require additional information to provide our final advice:

- Lewis Peatland SPA – The assessment for black-throated diver uses the biogeographic population and will need to consider the SPA population.
- Impacts to various SPAs for Greenland white fronted geese which are likely to migrate through the area.

We will require further additional information to inform our advice on the application as follows:

- An updated impact assessment for puffin at Cape Wrath SPA using more recent colony counts
- The rounding of mortality rate outputs to 2 decimal places and undertake any additional PVAs that are required.

- It is not clear from the information presented in the application why the upper impact scenario for gannet at Ailsa Craig SPA (project alone) has a higher CPS. We have assumed this is a clerical error but request that the applicant provide clarification on this.
- The figures relating to Muir Mhor, Ossian and Caledonia have been updated by these developments so those used in the in-combination assessment will need to be updated
- In section 13.2.1.2 the applicant states they have used proxy sites, but it is not clear what this entailed. We request further details on which sites this was applied to and how the numbers were calculated.
- For Canna and Sanday SPA, the excluding Berwick Bank scenario resulted in a larger increase in mortality rate for the upper impact scenario for puffin than including Berwick Bank scenario. We believe this is an error but ask the applicant to clarify what the including and excluding upper scenario increase in mortality rate should be.
- For razorbill at North Rona and Sule Sgeir SPA an assessment was made for project alone but not in the in-combination assessment, can the applicant clarify why this is the case
- For great skua we request that the applicant undertakes a CRM assessment but includes birds seen in the survey area and buffer and includes both sitting and flying birds. This will allow us to undertake an assessment.

B.3 Baseline characterisation

B.3.1 Baseline report (Appendix 14.1)

The baseline report, the data collection and modelling methods used to calculate abundance and density estimates follow our guidance. The applicant undertook 24 months of DAS using the buffers that were agreed at pre-application.

The availability bias used for auk species align with methods based on Thaxter (2010)[30] and Spencer (2012)[31]. The applicant has also undertaken abundance and density estimates using a model-based approach (MRSea) as we requested and where this was not possible design-based estimates have been used.

However, there are additional aspects we have noted, the key issues where further clarity is required are summarised as follows:

Section 4.5.1.8 – the applicant uses Seabirds Count as the basis of population counts stating it is the most contemporaneous counts, however, these counts were all done prior to the outbreak of HPAI and the applicants DAS (2002 – 2024) were undertaken during the HPAI outbreak. Gannet and great skua were first reported to be suffering from HPAI in 2021. There has been colony counts undertaken post HPAI to try and understand what impacts the disease outbreak has had on seabird populations, such as Tremlett et al. 2024[32] and data available on the Seabird Monitoring Programme website.

Section 7.4.3.2 – we requested that collision risk modelling was undertaken for common gull. The applicant has not been able to do this as the species was not recorded within the turbine area. The

[30] Thaxter, C.B., Wanless, S., Daunt, F., Harris, M.P., Benvenuti, S., Watanuki, Y., Grémillet, D. and Hamer,K.C., 2010. Influence of wing loading on the trade-off between pursuit-diving and flight in common guillemots and razorbills. The Journal of Experimental Biology, 213, 1018-1025.

[31] Spencer, S. M., 2012. Diving Behavior and Identification of Sex of Breeding Atlantic Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*), and Nest-Site Characteristics of Alcids on Petit Manan Island, Maine [Masters]. University of Massachusetts Amherst. https://doi.org/10.7275/2740959

[32] Tremlett, C. J., Cleasby, I. R., Bolton, M., & Wilson, L. J. (2024). Declines in UK breeding populations of seabird species of conservation concern following the outbreak of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in 2021–2022. Bird Study, 71(4), 293–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/00063657.2024.2438641

species is present within the wider survey area and buffer. The applicant should have highlighted this to us prior to submission so that we could have discussed what next steps would have been. **We request that the applicant provides collision risk modelling based upon the survey area and buffer and to include flying and sitting birds.** This may be a precautionary approach, but DAS is a snapshot of how birds use an area so this approach will allow an assessment to be undertaken.

Section 7.10.3.1 – The applicant states that as great skua are only seen in one survey there is probably little chance of an impact. This does not account for the fact that great skua were massively impacted by HPAI from the 2021 breeding season so there will be fewer birds recorded in the DAS. It is also unknown how species behaviour has been impacted by HPAI. Although the applicant does assess potential impacts of the development on great skua through the migratory CRM approach, this will not fully account for all potential impacts. **We request that the applicant undertakes a CRM assessment but includes birds seen in the array area and buffer and includes sitting and flying birds.** We can then undertake this assessment.

Section 7.12.2.1 – the figure for guillemot (5759) stated (highest design-based estimate for guillemot) is not below the 1% regional threshold the applicant states. 1% of the regional non-breeding population as stated in this paragraph is 1,816.

The applicant states that the highest model-based estimate is 2708 from September 2023, however the highest is September 2022 with 5552 (taken from table 7-18) and to note that the figure for September 2023 in table 7-18 is 2590 and the 2708 figure is from the design-based estimate for September 2023.

The applicant also states that the non-breeding and breeding regional populations are 181, 646 and signpost back to table 4-3 but this figure does not appear next to guillemot in this table so we are unclear what this is based upon. **We request the applicant to provide clarity on these points.**

Section 7.12.3.1 – it is stated here that guillemot do not meet the 1% threshold of 1,816 to meet the applicant's threshold for regional importance, however, the abundance estimates do go over this threshold over multiple months as presented in table 7-17 (design based) and 7-18 (model based). They go over the threshold even if you use the population estimate in Table 4-3. **We request that the applicant provides further explanation on this.**

Section 7.15.2.1 – the applicant states that the highest design-based and estimate for puffin is July 2022 with 10,456 birds and this it is the same peak month for model based but a lower estimate of 9065. The 9065 does not appear in the model-based estimates in table 7-25, the July estimate is 10,308 for 2023.

Section 7.20.1.2 – the applicant states that Rockall is the closest gannet colony to the proposed development, no location information is provided for this site. We advise North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA is the closest gannet colony. **The applicant should clarify this.**

Section 7.20.1.3 – the applicant makes no mention of the fact that gannet have been dramatically impacted by HPAI. The population estimates here are from pre-HPAI but the DAS was undertaken during/post HPAI impacts so the baseline population used should have reflected this.

Sections 7.21.3.1 and 7.22.3.1 – as highlighted cormorants and shags were recorded within the survey area but not within the study area. These species should be assessed further in relation to disturbance around where the cable corridor will come ashore in the onshore aspect of the project. **There is potential for these species to roost or nest on structures associated with the development, if consented.**

Section 7.23.1.2 – the conclusions made here for storm petrels are not appropriate. In September 2022 the abundance estimate for storm petrel spp. was 102 birds in the study area, this suggests these birds are making use of the study area. September also falls within the breeding period of both the European storm petrel and Leach's storm petrel, and they are within foraging range for SPAs for both species.

DAS is also not the most appropriate method to detect how storm petrel species are using an area as they are nocturnal in nature, DAS is flown during the day, so there is potential for this species to be missed. The applicant could have looked at different methods to understand these species movements such as making use of the storm petrel tracking that has been happening on St Kilda and Treshnish Isles.

Due to the inability to assess storm petrel quantitively and the lack of understanding how light attraction might impact these species **we request post consent monitoring around these points and can advise further if the application gains consent**.

Section 8.1.1.2 – the applicant suggests that petrels and skuas only make use of the area in numbers that may be of concern during migration. We accept that there may be peaks in the usage of the area on migration for these species. However, as highlighted above, the applicant has not fully accounted for why great skua and petrel species may not have been detected in the DAS campaign. If consented, we **request pre and post construction surveys and monitoring to better understand the potential impacts on these species.**

B.4 Assessment approach

B.4.1 Content and quality of the application

Overall, this application is generally good quality. The assessment is easy to follow, and the results are clearly presented. The Applicant has largely followed NatureScot guidance and advice. There are a few cases where outdated data sources have been used. There are also a few cases where approaches that do not reflect our current preferences have been used. We have therefore assessed whether these differences in approach would significantly impact our conclusions.

The applicant's methodology and approach to assessments is largely appropriate. Inputs and outputs are provided in sufficient detail for the Applicant's working to be double checked, and the calculations and analyses that we have checked have been undertaken correctly.

B.4.2 Methodology

B.4.2.1 Impact assessment criteria

The Applicant's assessment of seabird species sensitivity has considered: the potential for recovery of the receptor, the vulnerability of the receptor to a specific impact and the conservation value of the receptor. The recoverability of the receptors has been based on several factors, including the UK population trend as per Seabirds Count (Burnell et al., 2023)[33]. The Seabirds Count uses count data from between 2015 and 2021, and pre-dates the HPAI outbreak in seabirds in the UK which severely impacted several skua, gannet, gull, tern and auk species. Therefore, the UK population trend presented in Seabirds Count may not accurately reflect the recoverability of species affected by HPAI.

[33] Burnell, D., Perkins, A. J., Newton, S. F., Bolton, M., Tierney, T. D., Dunn, T. E. and Vaughan, R., 2023. Seabirds Count A Census of Breeding Seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015–2021). Lynx Nature Books. ISBN 978-84-16728-60-2.

In particular, the Applicant has assessed great skua as having a medium recoverability. By our assessment, considering more recent count data, great skua would have low recoverability.

B.4.2.2 Intertidal and nearshore surveys

The Applicant has not presented intertidal survey data for the potential cable landfall sites. We assume this will be part of the terrestrial planning application and have not undertaken an assessment of the potential impacts to species utilising the intertidal and nearshore zone that may be impacted by cable work construction and pre-construction activities.

B.4.2.3 Displacement report (Appendix 14.2)

The displacement assessment undertaken by the Applicant follows NatureScot guidance, and the parameters used for the guidance approach also match NatureScot guidance. Peak abundance counts for each season were used to estimate displacement, with Annex 14.2.1 showing the seasonal peak abundances which were selected. Displacement matrices were used to calculate the displacement mortality estimates. Results are presented for displacement assessments using both the design-based estimates and model-based estimates of bird abundance.

Several SeabORD analyses have also been undertaken, using the MATLAB version of the tool, and the results of this analysis have been presented (for context only) within Annex 14.2.2. We note that the Applicant has described encountering a large number of difficulties in using this version of the tool. An updated and restructured R version of SeabORD is under development and is expected to address the issues discussed by the Applicant.

We note that fulmar have been assessed qualitatively for barrier effects, as requested by NatureScot.

There appears to be a minor error in the copying of displacement mortality estimates from the Displacement report through to the EIAR, in table 4-1 14.40

However, as the higher numbers were reported in the EIAR, and the percentage point change in survival was still below the threshold for PVA, this difference does not affect our conclusions.

B.4.3 Regional population estimates

B.4.3.1 Breeding season

Regional population estimates have been based on colony count data from Seabirds Count. While the Seabirds Count dataset is robust, it covers colony count data from 2015 to 2021 and therefore is not adequately contemporaneous to DAS data collected between 2022 and 2024, particularly considering the impacts of the HPAI outbreak, which occurred between Seabirds Count and the Applicant's DAS regime and resulted in significant population declines for several seabird species.

We have therefore compared the colony counts for sites presented in EIAR Annex 14.1.5 - *Colonies in Regional Breeding Population* by the Applicant, to more recent counts available in the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) database (BTO, JNCC, and RSPB, 2026). We prioritised counts collected as close to the mid-point of the DAS regime as possible, i.e. 2023[34]. We calculated and compared the percentage point change in survival using the updated breeding season regional population. For the subset of species we assessed, the use of updated colony counts did not

[34] BTO, JNCC, and RSPB, 2026. Seabird Monitoring Programme. Available at: https://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/data.jsp [Accessed April 2026]

impact the requirement for PVA. Great skua showed the greatest decline in breeding season regional population size.

Table 4: Comparison of Applicant and updated breeding season regional population estimates for a subset of the valued ornithological receptor species.

	Breeding season regional population estimate (breeding adult individuals + immatures)		
Species	**Applicant estimate (Table 14.15)**	**Updated estimate**	**Difference (% change)**
Great skua	53,100	18,992	-34,108 (-64.2%)
Gannet	922,238	765,967	-156,271 (-16.9%)
Guillemot	278,589	254,473	-24,116 (-8.7%)
Kittiwake	221,825	223,077	1,252 (+0.6%)
Great black-backed gull	1,645	1,632 [35]	-13 (-0.8%)
Herring gull	3,148	3,566 [1]	418 (+13.3%)
Arctic tern	1,814	1,488	-326 (-18.0%)

In the above table the Applicant's estimate has been taken from Table 14.15 of the EIAR and is based on Seabirds Count. The updated estimate was calculated by NatureScot using colony counts for the same colonies taken from the SMP database (accessed April 2026). Colony counts as close to the mid-point of the project's DAS regime (i.e. summer 2023) were selected. Immature numbers were estimated using the same approach as the applicant – using the "immatures per adult" values presented by Furness 2015[36].

Razorbill

We note that a k value of 0.67 has been used in the conversion of razorbill IND to AON and total adult individuals. Seabirds Count makes use of a more up-to-date k value of 0.75. As the resulting difference in total adult individuals is small it does not impact our conclusions.

B.4.3.2 Non-breeding season

Herring gull

The Applicant has used the non-breeding season BDMPS from Furness (2015) as the non-breeding season regional population size for herring gull. Herring gulls are expected to stay within the vicinity of their breeding colonies during the non-breeding season (Furness, 2015); therefore, we would typically expect the use of the breeding season regional population estimate for the non-breeding season assessment. We do acknowledge that herring gull have not been discussed in detail in the scoping process, and that our preferred approach is not specified in our published guidance. However, as no SPAs designated for herring gull have connectivity to the project, it is particularly important that potential impacts are considered accurately within the EIA.

Using the breeding season regional population estimate results in a percentage point change in mortality above the 0.02 threshold (both using Seabirds Count colony counts and updated colony

[35] The majority of the great-black backed and herring gull colonies in the assessment have not been surveyed since Seabirds Count, therefore the updated count may not be accurate.

[36] Furness, R.W. (2015). Non-breeding season populations of seabirds in UK waters: Population sizes for Biologically Defined Minimum Population Scales (BDMPS). Natural England Commissioned Reports, No. 164.

counts). **Therefore, PVAs are requested for this species for project alone and cumulative impacts in the non-breeding season.**

Table 5: Comparison of the calculation of percentage point change (PPC) in survival in the non-breeding season for herring gull using different data sources for the non-breeding season regional population estimate.

Scenario	**Population estimate (breeding adults + immatures)**		**PPC in survival for non-breeding season (1.65 collisions)**
	Breeding Season	**Non-breeding season**	
Applicant's original assessment	3,148	173,299	0.00%
NatureScot approach, Seabirds Count	3,148	3,148	**0.06%**
NatureScot approach, updated counts	3,378	3,378	**0.05%**

B.4.4 Annual regional population estimates

The Applicant has selected the larger of either the breeding season or non-breeding season regional population estimates for use as the annual regional population estimate. This approach runs the risk of underestimating annual impacts, due to the fact that for most species the non-breeding season regional population is much larger, both due to the inclusion of birds from outside the UK, and also due to the fact that the BDMPS is based on colony counts pre-dating 2015, which are likely to be higher than more recent colony counts.

An alternate approach to annual regional population estimate, which NatureScot has agreed with West of Orkney and Salamander wind farms, adjusts the non-breeding season mortality estimate to remove impacts to birds that are not a part of the breeding season regional population.

The steps are as follows:

- The proportion of birds in the non-breeding season population which are also in the breeding season population is estimated by dividing the breeding season population estimate by the non-breeding season population estimate.
- The non-breeding season mortality estimate is then multiplied by this proportion to calculate the mortalities from the non-breeding season which can be applied to the regional breeding population.
- The annual mortality estimate is then calculated by adding the adjusted non-breeding season mortality estimate to the breeding season mortality estimate. The breeding season regional population estimate can be used with the annual mortality estimate for the calculation of percentage point change in mortality and in PVAs.

We have calculated annual regional population estimates using this alternative method and assessed if this affects whether the percentage point change in survival threshold is met in any case. Under the alternate approach the annual impacts of Arctic tern, and Herring gull would now pass the 0.02 percentage point change threshold, however, for both species the impacts were only predicted for one season, and so the annual impacts are not expected to be different to the seasonal impacts.

B.4.5 Offshore ornithology collision risk modelling (CRM) - Appendix 14.3

We agree with the species assessed, which include black-legged kittiwake, great black-backed gull. herring gull, Arctic tern, fulmar, Manx shearwater; and northern gannet.

The applicant's approach to undertaking the collision risk modelling follows our guidance as laid out in Guidance Note 7 (NatureScot, 2025) [1], they have used the sCRM tool and have undertaken stochastic and deterministic analysis and presented both outputs. We support the outputs taken forward in the assessment for these species.

In our pre-application advice, we requested that collision risk modelling was undertaken for common gull. The applicant has not been able to do this as the species was not recorded within the array area. The species is however present within the wider survey area and buffer. Had the applicant highlighted this to us prior to submission we would have provided further advice. **We would request that the applicant provides collision risk modelling based upon the survey area and buffer and to include flying and sitting birds.** This may be a precautionary approach, but DAS is a snapshot of how birds use an area so this approach will allow an assessment to be undertaken.

A species that would typically be assessed using the sCRM approach is great skua, but the applicant has assessed this species using the migratory CRM, the reasoning given is due to the low number of great skua seen in the study area. This reasoning does not take account for the fact that great skua are one of the species most impacted by the HPAI outbreak. As mentioned previously DAS is a snapshot of the way birds are using the environment, HPAI reduced great skua populations in the UK by 73% (Tremlett et al., 2024[5]). All of these factors could have played a role in why the applicant was not detecting great skua in their surveys. **We will therefore request that the applicant undertakes a CRM assessment but includes bird seen in the survey area and buffer and includes sitting and flying birds.** This will allow us to provide advice on the project's potential impacts on great skua.

It should be noted though that for several species that we would usually expect to be run using the sCRM approach have been assessed under a migratory approach and have been designated by the applicant as migratory seabirds.

Section 2.1.1.6 – as requested Manx shearwater was assessed for collision, the applicant uses the parameters set out in Johnston et al. (2014[37]) due to the lack of other sources. However, this does not account for the possibility that this species may be attracted to light sources from the windfarm during operation which could in turn increase the chances of collision. We appreciate that it currently not possible to quantitively assess what this increased attraction might do so we are not requesting any further steps at this stage. However, **we will advise that post consent monitoring is required to look at this potential attraction for shearwater and petrel species.**

Section 2.2.1.2 – the applicant highlights that within NatureScot Guidance Note 7[6] that CRM parameters are available for four species the appendix looks at, namely kittiwake, herring gull, great black-backed gull and gannet. They state that parameters for the other species are not presented (Arctic tern and Manx shearwater) so they have sourced parameters from best available evidence. However, our guidance note clearly states that for species not listed within the note the developer should contact us to discuss this, from our understanding this was not done. We are not

[37] Johnston, A., Cook, A.S.C.P., Wright, L.J., Humphreys, E.M. and Burton, N.H.K. (2014) Modelling flight heights of marine birds to more accurately assess collision risk with offshore wind turbines. Journal of Applied Ecology 51, 31–41 doi: 10.1111/1365-2664.12191.

requesting additional information for this it is just to highlight that the requested process does not appear to have been followed.

Section 2.6.1.6 – the method described here is not a suitable way to calculate a pooled standard deviation. An example of how we would anticipate a pooled standard deviation should be calculated can be found here - https://math.stackexchange.com/questions/2971315/how-do-i-combine-standard-deviations-of-two-groups

We note the section of the CRM appendix where the applicant considers uncertainty. We aim to keep our guidance up to date as new research becomes available, but our advice contained in guidance note 7 is still our standing advice and our assessment is based upon the outputs using these parameters.

B.4.6 Migratory CRM – seabirds

The applicant undertook an assessment of various seabird species using an approach similar to how migratory waterbirds (geese, ducks etc) are assessed. This was discussed with us at a meeting on 16th April 2025. The approach taken is outlined in Appendix 14.4 - Migratory Collision Risk Monitoring Report, Volume 2c section 2.2. The species taken forward as part of this assessment were:

- Little Gull
- Sandwich Tern
- Little Tern
- Common Tern
- Arctic Tern
- Arctic Skua
- Great Skua
- Pomarine Skua
- Long-tailed Skua
- European Storm Petrel
- Leach's Petrel

We would like to acknowledge that the applicant has attempted an assessment for the above species however, on review of the information provided we have concerns with the key source used to base the assessment on - *Strategic assessment of collision risk of Scottish offshore wind farms to migrating birds, WWT Consulting and MacArthur Green (2014)*[38]. NatureScot has always advised against this part of the report being used, which was highlighted in the meeting on the 16 April 2025. We also advised that more up to date information should have been investigated. Having said this, we do not disagree with the conclusion made other than for species that are mentioned elsewhere in this advice.

B.4.7 Migratory CRM - waterbirds

The applicant undertook collision risk modelling for migratory species using the Marine Directorate mCRM tool, we support the use of this tool. All species within the model were included apart from gannet, which is appropriate. There are discrepancies between Table 2: Migratory waterbirds species included in collision risk modelling and Table 7: Results of mCRM in the EIAR Appendix 14.4 - Migratory Collision Risk Monitoring Report, Volume 2c, the species listed

[38] WWT Consulting and MacArthur Green (2014). Strategic assessment of collision risk of Scottish offshore wind farms to migrating birds. [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-marine-freshwater-science-volume-5-number-12-strategic-assessment/

in each table do not match. The following species do not appear in Table 2 but do appear in Table 7:

Table 6: Discrepancies between Table 2 and Table 7 in the EIAR Appendix 14.4 - Migratory Collision Risk Monitoring Report, Volume 2c and if the migratory path intersects the development.

Species not in Table 2 (in mCRM report)	Migratory path intersects turbine area
Bean goose	No
Bewick's swan	No
Canadian light - bellied Brent goose	Yes
Common scoter	Yes
Dark-bellied Brent goose	No
Eider	Yes
European white-fronted goose	No
Gadwall	No
Goldeneye	Yes
Goosander	Yes
Greenland barnacle goose	Yes
Greenland white-fronted goose	Yes

It is not clear why these discrepancies have occurred as no explanation is provided. This check was done by looking at the strategic study of collision risk for birds on migration and further development of the stochastic collision risk modelling tool – Work package 1 report (Woodward et al., 2023[39]) and looking at the migratory maps assigned to each species. This issue does not impact our assessment of this appendix as all species we would have expected to be run through the mCRM model were and outputs provided, so we were still able to make an assessment.

B.4.8 Apportioning (From RIAA Appendix D)

Breeding season calculations

The breeding season apportioning calculations have been undertaken in line with NatureScot's interim guidance (NatureScot, 2018)[40]. Colonies have been screened in correctly, using edge to edge foraging ranges, and centre-to-centre distances have been used for the apportioning calculations. We found no errors in the subset of species we checked.

[39] Woodward, I. D., Thaxter, C. B., Owen, E., Bolton, M., Ward, R. M., and Cook, A. S. (2023). The value of seabird foraging ranges as a tool to investigate potential interactions with offshore wind farms. Ocean and Coastal Management, 254, 107192.
[40] NatureScot, 2018. Interim Guidance on apportioning impacts from marine renewable developments to breeding seabird populations in SPAs. [Online]. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/interimguidance-apportioning-impacts-marine-renewable-developments-breeding-seabird-populations [Accessed April 2026].

We did note the use of Seabirds Count for the colony counts used in the calculation of apportioning. However, after recalculated the apportioning values for a subset of species (kittiwake and gannet) using more recent counts we concluded the use of updated colony counts would not result in any additional PVAs.

We note that great skua SPAs with theoretical connectivity to the Project have experienced very large declines in colony counts. As the Applicant did not present a CRM for great skua (due to no flying birds being present within the array area), they did not undertake apportioning. **We have advised the Applicant undertakes a new CRM assessment as per our advice, we therefore recommend that apportioning values should be calculated using updated colony counts contemporaneous to DAS.**

Table 7: Summary of the declines in Great Skua SPA colony counts (Apparently Occupied Territory (AOT)) between Seabirds Count and an updated colony count collated from the Seabirds Monitoring Programme (SMP) by NatureScot

SPA	Seabirds Count: Colony count (AOT)	Updated colony count (AOT)	% change in colony count
Fair Isle SPA	430	153	-64.4%
Fetlar SPA	854	297	-65.2%
Foula SPA	1846	308	-83.3%
Handa SPA	283	84	-70.3%
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA	1030	251	-75.6%
Hoy SPA	1405	257	-81.7%

Non-breeding season calculations

The non-breeding season apportioning calculations has been carried out using the BDMPS populations presented in Furness (2015) and the subset of values we have checked are correct.

We note a minor error in Table 3-12 where the column headings of the last column appear to be filled in correctly as "BDMPS Population (Number of Individuals)", we believe this should be "Apportioning value" and have interpreted the table accordingly.

We accept that the Applicant has followed our advice with the approach taken for guillemot, and the apportioning appears to be correct.

Migratory birds

Apportioning values for migratory species have been calculated for each screened-in SPA and species. A precautionary approach has been taken and all mCRM impacts have been apportioned to UK SPAs, as per NatureScot's advice (email correspondence, 21 August 2025).

Updated population estimates based on the 5 year mean peak count (2019-2024) from Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) Programme (Calbrade et al., 2025)[41] were used to calculate SPA population size. Where updated counts were not available, the published citation population was used instead. The subset of values we have checked are correct.

[41] Calbrade, N.A., Birtles, G.A., Woodward, I.D., Feather, A., Hiza, B., Caulfield, E., Balmer, D.E., Peck, K., Wotton, S.R., Shaw, J.M., and Frost, T.M. (2025). Waterbirds in the UK 2023/24: The Wetland Bird Survey and Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme. BTO/RSPB/JNCC/NatureScot. Thetford.

We therefore accept the breeding season, non-breeding season and migratory apportioning methodology and the apportioning values that have been calculated.

B.4.9 EIA PVA report (Appendix 14.5)

The PVAs presented have followed NatureScot guidance. We note that PVAs have only been undertaken for the specific seasons for which the 0.02 percentage point change in survival threshold has been passed. Typically, we would expect that when this threshold is triggered in one season would also expect PVAs undertaken for the annual impacts as well. We have therefore based our conclusions on the PVA results as presented, and interpreted PVA results with additional caution in situations where we believe that annual impacts may be worse than seasonal impacts.

Additionally, in a situation where the "high displacement" scenario has passed the threshold for PVA requirement, but the "low displacement" scenario has not, we find it useful for both PVAs to be undertaken and the results presented for both scenarios as it provides a range of the potential impacts, which places the "high displacement" impacts in context. As the Applicant has only presented PVA results for the specific seasons and scenarios which pass the threshold, we were not able to assess the full range of potential impacts. We have therefore based our conclusions on the PVA results as presented.

<u>Red-throated diver</u>

We note that in paragraph 2.4.1.3 of Appendix 14.5 EIA PVA report, the Applicant discusses difficulties encountered in the PVA modelling of red-throated diver, where the model population would quickly decline to the point of extinction during the model run and therefore no differences between the baseline and the project scenario could be determined. The Applicant has proposed that this issue may be due to methodological concerns around the studies from which red throated diver juvenile survival rates were observed. The Applicant has used Great northern diver juvenile survival rates from Horswill and Robinson (2015)[42] as a proxy.

We acknowledge the difficulties encountered by the Applicant and believe that the alternate approach is an acceptable substitute in this case. We have, however, interpreted the results of the red-throated diver PVAs with additional caution.

B.4.10 Impact assessment

We accept that the following impacts are scoped out of the assessment for Offshore Ornithology:

- Construction and decommissioning
  - Collision risk
  - Distributional responses and barrier effects
  - Long-term habitat loss
  - Entanglement
  - Accidental pollution
- Operation and maintenance
  - Temporary habitat loss and disturbance
  - Indirect effects through effects on prey species
  - Entanglement (no mooring lines present due to fixed bases being used)

[42] Horswill, C. and Robinson, R. (2015). Review of seabird demographic rates and density dependence. JNCC Report No: 552., Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

- Accidental pollution

B.4.10.1 Collision risk mortality

Collision risk was scoped in during the operation and maintenance phase (Section 14.9.2 of the EIAR). Impacts due to collision risk were assessed quantitatively for kittiwake, great black-backed gull, herring gull, arctic tern, fulmar, Manx shearwater, gannet through CRM and migratory seabirds and waterbirds through mCRM

B.4.10.2 Distributional responses

Distributional responses (displacement) associated with the Offshore Project was scoped in during the operation and maintenance phase (section 14.9.3 of the EIAR). Impacts due to displacement were assessed quantitatively for kittiwake, guillemot, razorbill, puffin, red-throated diver, great northern diver and gannet.

B.4.10.3 Barrier effects

Barrier effects during operation and maintenance were scoped in separately to displacement (Section 14.9.5 of the EIAR). The Applicant has assessed this impact qualitatively, identifying species with higher per unit flight energetic costs as being potentially sensitive.

Fulmar were included within the assessment for barrier effects upon NatureScot's request in a meeting on the 16 April 2025. The Applicant has provided a discussion of the literature, concluding that the high efficiency of fulmar gliding flight results in negligible impacts due to barrier effects.

The applicant has also assessed sooty shearwater, Cory's shearwater and great shearwater upon the request of the RSPB Outer Hebrides regional group and concludes negligible impacts due to the large migratory journeys undertaken by these species.

The Application expects barrier effects to result in local, long-term, continuous and highly reversible impacts, and concludes the impacts to be minor adverse and therefore non-significant.

We accept the conclusion that impacts due to the barrier effects described in this section, as considered separately from displacement, are not significant.

B.4.10.4 Temporary habitat loss and/or habitat disturbance

Temporary habitat loss and/or habitat disturbance during the construction phase was scoped in (Section 14.8.2 of the EIAR). Decommissioning activities, and the resulting impacts, are expected to be equal to or less than those carried out during construction (Section 14.10.2). Temporary habitat loss and/or habitat disturbance is expected to consist of 6% of the Offshore Project boundary temporarily lost and/or disturbed due to construction activities. Impacts may arise due to increased suspended sediments and displacement and disturbance due to vessel movements has also been considered under this impact. The construction activities are expected to take place between April and October and therefore correspond to the breeding and post-breeding seasons for the ornithological receptors.

The Applicant concludes that no assessment was required for kittiwake, guillemot, razorbill, puffin, great northern diver and gannet. Red-throated diver was assessed for this impact and is predicted to be intermittent, temporary, local and short term in nature. The Applicant considers the magnitude to be negligible, and therefore the impact to be not significant.

We largely support this conclusion; however, we note that little information is provided concerning the potential numbers of vessel traffic relative to current vessel traffic, or the potential

vessel routes to and from port. The Applicant states in Table 14.18 that a total of 35 vessels (plus one helicopter) could be on site at any one time to support the offshore activities, with 871 return installation vessel movements annually to support offshore construction activities. Chapter 3 - Project Description does provide more information about maximum vessel movements per year, with a break down by vessel type, role and phase.

We are therefore unable to fully **advise on the potential impacts of vessel traffic as we do not have information concerning the absolute and relative increase of vessel traffic in the area**, **nor the proximity of vessel routes to designated sites or species hotspots.**

Embedded mitigation

The Applicant proposes the following embedded mitigation measures for temporary habitat loss and/or disturbance:

- All vessels will comply with embedded mitigation measures including a vessel management plan (VMP) to reduce the effects of increased traffic.
- The development of an OEMP which will include measures to minimise disturbance to birds from transiting vessels such as maintaining course and speed and actively avoiding large flocks of roosting birds.
- Best practice techniques will be used for seabed excavation to ensure impacts remain as short-term, temporary, and reversible as possible.

We welcome the mitigation measures as described, which align with the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code.

B.4.10.5 Disturbance to prey species and their habitats

Indirect effects through effects on prey species was scoped in during the construction phase (Section 14.83 of the EIAR). Decommissioning activities, and the resulting impacts, are expected to be equal to or less than those carried out during construction (Section 14.10.3). During construction impacts on prey may arise from sound from pile driving, drilling, and vessel operations, increase suspended sediments, localised seabed deposition and the alteration of benthic habitats. Impacts to benthic invertebrates and fish are assessed in Chapter 11, volume 2a and chapter 12, volume 2a.

The Applicant concluded that impacts to benthic ecology are negligible to minor adverse, and impacts to sandeel, herring and diadromous fish are negligible to low. The impact is expected to be of a local extent, intermittent, short term and reversible.

Kittiwake, great black-backed gull, Arctic tern, guillemot, puffin, and red-throated diver were assessed as having high sensitivity to this impact, based on vulnerability, recoverability and value. Razorbill, great northern diver, fulmar, Manx shearwater and gannet were assessed as being of medium sensitivity. scoped in for impacts due to disturbance to prey species and their habitats.

The Applicant concludes that this impact will be negligible to minor adverse, and therefore not significant. We accept this conclusion.

Embedded mitigation

No mitigation measures for marine and nearshore ornithology have been provided for this impact, as the Applicant considers the potential impacts not significant in EIA terms, even in the absence of mitigation. The Applicant has proposed the following mitigation measures to address the impacts to the prey species:

- Project specific site investigation surveys will be used to avoid sensitive areas as far as possible.
- A Cable Installation Plan will be produced to confirm routing, method of installation etc.
- Relevant best practice techniques for seabird excavation will be employed.

B.4.10.6 Long-term habitat loss

Long term habitat loss (i.e. spanning the operational duration of the project) was scoped in during operation and maintenance (Section 14.9.6 of the EIAR). Long-term habitat loss is expected to consist of the physical footprint of the wind turbines and associated offshore infrastructure, e.g. offshore cables. The applicant states that habitat loss is mostly accounted for within the assessment of distributional responses and indirect impacts on prey.

The applicant has concluded the impact is likely to be of negligible magnitude, receptor sensitivity is high and the impact is expected to be minor adverse and therefore not significant.

We accept this conclusion, since the impacts of displacement on ornithological receptors are considered quantitively in another section.

B.4.10.7 Response to artificial lighting

Response to artificial lighting was scoped in during the construction phase (Section 14.8.4 of the EIAR) and the operation and maintenance phase (section 14.9.7 of the EIAR). Decommissioning activities, and the resulting impacts, are expected to be equal to or less than those carried out during construction (Section 14.10.3). Artificial lighting during construction is expected to consist of lighting to enable 24 hours a day of construction between April and October each year for 5 years, with the average night length ranging from 6 hours in June to 13.75 hours in October.

The Applicant has provided a detailed review of the evidence of seabird responses to artificial lighting, which has been used to identify ornithological receptors and migratory seabirds which may be sensitivity to artificial lighting. The applicant has selected European storm petrel, Leach's storm petrel, fulmar and Manx shearwater for assessment. As the Applicant discusses, DAS data may not provide an accurate indication of the presence of nocturnal species within the project boundary. It may have been helpful for the applicant to utilise tracking data from nearby colonies.

The Applicant has concluded that the effects range from negligible to minor adverse significance and is therefore not significant for these species.

We largely accept this conclusion. However, **we would recommend that the Applicant consider how post-consent monitoring may be able to address the issue of the potential impacts of light attraction on procellariforms.**

<u>Embedded mitigation</u>

The Applicant proposes the following embedded mitigation measures for impacts due to attraction to light:

- Outline Lighting and Marking Plan – Offshore Project lighting will not exceed minimum legal requirements.

B.4.10.8 Consideration of onshore transmission works project.

The Applicant has considered the potential interactions between the impacts on marine and nearshore ornithology receptors arising from both the Offshore Project and the onshore elements

of the project (the OTW Project). However, further advice on this aspect will be provided in response to the terrestrial planning application.

B.4.10.9 Unexploded ordnance (UXO)

The potential impacts of the controlled detonation of Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) have not been screened in as a potential impact. The Applicant states in the RIAA (paragraph 1.11.1.5) that it is not anticipated that UXO clearance will be required, based on initial site investigations. However, the potential impacts, sensitive ornithological receptors, and mitigation measures should have been considered within the EIAR, as it is not yet certain that no UXO will be encountered.

B.4.10.10 Other impacts

A potential impact that has not been discussed in the application is the potential for cormorants and shags to be attracted to and roosting upon the turbines. This may be a greater concern for Spiorad na Mara than for other recent projects, as it is particularly close to shore. Dierschke et al. (2016)[43] found that great cormorant and European shag are attracted to OWFs, frequently roosting on OWF structures. Dierschke et al (2015) suggest that this attraction may be of benefit these species by opening up new foraging areas. In some cases, the presence of cormorant on offshore wind turbines causes issues with guano accumulation, and so cormorant deterrence methods have become necessary, however, the birds were found to habituate to deterrence methods quickly (Clifford and Mather, 2021)[44]. The potential consequences of cormorant and shag attraction (and possible deterrence activities) to OWF turbines are likely to be complex and difficult to predict. We would like to highlight this as an issue that may need to be considered in the future.

B.4.11 Cumulative effects assessment (CEA) approach

The Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) undertaken by the Applicant includes projects which fall under Tier 1 of the Applicant's tiered approach to the CEA – other developments which are operational, have consent or have submitted a planning application which provides quantitative information on the predicted impacts.

The Applicant has applied a Zone of Influence (ZOI) in the breeding season based on the mean maximum foraging range of gannet, and the relevant BDMPS region in the non-breeding periods. Gannet has been selected as the species included in the CEA with the largest foraging range. Species specific foraging ranges or BDMPS were then used to short list other developments for each species.

The applicant has considered the following species and impacts in the CEA.

- Kittiwake – collision, and displacement
- Great black-backed gull – collision
- Herring gull – collision
- Arctic tern – collision

[43] Dierschke, V. Furness, R. W., Garthe, S., Seabirds and offshore wind farms in European waters: Avoidance and attraction, Biological Conservation, Volume 202, 2016, Pages 59-68, ISSN 0006-3207, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2016.08.016.

[44] Clifford, D., and Mather, L., (2021), 'Report 1: Initial Scoping Investigation', Cormorant Roosting in Offshore Wind Farms – An Investigation into Bird Behaviour, Conflicts and Mitigation Measures at Burbo Bank, Internal Ørsted report, Unpublished.

- Gannet – collision and displacement
- Razorbill – displacement
- Puffin – displacement
- Red throated diver – displacement and collision (including impacts from onshore wind farms)

Compensated-for impacts have been removed from the cumulative totals for projects where compensation measures are considered secured. Projects which have received consent and require a derogation case are Berwick Bank, Green Volt, Salamander, and West of Orkney.

The Applicant has not included fulmar, Manx shearwater, guillemot and northern diver in the CEA, stating that no other developments have a spatial or temporal overlap with the offshore project. We note that the West of Orkney's addendum to the offshore EIA quantitatively assessed fulmar displacement mortalities and estimated an annual impact of 15.3 to 45.9 mortalities. A CEA for fulmar could have included these mortalities. We have considered the potential cumulative impacts to fulmar in the relevant section in our detailed advice below.

The Applicant has also not considered migratory species in the CEA for the same reason.

B.4.12 Guillemot

While there are no other developments within guillemot foraging range of Spiorad na Mara, we note that there are several SPA and non-SPA colonies within foraging range of both Spiorad na Mara and West of Orkney. These colonies may therefore face cumulative impacts from both projects. The Applicant has undertaken an assessment of the in-combination impacts to the SPA colonies within range of both Spiorad na Mara and West of Orkney for the RIAA. We agreed with the Applicant's conclusions of no AEoSI for these SPAs. As these SPAs make up a large proportion of the guillemot colonies within the overlap area, we accept that there will be no significant effect in EIA terms on the regional population of guillemots affected by the impacts of Spiorad na Mara, cumulative with other developments.

B.4.13 NEEOG dataset

The Applicant states that quantitative information/data utilised within the assessment have been either taken from the publicly available documentation for each project, or from the North East and East Ornithology Group (NEEOG) database. The Applicant has not made it clear which version of the NEEOG database has been used (or when this database was accessed). This is important information, as some errors and issues have been noted within previous versions of the NEEOG database.

B.4.14 Berwick Bank gannet scenarios

With and without Berwick Bank scenarios are presented for gannet only, as the other species assessed in the CEA did not have connectivity with Berwick Bank. We note that the Applicant states within Appendix 14.5 EIA PVA report (paragraph 2.4.3.10): "The scenarios presented 'without Berwick Bank' for gannet predict a greater impact due to the level of compensation required for the development. The number of predicted compensated birds is greater than the predicted impact as compensation ratios are applied to the derogation case."

Our understanding is that the Applicant's with Berwick bank scenario therefore consists of Berwick Bank impacts being theoretically included, but compensated impacts removed and then predicted compensation above these impacts, based upon compensation ratios, are removed from the pool of cumulative mortalities.

We do not support this approach. While compensated-for impacts may be removed from other developments where compensation can be considered secured, we do not support the removal of additional mortalities based on an assumption of over-compensation, particularly when uncertainty remains around the nature and efficacy of the planned compensation measures.

As per Berwick Bank's Appropriate Assessment, Berwick Bank was concluded to have Adverse Effect on Site Integrity (AEoSI) or unable to conclude no AEoSI in the in-combination assessment of gannets at Forth Islands SPA and Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA. These gannet mortalities are expected to be compensated for by Berwick Bank. However, Berwick Bank is also expected to have impacts on gannets at several SPAs that did not reach Adverse Effect on Site Integrity and at non-SPA colonies, and these mortalities should be included in Spiorad na Mara's CEA.

The "with Berwick Bank" scenario for the EIA should therefore exclude the mortalities that have been apportioned to SPAs where AEoSI has been concluded (or no AEoSI could be concluded), and include the remaining mortalities apportioned to other SPAs and non-SPA colonies with connectivity to Spiorad na Mara's regional population.

B.4.15 Proposed monitoring

The Applicant has not discussed any proposed ornithological receptor post-consent monitoring within the EIAR. In addition to the more commonly monitored species and impacts, we have highlighted several novel ornithological issues in this advice and recommended monitoring for these such as Greenland white-fronted geese and light-attraction for procellariforms. Potential monitoring plans should be discussed with NatureScot at as early a stage as possible.

B.4.16 Transboundary effects

The Applicant has assessed the potential for transboundary effects on other European Economic Area states. The Applicant has focussed on displacement and collision impacts for this assessment. No non-UK colonies occur within mean-max foraging range of the offshore project and so no transboundary effects are anticipated within the breeding season. Impacts on non-UK birds in the non-breeding season are expected to have minimal impact due to the wide ranging and transient nature of non-UK birds within UK waters in the non-breeding season.

The Applicant has also considered projects within Irish waters, and notes that the currently operational Arklow Bank lacks a comparable dataset due to its age. Proposed projects in Irish waters have not been considered as these projects have all concluded that there would be no potential for significant transboundary effects.

B.5 NatureScot appraisal – EIA

B.5.1 Proposal alone impact assessment

B.5.1.1 Arctic tern

A total of 1.75 collision mortalities were estimated for Arctic tern, all occurring within the breeding season, with none in the non-breeding season. The percentage point change in survival resulting from this mortality was above the 0.02 threshold, and therefore a PVA was required for project alone impacts for the breeding season and annual impacts. The breeding season PVA results indicate very small decreases in the counterfactuals of population size and growth rate. The Applicant did not run a PVA for the annual impacts, however, as no impacts were predicted in the

post-breeding or pre-breeding seasons, the results of an annual PVA would not be expected to be significantly different.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on Arctic tern are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 8: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for Arctic tern including collision mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**	**PPC**	**35-year PVA results**	
	Collision		**Median Counterfactual for Growth Rate (CGR)**	**Median Counterfactual for Population Size (CPS)**
Breeding	1.75	0.10%	0.9985	0.9459
Post-breeding	0.00	0.00%	*Not required*	*Not required*
Pre-breeding	0.00	0.00%	*Not required*	*Not required*
Annual	1.75	0.00% (***0.10%)***	*Not run*	*Not run*

Note that PPC calculated using NatureScot's approach to the annual impact assessment is presented in brackets.

B.5.1.2 Kittiwake

The percentage point change in survival resulting from combined collision and displacement mortality was below the 0.02 threshold in all seasons, and therefore a PVA was not required for project alone impacts.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on kittiwake are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 9: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for kittiwake including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

	Mortalities			**PPC**
Season	**Collision**	**Displacement**	**Total**	
Breeding	0.89	0-0	0.9	0.00-0.00%
Post-breeding	6.69	1-2	7.7-8.7	0.00-0.00%
Pre-breeding	13.97	2-6	16.0-20.0	0.00-0.00%
Annual	21.55	3-8	24.5-29.6	0.00-0.00%

B.5.1.3 Great black-backed gull

A total of 1.48 collision mortalities were estimated for great-black backed gull, all occurring within the non-breeding season. The percentage point change in survival resulting from this mortality was below the 0.02 threshold, and therefore a PVA was not required for project alone impacts.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on great black-backed gull are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 10: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for great black-backed gulls including collision mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC)

Season	Mortalities	PPC
	Collision	
Non-breeding	1.48	0.00%

B.5.1.4 Herring gull

A total of 1.65 collision mortalities were estimated for herring gull, all occurring within the non-breeding season. As discussed above, our preferred approach for determining herring gull connectivity within the non-breeding season is for the breeding season regional population estimate to be used. PVA assessment for project alone impacts to herring gull would be required when using NatureScot's preferred approach.

We therefore request a project alone PVA assessment of collision impacts on herring gull is undertaken.

Table 11: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for herring gulls including collision mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC).

Season	Mortalities	Approach	Regional population estimate	PPC
	Collision			
Non-breeding season	1.65	Applicant	173,299	0.00%
		NatureScot	3,378	**0.05%**

Note that the Applicant's approach, where the non-breeding season regional population estimate was based on the BDMPS, and NatureScot's approach, where the breeding season regional population estimate is used, are compared.

B.5.1.5 Gannet

The percentage point change in gannet survival resulting from collision and displacement mortality was below the 0.02 threshold, and therefore a PVA was not required for project alone impacts.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on gannet are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 12: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for gannet including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC)

	Mortalities			PPC
Season	Collision	Displacement	Total	
Breeding	21.9	3-9	24.9-30.9	0.00%-0.00%
Post-breeding	1.2	3-8	4.2-9.2	0.00%-0.00%
Pre-breeding	0.2	0-1	0.2-1.2	0.00%-0.00%
Annual	23.3	6-18	29.3-41.3	0.00%-0.00%

B.5.1.6 Guillemot

The project alone non-breeding season and annual impacts of displacement on guillemot passed the 0.02 percentage point threshold. The Applicant has reported the percentage point change in survival to three decimal places and therefore did not interpret the result for the non-breeding

season (0.017) as passing the 0.02 threshold. However, as the threshold is stated as being to two decimal places, it would be more appropriate to round 0.017 to 0.02, and therefore a PVA would be required for this season. As the annual impacts were 0.023, the Applicant did perform a PVA for the annual impacts. As the annual regional population estimate for guillemot is the same as the breeding season regional population estimate, the non-breeding season impacts would not be greater than the annual impacts. Therefore, the lack of a non-breeding season PVA does not affect our ability to make a conclusion in this case. The annual PVA results indicate very small decreases in the counterfactuals of population size and growth rate for guillemot in the annual impacts of high displacement scenario.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on guillemot are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 13: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for guillemot including displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**	**PPC**	**35-year PVA results**	
	Displacement		**Median CGR**	**Median CPS**
Breeding	9-15	0.00-0.01%		
Non-breeding	16-48	0.01-**0.02**%	*Not run*	*Not run*
Annual	25-63	0.01-**0.02**%	0.9997	0.9910

B.5.1.7 Razorbill

The project alone breeding season impacts passed the 0.02 percentage point change in survival threshold, and therefore PVAs were required and performed. We note that annual impacts would also require a PVA under our alternative approach to annual regional population estimate. The breeding season PVA results indicate very small decreases in the counterfactuals of population size and growth rate for razorbill in the breeding season impacts of high displacement scenario.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that the **project alone impacts on razorbill are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 14: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for razorbill including displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**	**PPC**	**35-year PVA results**	
	Displacement		**Median CGR**	**Median CPS**
Breeding	7 – 12.3	0.01 – **0.02**%	0.9998	0.9911
Post-breeding	3 – 8	0.00 - 0.00%		
Pre-breeding	4 – 12	0.00 – 0.00%		
Annual	14 - 32	*0.00 – 0.01% (0.01 – **0.02**%)*	*Not run*	*Not run*

Note that PPC calculated using NatureScot's approach to the annual impact assessment is presented in brackets.

B.5.1.8 Puffin

The impacts of displacement did not pass the PVA requirement threshold for puffin in any season or displacement scenario. We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on puffin are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 15: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for puffin including displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	Mortalities	PPC
	Displacement	
Breeding	70 – 117	0.01 – 0.01%
Non-breeding	2 – 7	0.00 – 0.00%
Annual	72 - 124	0.01 – 0.01%

B.5.1.9 Red-throated diver

The project alone impacts of displacement on red-throated diver passes the PVA requirement threshold in the breeding season. We note that annual impacts would also require a PVA under our alternative approach to annual regional population estimate. The breeding season PVA results indicate very small decreases in the counterfactuals of population size and growth rate for red-throated diver in the breeding season.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on red-throated diver are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 16: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for red throated diver including displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	Mortalities	PPC	35-year PVA results	
	Displacement		Median CGR	Median CPS
Breeding	0.4	**0.14%**	0.9979	0.9341
Post-breeding	0.4	0.01%		
Non-breeding	0.0	0.00%		
Pre-breeding	0.4	0.01%		
Annual	1.20	**0.03% (*0.14%)***	*0.9996*	*0.9852*

Note that PPC calculated using NatureScot's approach to the annual impact assessment is presented in brackets.

B.5.1.10 Great Northern diver

All great northern diver displacement mortalities were predicted to occur in the non-breeding season. These mortalities passed the PVA requirement threshold. The non-breeding season PVA results indicate very small decreases in the counterfactuals of population size and growth rate for great northern diver in the breeding season.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on great northern diver are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 17: Summary of the results of the project alone impact assessment for great northern diver including displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change in survival (PPC), and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	Mortalities	PPC	35-year PVA results	
	Displacement		Median CGR	Median CPS
Non-breeding	2.70	**0.14%**	0.9981	0.9368

B.5.1.11 Great skua

No collision mortalities were predicted for great skua in the CRM, due to only a single sitting great skua, and no flying great skua being observed within the array area during the DAS regime. A migratory CRM was run for great skua, which resulted in an estimated 0.06 mortalities. We appreciate the effort taken by the Applicant to follow our standard guidance, and to go the further step by performing this mCRM assessment for great skua. However, we note that the data used for the mCRM assessment of great skua was based on an outdated data source which we do not recommend the use of for seabirds.

Additionally, we note that while no flying great skua were observed within the Array Area, a single sitting great skua was recorded within the array area, and three additional birds were recorded in the buffer zone across two other months of DAS (two in April 2022, one in August 2022). Great skua are a highly mobile species and so the snapshot nature of DAS may mean that the lack of flying great skua within the Array Area itself may not accurately reflect reality.

We also note that the regional population of great skua has declined severely since Seabirds Count and is therefore very vulnerable and only a small number of mortalities would be required to pass the 0.02 percentage point threshold for PVA requirement.

We therefore request that the applicant perform a CRM analysis utilising the total number of great skua (all behaviours) within the study area (Array Area plus buffer zone). The resulting collision mortalities should be assessed against an updated regional population estimate calculated using colony count data sourced from the SMP, selecting years as close to the timing of the DAS regime as possible.

B.5.1.12 Fulmar

The percentage point change in survival resulting from fulmar collision mortality was below the 0.02 threshold, and therefore a PVA was not required for project alone impacts. The Applicant has quantitatively assessed for the potential impacts of barrier effects on fulmar, concluding that these impacts are likely to be minimal due to fulmar's high flight efficiency and large foraging ranges.

We therefore agree with the applicant's conclusion that **project alone impacts on fulmar are not significant in EIA terms.**

Table 18: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for fulmar including collision mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change (PPC) in survival.

Season	Regional population estimate	Mortalities	PPC
		Collision	
Breeding	1,142,437	0.98	0.00%
Post-breeding	828,194	0.11	0.00%
Non-breeding	556,367	0.08	0.00%
Pre-breeding	828,194	1.61	0.00%
Annual	1,142,437	2.78	0.00%

B.5.1.13 Manx shearwater

No collision mortalities were predicted for Manx shearwater, primarily due to their low flight height.

B.5.1.14 Migratory species

Migratory seabirds and waterbirds were assessed quantitatively for migratory collision risk. The applicant states that of the 69 waterbird species considered, the majority had 0 or negligible collision estimates, with below 0.02 percentage point change in mortality of the relevant population using UK waters. The highest collision estimate was for Wigeon, with 2.901 annual mortalities. Of the 11 species of migratory seabirds considered, all had collision estimates which resulted in less than a 0.02 percentage point change in mortality.

We accept the Applicant's conclusion that impacts from the project alone on migratory species are not significant in EIA terms, with the exception of Greenland white-fronted goose.

B.5.1.15 Greenland white fronted geese

A migratory collision estimate of 0.006 +/- 0.004 was estimated for Greenland white-fronted geese. The Applicant has not considered this species in detail within the EIA due to the small number of migratory collisions estimated. **We advise that further analysis should be carried out to establish the potential impacts on this species**. Please see Section B.6.17 in the RIAA for further detail on this.

B.5.2 Cumulative effects assessment

B.5.2.1 Arctic tern

Three other developments were screened into the CEA for Arctic tern – Awel Y Mor, Morecambe and White Cross. We conclude that the cumulative effects on Arctic tern in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 4.55%.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.12%.

Table 19: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for Arctic tern including collision mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change (PPC) in survival and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**		**PPC**	**35-year PVA results**	
	Project	**Cumulative**		**Median CGR**	**Median CPS**
Breeding	1.75	1.75	**0.10**%	0.9988	0.9545
Post-breeding	0.00	0.05	0.00%		
Pre-breeding	0.00	0	0.00%		
Annual	1.75	2.01	*0.00% (**0.10**%)*		

Note that PPC calculated using NatureScot's approach to the annual impact assessment is presented in brackets.

B.5.2.2 Kittiwake

26 other developments were screened into the CEA for kittiwake. We conclude that the cumulative effects on kittiwake in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 3.75 to 4.61% in the annual assessment, and 4.79 to 6.34% in the breeding season assessment.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.11 to 0.13% in the annual assessment, and 0.14 to 0.18% in the breeding season assessment.

Table 20: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for kittiwake including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change (PPC) in survival and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

	Mortalities		**Cumulative PPC**	**35-year PVA**	
Season	**Project**	**Cumulative**		**Median CGR**	**Median CPS**
Breeding	0.9	255.78 – 339.94	**0.12 – 0.15%**	0.9982 – 0.9986	0.9366 – 0.9521
Post-breeding	7.7-8.7	282.44 – 346.82	**0.03 – 0.04%**	0.9995 - 0.9996	0.9840 – 0.9869
Pre-breeding	16.0-20.0	277.98 – 321.99	**0.04 – 0.05%**	0.9994 – 0.9995	0.9804 – 0.9830
Annual	24.5-29.6	816.20 – 1008.75	**0.09 – 0.11%**	0.9987 – 0.9989	0.9539 – 0.9625

B.5.2.3 Great black-backed gull

Three other developments were screened into the CEA for great black-backed gull – Pentland, Robin Rigg and West of Orkney. We conclude that the cumulative effects on great black-backed gull in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 1.75%.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.05%.

Table 21: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for great black-backed gull including collision mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change (PPC) in survival and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**		**Cumulative PPC**	**35-year PVA results**	
	Project contribution	**Total cumulative**		**Median CGR**	**Median CPS**
Non-breeding	1.48	15.28	**0.04%**	0.9995	0.9825

B.5.2.4 Herring gull

17 other developments were screened into the CEA for herring gull. We conclude that the cumulative effects on herring gull in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 4.15%.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.11%.

Table 22: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for herring gull including mortality estimates and the resulting counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	Mortalities		Approach	Cumulative PPC	35-year PVA results	
	Project contribution	Total cumulative			Median CGR	Median CPS
Non-breeding	1.65	169.20	**Applicant**	**0.10%**	0.9989	0.9585
			NatureScot	**5.01%**		

B.5.2.5 Gannet

39 other developments were screened into the CEA for gannet. We note that we do not support the approach used to calculate the number of mortalities within the "with Berwick Bank" scenario and therefore cannot provide our conclusions for a "with Berwick Bank" scenario.

We conclude that the cumulative effects on gannet in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms for the "without Berwick Bank" scenario only. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a small decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 3.44 to 4.79% without Berwick Bank
- The high CGR values, which represent a small decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.10 to 0.14% without Berwick Bank

We cannot provide conclusions on the "with Berwick Bank" scenario with the approach that has been used. **We request a re-run of the "with Berwick Bank" scenario as per our preferred approach.**

Table 23: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for gannet including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting percentage point change (PPC) in survival and counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	Mortalities			Cumulative PPC	35-year PVA	
	Project	Cumulative				
		Scenario	Mortality		Median CGR	Median CPS
Breeding	24.9-30.9	*With BB*	*650.07-967.60*	***0.07-0.10%***	*0.9988-0.9992*	*0.9562-0.9702*
		Without BB	744.30-995.54	**0.08-0.11%**	0.9987-0.9990	0.9549-0.9661
Post-breeding	4.2-9.2	*With BB*	*41.34-88.93*	*0.01-**0.02%***		
		Without BB	42.34-88.93	0.01-**0.02%**		
Pre-breeding	0.1-1.2	*With BB*	*14.10-22.02*	*0.00-0.00%*		
		Without BB	14.10-22.02	0.00-0.00%		
Annual	29.3-41.3	*With BB*	*677.36-1050.40*	***0.07-0.11%***	*0.9986-0.9991*	*0.9524-0.9690*
		Without BB	752.61-1059.36	**0.08-0.11%**	0.9986-0.9990	0.9521-0.9656

B.5.2.6 Guillemot

The Applicant has not performed a CEA for guillemot as no other developments were within foraging range of Spiorad na Mara. However, we note that several SPAand non-SPA colonies are within range of both Spiorad na Mara and other developments (e.g. West of Orkney). The Applicant has performed a RIAA in-combination assessment for these SPAs, and we have concluded no AEoSI for any of the SPAs. As the SPA colonies are likely to make up the bulk of the regional population within the overlap of Spiorad na Mara and other development, and no AEoSI was concluded for these SPAs, we accept the conclusion that the cumulative impacts in guillemot for this regional population are not significant.

B.5.2.7 Razorbill

20 other developments were screened in for the CEA for razorbill.

We conclude that the cumulative effects on razorbill in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 1.02 to 2.83% in the annual impact assessment.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.03 to 0.08% in the annual impact assessment.

Table 24: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for razorbill, including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**		**Cumulative PPC**	**35-year PVA results**	
	Project contribution	**Total cumulative**		**Median CGR**	**Median CPS**
Breeding	7-12.3	7.38 – 12.30	0.01-**0.02%**	0.9997	0.9905
Post-breeding	3-8	41.76 – 125.45	0.01-**0.02%**	0.9998	0.9914
Non-breeding	0-0	56.12 – 152.35	**0.02-0.04%**	0.9995	0.9812
Pre-breeding	4-12	39.78 – 119.51	0.01-**0.02%**		
Annual	14-32	145.03 – 409.60	**0.02-0.07%**	0.9992-0.9997	0.9717-0.9898

B.5.2.8 Puffin

21 other developments were screened in for the CEA for puffin.

We conclude that the cumulative effects on puffin in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 1.60 to 2.78% in the annual impact assessment.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.04 to 0.08% in the annual impact assessment.

Table 25: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for puffin, including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	**Mortalities**	**PPC**	**35-year PVA results**

	Project	Cumulative		Median CGR	Median CPS
Breeding	70 – 117	441.69-736.15	**0.04-0.06%**	0.9993-0.9996	0.9743-0.9844
Non-breeding	2 – 7	11.93-56.41	0.00-**0.02%**		
Annual	72 - 124	454.14-793.08	**0.04-0.07%**	0.9992-0.9996	0.9722-0.9840

B.5.2.9 Red-throated diver

14 onshore wind farms were screened into the CEA for red-throated diver.

We conclude that the cumulative effects on red-throated diver in the regional population are not significant in EIA terms. This conclusion is based on:

- The high CPS values, which represent a decrease in the regional population size after 35 years of 2.02% in the annual impact assessment and 6.35% in the breeding season assessment.
- The high CGR values, which represent a decrease in the population growth rate after 35 years of 0.05% in the annual impact assessment and 0.19% in the breeding season assessment.

Table 26: Summary of the results of the cumulative impact assessment for red-throated diver, including collision and displacement mortality estimates and the resulting counterfactuals from the 35-year PVA assessment.

Season	Mortalities		PPC	35-year PVA results	
	Project contribution	Cumulative		Median CGR	Median CPS
Breeding	0.4	0.4	**0.14%**	0.9981	0.9365
Post-breeding	0.4	0.4	0.01%		
Non-breeding	0.0	0.0	0.00%		
Pre-breeding	0.4	0.4	0.01%		
Annual	1.20	**1.76**	**0.03%** ***(0.14%)***	*0.9995*	*0.9798*

Note that PPC calculated using NatureScot's approach to the annual impact assessment is presented in brackets.

B.5.2.10 Great skua

We request that once a CRM analysis is performed for all great skua within the study area, that a cumulative assessment is performed for quantified great skua mortalities affecting the regional population in the breeding season and non-breeding seasons.

B.5.2.11 Fulmar

We note that fulmar has not been included in the cumulative assessment, despite other developments within foraging range having publicly available mortality estimates for this species (for example, West of Orkney's additional information). However, due to the small number of fulmar mortalities estimated for the project alone assessment, and the very large regional population size for fulmar, we believe that in this case a full cumulative assessment of impacts to fulmar would not have met the 0.02 percentage point change in survival threshold for PVA requirement.

B.5.2.12 Migratory species

No cumulative assessment of the potential impacts to migratory species has been undertaken**.**

B.6 NatureScot appraisal – RIAA

B.6.1 Quality and content of the application

The documents reviewed were generally found to be of a good standard, they were laid out in an easy to follow manner and relevant detail has been provided. In general, NatureScot guidance and advice have been followed with regards to methodology and approach to the assessment.

Within the report, we note several potential labelling errors. We list some examples below, and **we request clarification on these by the Applicant:**

- Table 6-2 – Baseline Ornithology Characterisation Report – the title of the first column is SPAD but there is no explanation of what this means.
- Section 7 – Baseline Ornithology Characterisation Report – not clear what is meant by IT species.
- 2.2.1.2 - EIAR Appendix 14.3: Collision Risk Model (CRM) Report – gannet is highlighted as having NatureScot supported parameters available in Guidance Note 7[45] but the sentence after says gannet parameters are not available in the same guidance note.
- 2.3.1.3 - EIAR Appendix 14.3: Collision Risk Model (CRM) Report – the applicant provides an in-text reference of NatureScot (2020) while highlighting macro avoidance for gannets. There is then no NatureScot 2020 reference provided in the reference list. Can the applicant please clarify what this reference is.
- Table 2-2 - EIAR Appendix 14.3: Collision Risk Model (CRM) Report - the applicant quotes for Arctic tern, fulmar and Manx shearwater that flight type and proportion of flights upwind are flapping and 50% respectively. It provides guidance note 2[46] as a reference for this but it does not state these parameters in this guidance note? Can the developer explain where they got these from?

B.6.2 Approach to the RIAA

The applicant has used Seabirds Count, Burnell et al. (2023)[47] for both the EIA and RIAA. We would have anticipated that more recent counts would have been used as the applicants DAS was undertaken during the HPAI outbreak. More recent colony counts would have allowed the potential impacts to be assessed against the more recent population estimates. However, we have checked and for the sites taken forward in the assessment the only site it would impact is Puffin at Cape Wrath. Can the applicant please check this site using updated colony counts from the Seabird Monitoring Programme.

We note that where the upper impact scenario triggers the PVA threshold (0.02% change in survival) and the lower does not, only the upper impact scenario has a PVA run. We would usually expect to see both outputs but as we conclude No AEoSI we can accept this. This happened for guillemot at Cape Wrath, Flannan Isles, Handa and North Rona and Sula Sgeir (Table 8-16 Report

[45] NatureScot (2025). Guidance Note 7: Guidance to support Offshore Wind Applications: Marine Ornithology - Advice for assessing collision risk of marine birds. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/guidance-note-7-guidance-support-offshore-wind-applications-marine-ornithology-advice-assessing.

[46] NatureScot, 2023. Guidance Note 2: Guidance to support Offshore Wind Applications: Advice for Marine Ornithology Baseline Characterisation Surveys and Reporting. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/guidance-note-2-guidance-support-offshore-wind-applicationsadvice-marine-ornithology-baseline.

[47] Burnell, D., et al. (2023). *Seabirds Count: A census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015-2021)*. Lynx Editions.

to Inform Appropriate Assessment). We are not asking for any additional information on this point but highlight that we would expect to see the range presented in any future applications.

Due to the convention used in the application some sites are said to have not reached the 0.02 mortality rate threshold for undertaking a PVA. This is due to the fact the data is presented to 3 or 4 decimal places, we would anticipate that for these situations the figures would be rounded up to 2 decimal places as the threshold is shown to 2 decimal places.

In Table 8-16 in the RIAA, which looks at guillemot for Sule Skerry and Sule Stack, the applicant states AEOI ruled out but the increase in mortality is 0.007 – 0.019 compared to Seabirds Count. However, the upper scenario here would trigger the requirement for a PVA as it would meet the 0.02 threshold if it had been rounded.

There are multiple cases of this where a PVA should have been run, and we have been unable to make a conclusion based on the information presented. The applicant will need to evaluate all increases in mortality rate outputs and round these to 2 decimal places and run any PVAs that are required. From our understanding this means the following need to be run, **but this is not an exhaustive list**:

Table 27: PVAs missing due to mortality rate rounding

Species	Site	Table (within the RIAA)	Increase in mortality Rate (percentage Points)
Guillemot	Sule Skerry and Sule Stack	8-16	0.007 – 0.019
Razorbill	Cape Wrath	8-23	0.0103 – 0.0186
	St Kilda		0.0085 – 0.0186
Gannet (combined impact displacement and collision)	North Rona and Sula Sgeir	8-63	0.0192

For the in-combination assessment we have based our assumptions on the impacts that will be compensated for by various contested projects, including Berwick Bank. We also assume these figures have been pulled through the assessment correctly.

The applicant highlights that they make use of the NEEOG dataset as a data source for the in-combination assessment, as we requested. It is however unclear what version of the NEEOG dataset that has been used. **Could the applicant please confirm the version they used.**

One key points to raise in terms of in-combination impacts is that from our understanding the applicant has used the outputs from the original Muir Mhor, Ossian and Caledonia applications. However, there has been work ongoing as there were issues with the original impact figures presented. With the updated figures we have identified several sites which may be an issue, further work might need to be done to confirm this:

Table 28: Updated impact assessment for Muir Mhor, Ossian and Caledonia that might impact the Spiorad na mara Wind assessment

Site	Species

Cape Wrath SPA	Kittiwake
Copinsay SPA	Kittiwake
Fair Isle SPA	Gannet
	Puffin
Forth Islands SPA	Puffin
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA	Gannet
Hoy SPA	Puffin
Marwick Head SPA	Kittiwake
North Rona and Sule Sgeir SPA	Gannet
Noss SPA	Gannet
Rousay SPA	Kittiwake
Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA	Gannet

In Section 13.2.1.2 – the applicant states here that they have used some sites as proxies for others, it is not clear what this has entailed and how many sites this has been applied to and what the numbers look like (impact numbers). **We request that this is clarified.**

B.6.3 NatureScot Approach to PVA results and determination of AEoSI for SPAs

Our assessments of AEoSI are primarily based on the PVA Counterfactual of Population Size (CPS) outputs, after 35 years. However, in reaching our conclusions we also consider a range of other factors including:

- Counterfactual of Population Growth Rate (CGR) outputs and the % decrease in population growth rate
- Status of the population including short and long-term trends
- Condition of the feature
- Species ecology
- Proportional importance of the species in Scotland and UK
- Impacts of HPAI and other recent mortality events.

PVAs were undertaken for the following impact pathways:

- Collision
- Distributional responses
- Collision and displacement combined for gannet and kittiwake.

B.6.4 Proposal alone assessment of impacts on breeding seabird SPAs

We conclude **no AEoSI** for all species and sites not taken through to PVA, and our conclusions for sites where PVAs have been undertaken are shown in the table below:

Table 29: Determination of AEoSI for proposal alone impacts

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Conclusion
Cape Wrath	Guillemot	0.9914*	No AEoSI
Flannan Isles	Guillemot	0.9873*	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.9738 - 0.9843	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.9866*	No AEoSI
Handa	Guillemot	0.9909*	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.9891*	No AEoSI
North Rona and Sula Sgeir	Guillemot	0.9910*	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.9872*	No AEoSI
Shiant Isles	Razorbill	0.9918*	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

B.6.5 Individual SPA assessment (project alone)

B.6.5.1 Cape Wrath SPA

Table 30: PVA results for Cape Wrath SPA

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)*	Conclusion
Cape Wrath	Guillemot	0.9914	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude **no AEoSI for Guillemot at Cape Wrath SPA**.

B.6.5.2 Flannan Isles SPA

Table 31: PVA results for Flannan Isles SPA

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)*	Conclusion
Flannan Isles	Guillemot	0.9873	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.9738 - 0.9843	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.9866	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude:

- **No AEoSI for Guillemot at Flannan Isles SPA**
- **No AEoSI for Razorbill at Flannan Isles SPA**
- **No AEoSI for Puffin at Flannan Isles SPA**

B.6.5.3 Handa SPA

Table 32: PVA results for Handa SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)*	Conclusion
Handa	Guillemot	0.9909	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.9891	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude:

- **No AEoSI for Guillemot at Handa SPA**
- **No AEoSI for Razorbill at Handa SPA**

B.6.5.4 North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA

Table 33: PVA results for North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)*	Conclusion
North Rona and Sula Sgeir	Guillemot	0.9910	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.9872	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude:

- **No AEoSI for Guillemot at North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA**
- **No AEoSI for Razorbill at North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA**

B.6.5.5 Shiant Isles SPA

Table 34: PVA results for Shiant Isles SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)*	Conclusion
Shiant Isles	Razorbill	0.9918	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude **no AEoSI for Razorbill at Shiant Isles SPA.**

B.6.6 In-combination assessment of AEoSI

The applicant, as agreed, has taken account for developments that have been consented and are subject to derogation and associated compensation requirements, these sites are Berwick Bank, Green Volt, Salamander and West of Orkney.

The applicant was also requested to present a with and without Berwick Bank assessment by MD-LOT.

Our assessments are based on the data as it is presented in the Application under the scenarios that include Berwick Bank as this project has now been grant consent.

PVAs were undertaken for the sites below, shown in Table 35, and our advice is based upon the PVA outputs over 35 years and on the understanding that the information in the application is correct. This is provided below in the form of:

- a summary table (Table 35)
- detailed assessments for individual SPAs and species (Table 36 - Table 52)

Table 35: Summary of in-combination assessment where PVAs were undertaken.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios) ^	Conclusion
Ailsa Craig	Gannet	0.99 - 0.95	No AEoSI
Cape Wrath	Kittiwake	0.91 - 0.91	Unable to conclude No AEoSI
	Guillemot	0.98*	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.94 - 0.98	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.97 - 0.98	No AEoSI
East Caithness Cliffs	Kittiwake	0.74 - 0.80	AEoSI
Forth Islands	Gannet	0.81 - 0.86	AEoSI
Flamborough	Kittiwake	0.71 - 0.78	Defer to Natural England
Flannan Isles	Guillemot	0.99*	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.92 - 0.96	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.98 - 0.99	No AEoSI
Grassholm	Gannet	0.97 - 0.98	No AEoSI
Handa	Guillemot	0.98	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.95 - 0.98	No AEoSI
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field	Gannet	0.93 - 0.97	No AEoSI
Lewis Peatlands	Red throated diver	0.786	AEoSI
Mingulay and Berneray	Razorbill	0.97 - 0.99	No AEoSI
North Caithness Cliffs	Kittiwake	0.90 - 0.92	Unable to conclude No AEoSI
North Colonsay and Western Cliffs	Kittiwake	0.95 - 0.96	No AEoSI

North Rona and Sula Sgeir	Guillemot	0.99*	No AEoSI
	Gannet	0.97 - 0.98	No AEoSI
Noss	Gannet	0.93 - 0.96	No AEoSI
Rathlin Island	Kittiwake	0.98 - 0.98	Defer to DAERA
	Razorbill	0.96 - 0.99	Defer to DAERA
Shiant Isles	Razorbill	0.96 - 0.98	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.99*	No AEoSI
Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas of Pembrokeshire	Razorbill	0.97 - 0.99	No AEoSI
St Kilda	Razorbill	0.87 - 0.95	Unable to conclude No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.99*	No AEoSI
	Gannet	0.97 - 0.98	No AEoSI
Sule Skerry and Sule Stack	Guillemot	0.95 - 0.98	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.95 - 0.97	No AEoSI
	Gannet	0.90 - 0.93	Unable to conclude No AEoSI
West Westray	Kittiwake	0.55 - 0.66	AEoSI

^ CPS used in assessment are combined effects for Gannet and Kittiwake.

* Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

˘Assessment based on terrestrial impacts affecting SPA

B.6.7 Individual SPA assessments (in-combination)

B.6.7.1 Ailsa Craig SPA

Table 36: PVA results for Ailsa Craig SPA.

Site	**Species**	**CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)**	**Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)** **(lower - upper scenarios)**	**Conclusion**
Ailsa Craig	Gannet	0.99 - 0.95	1.04 – 1.45	Provisional No AEoSI

We provisionally conclude **no AEoSI for Gannet at Ailsa Craig SPA**

It is not clear from the information presented in the application why the upper impact scenario for gannet at Ailsa Craig SPA has a higher CPS. We assume this is an error but **request that the applicant clarifies this.**

B.6.7.2 Cape Wrath SPA

Table 37: PVA results for Cape Wrath SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum) (lower – upper scenarios)	Conclusion
Cape Wrath	Kittiwake	0.91 - 0.91	0.52 – 0.64	Unable to conclude no AEoSI
	Guillemot	0.98*	4.09 – 10.80	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.94 – 0.98	0.45 – 0.81	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.97 – 0.98	0.21 – 0.35	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We are unable to conclude no AEoSI for kittiwake at Calf of Eday SPA, considering:

- the low CPS values
- a population decline of up to 9% (lower and upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 0.3% (lower and upper impact scenario)
- the unfavourable condition of the feature
- a 65% population decrease between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count.

We conclude:

- **no AEoSI for guillemot at Calf of Eday SPA**
- **no AEoSI for razorbill at Calf of Eday SPA**
- **no AEoSI for puffin at Calf of Eday SPA**

B.6.7.3 East Caithness Cliffs SPA

Table 38: PVA results for East Caithness Cliffs SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
East Caithness Cliffs	Kittiwake	0.74 – 0.80	0.52 – 0.69	AEoSI

We conclude **AEoSI for kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA**, considering:

- the very low CPS values
- a population decline of up to 20% - 26% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 0.6% - 0.8% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- favourable condition of the feature
- a 39% population decline between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count.

B.6.7.4 Forth Islands SPA

Table 39: PVA results for Forth Islands SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Forth Islands	Gannet	0.81 - 0.86	0.72 – 0.91	AEoSI

We conclude **AEoSI for gannet at Forth Islands SPA** considering:

- the very low CPS values
- a population decline of up to 14% - 19% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 0.4% - 0.6% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- favourable condition of the feature
- a 57% increase in population between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count, but a 30% decline between Seabirds Count and most recent count[48]

B.6.7.5 Flannan Isles SPA

Table 40: PVA results for Flannan Isles SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Flannan Isles	Guillemot	0.99*	1.01 – 2.27	No AEoSI
	Razorbill	0.92 – 0.96	0.53 – 0.92	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.98 – 0.99	19.16 – 31.99	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude**:**

- **no AEoSI for guillemot at Flannan Isles SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for razorbill at Flannan Isles SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for puffin at Flannan Isles SPA.**

B.6.7.6 Handa SPA

Table 41: PVA results for Handa SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Handa	Guillemot	0.98*	6.77 – 17.00	No AEoSI

[48] BTO, JNCC, and RSPB, 2026. Seabird Monitoring Programme. Available at: https://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/data.jsp accessed 22/04/2026

	Razorbill	0.95 – 0.98	1.68 – 2.94	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude**:**

- **no AEoSI for guillemot at Handa SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for razorbill at Handa SPA.**

B.6.7.7 Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA

Table 42: PVA results for Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field	Gannet	0.93 – 0.97	0.44 – 0.58	No AEoSI

We conclude **no AEoSI for gannet at Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA**.

B.6.7.8 Lewis Peatlands SPA

Table 43: PVA results for Lewis Peatlands SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Conclusion
Lewis Peatlands	Red-throated diver	0.79	AEoSI

We conclude **AEoSI for red-throated diver at Lewis Peatlands SPA** considering:

- The very low CPS
- a population decline of between 21%
- a decrease in population growth rate of between 0.7%
- the unfavourable condition of the feature

B.6.7.9 Mingulay and Berneray SPA

Table 44: PVA results for Mingulay and Berneray SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Mingulay and Berneray	Razorbill	0.97 – 0.99	0.22 – 0.66	No AEoSI

We conclude **no AEoSI for razorbill at Mingulay and Berneray SPA.**

B.6.7.10 North Caithness Cliffs SPA

Table 45: PVA results for North Caithness Cliffs SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
North Caithness Cliffs	Kittiwake	0.90 – 0.92	0.19 – 0.24	Unable to conclude No AEoSI

We are **unable to conclude no AEoSI for kittiwake at North Caithness Cliffs SPA**, considering:

- the low CPS
- a population decline of up to 8% - 10% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 0.2% - 0.3% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- the unfavourable condition of the feature
- a 45% decline in the population between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count.

B.6.7.11 North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA

Table 46: PVA results for North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
North Colonsay and Western Cliffs	Kittiwake	0.95 – 0.96	0.27 – 0.33	No AEoSI

We conclude **no AEoSI for kittiwake at North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA.**

B.6.7.12 North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA

Table 47: PVA results for North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
North Rona and Sula Sgeir	Guillemot	0.99*	0.88 – 2.27	No AEoSI
	Gannet	0.97 – 0.98	3.70 – 4.72	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude**:**

- **no AEoSI for guillemot at North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for gannet at North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA.**

B.6.7.13 Noss SPA

Table 48: PVA results for Noss SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Noss	Gannet	0.93 - 0.96	0.23 – 0.30	No AEoSI

We conclude **no AEoSI for gannet at Noss SPA**

B.6.7.14 Shiant Isles SPA

Table 49: PVA results for Shiant Isles SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Shiant Isles	Razorbill	0.96 - 0.98	1.34 – 2.35	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.99*	7.40 – 12.56	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We conclude:

- **no AEoSI for razorbill at Shiant Isles SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for puffin at Shiant Isles SPA.**

B.6.7.15 St Kilda SPA

Table 50: PVA results for St Kilda SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
St Kilda SPA	Razorbill	0.87 – 0.95	0.09 – 0.20	Unable to conclude No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.99*	6.35 – 11.09	No AEoSI
	Gannet	0.97 – 0.98	9.74 – 12.59	No AEoSI

*Applicant only presented upper impact CPS

We are **unable to conclude no AEoSI for razorbill at St Kilda SPA** considering:

- the low CPS values
- a population decline of up to 5% - 13% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 0.1% - 0.4% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- unfavourable condition of the feature
- a 67% increase in population between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count.

We conclude:

- **no AEoSI for puffin at St Kilda SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for gannet at St Kilda SPA.**

B.6.7.16 Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA

Table 51: PVA results for Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
Sule Skerry and Sule Stack	Guillemot	0.95 – 0.98	0.81 -2.12	No AEoSI
	Puffin	0.95 – 0.97	2.08 – 3.68	No AEoSI
	Gannet	0.90 - 0.93	0.85 – 1.1	Unable to conclude No AEoSI

We conclude:

- **no AEoSI for guillemot at Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA.**
- **no AEoSI for puffin at Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA.**

We are unable to conclude no AEoSI for gannet at Sule Skerry and Sule stack SPA considering:

- the low CPS values
- a population decline of up to 7% - 10% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 0.2% - 0.3% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- favourable condition of the feature
- a 94% increase in population between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count but a 27% decline between Seabirds Count and most recent count[10]

B.6.7.17 West Westray SPA

Table 52: PVA results for West Westray SPA.

Site	Species	CPS (upper and lower impact scenarios)	Additional mortality from project alone (birds/annum)	Conclusion
West Westray	Kittiwake	0.55 - 0.66	0.21 – 0.26	AEoSI

We conclude **AEoSI for kittiwake at West Westray SPA,** considering:

- the very low CPS
- a population decline of up to 34% - 45% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- a decrease in population growth rate of up to 1.1% - 1.6% (lower – upper impact scenario)
- the unfavourable declining condition of the feature
- a 92% decline in population between Seabird 2000 and Seabirds Count

B.6.8 Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex (OFFSABC) marine SPA assessment

Our assessment of impacts to the OFFSABC marine SPA breeding seabird qualifying features was undertaken with respect to the functionally linked breeding colony SPAs.[49] The assessed SPAs/features are listed in the table below along with our colony SPA conclusions for AEoSI.

Table 53: Summary of NatureScot conclusions for OFFSABC.

SPA	Species	Colony SPA conclusion
Forth Islands	Gannet	AEoSI

B.6.9 Seas off St Kilda marine SPA assessment

Our assessment of impacts to the Seas off St Kilda marine SPA breeding seabird qualifying features was undertaken with respect to the functionally linked breeding colony SPAs.[50] The assessed SPAs/features are listed in the table below along with our colony SPA conclusions for AEoSI.

Table 54: Summary of NatureScot conclusions for Seas off St Kilda.

SPA	Species	Colony SPA conclusion
St Kilda SPA	Razorbill	Unable to conclude no AEoSI

B.6.10 Seabird assemblage features assessment

Any named qualifying species of an assemblage feature in an SPA is protected in its own right. The SPA Conservation Objectives are set for individual species rather than the assemblage and therefore the features should be assessed and any impacts concluded at the individual species level.

This has been the established position in Scotland for quite some time, although we understand that this differs from the approach taken in England.

For those SPAs which have a seabird assemblage feature, where we have concluded AEoSI for at least one named species of the seabird assemblage, then that is also the conclusion for the assemblage feature.

B.6.11 Great skua assessment

As mentioned previously the applicant has assessed great skua using a migratory CRM approach, the reasoning given is due to the low number of great skua seen in the study area. This reasoning does not take account for the fact that great skua are one of the species most impacted by the HPAI outbreak. As mentioned previously DAS is a snapshot of the way birds are using the environment, HPAI reduced great skua populations in the UK by 73% (Tremlett et al., 2023[5]). All of these factors may have played a role in why great skua was not being detected in surveys and is why we will be requesting pre-construction DAS. **We will therefore request that the applicant undertakes a CRM assessment but includes birds seen in the survey area and buffer and includes sitting and flying birds**. This will allow us to undertake an assessment of the projects impacts on great.

B.6.12 Manx shearwater and storm petrel assessment

[49] Conservation and Management Advice (2022) Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex Special Protection Area (SPA) - https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/special-protection-area/10478/conservation-and-management-advice.pdf
[50] Conservation and Management Advice (2022) St Kilda SPA and Seas of St Kilda SPA - https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/special-protection-area/10488/conservation-and-management-advice.pdf

The applicant highlights that there were low numbers of storm petrels and Manx shearwaters recorded during the DAS campaign. However, these species are active during the night and a higher number of birds may be present outside the period when DAS is undertaken (during daylight hours).

We appreciate that the applicant has undertaken collision risk modelling for Manx shearwater and note that the applicant makes use of Waggit et al. (2020)[51] to look at the species distribution around the array area. However, as it is currently not known how this species and other procellariiformes, such as storm petrel species might react/interact with offshore windfarms due to their attraction to light, we request post consent monitoring to look at this to better understand any potential impacts and can advise further if the application gains consent.

B.6.13 Atlantic puffin

Within Table 13-8 of the RIAA it is reported that that *'Puffin increase in mortality from in-combination displacement'*, for Canna and Sanday SPA resulted in a larger increase in mortality rate for the upper impact scenario for excluding Berwick Bank, than including Berwick Bank. We believe this is an error, but ask the applicant to clarify what the including and excluding upper scenario increase in mortality rate should be.

It is also noted that as the applicant has rounded the increase in mortality rate to 4 decimal places they have not undertaken a PVA for puffin at Canna and Sanday SPA and North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA. **If the increase in mortality rate had been rounded to 2 decimal places as expected, PVAs would have been run.**

B.6.14 Razorbill

Within the RIAA the applicant undertook a project alone assessment for razorbill at North Rona and Sule Sgier SPA but has not undertaken one in the in-combination assessment, **can the applicant clarify why this is the case**.

B.6.15 Kittiwake

Table 8-59 – the applicant states that the SPA population for North Caithness Cliff is 26,200 can the applicant please clarify how this was calculated as we calculate the population to be 11,142. This does not change our conclusions as even with the corrected population the impact does not reach a 0.02 increase in mortality.

B.6.16 Terrestrial SPAs

Due to the proximity of the development to the coast there are several terrestrial SPAs considered via EIA and RIAA. We provide specific comments on these below:

B.6.16.1 Lewis Peatlands SPA

Red-throated diver and black-throated divers are qualifying species of the Lewis peatlands SPA which routinely commute to the sea for fishing, and so the Proposed Development may present a risk to these birds. Preferably an assessment would be as accurate as possible by using the actual

[51] Waggitt JJ, Evans PGH, Andrade J, et al. Distribution maps of cetacean and seabird populations in the North-East Atlantic. J Appl Ecol. 2020;57:253–269. https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.13525

numbers of birds seen flying through the area, as is used in a terrestrial CRM assessment but noting this may not be possible.

We have been able to provide conclusions for red-throated diver (see Section B.6.7.8), however, **we request that the collision risk for black-throated diver is recalculated**. This should use the correct avoidance and the Lewis Peatlands SPA population for qualifying species, which would provide a better indication than using the biogeographic populations as has been done in the EIA.

B.6.17 Greenland White Fronted Geese

Greenland white fronted geese (GWFG) are connected to several SPAs in the South and West of Scotland and may migrate through the Proposed Development. While we note the assessment undertaken by the applicant has explored the migratory collision risk model outputs we have been made aware of emerging global concerns for this species. The global population of GWFG has fallen significantly and the population is now considered Critically Endangered – the latest population estimate in spring 2025 was 13,303 birds. GWFG have undergone major declines with a concerning decline 11.6% decline between spring 2024 and 2025. While climatic variables add uncertainty to predictions, on the current trajectory the population could be extinct within 20-50 years.

The ultimate cause of the decline is poor productivity linked to increased snow in Greenland early in the breeding season, and there is also a level of illegal shooting in Iceland. However, the UK and Ireland are the main wintering grounds for GWFG, and while we are already working on several actions there are others we can/are being asked to take to ensure that the birds are protected and in the best possible condition while they are in Scotland.

There is an expectation within the AEWA International Single Species Management Plan (ISSAP)[52] that Range States (UK, Ireland, Iceland and Greenland) should therefore convene an Emergency Meeting to address the situation – this is now likely to take place in June 2026. NatureScot and JNCC are working together to identify any measures and commitments we can make to address the decline. We are not currently able to provide specific advice on the likely outcomes of this meeting.

We are aware that this species migratory flight path is likely to encompass the development area and may use Lewis as an emergency stop during bad weather. However, there is currently insufficient information to quantify potential impacts or assess the risk of such conditions occurring. **We therefore recommend that monitoring work could be considered prior to any construction that would provide a better understanding of how frequently this occurs and under what conditions.** For example, the use of radar monitoring to record migratory flights, particularly during poor weather, shore-based vantage points. as well as reviewing and analysing any existing tracking data. If this is still considered an issue it is possible that a very specific short curtailment could mitigate any impacts. However if post-consent/ pre-construction monitoring shows that GWFG do not pass through the Proposed Development then this suggested condition would not need to be implemented.

The radar survey flagged unidentified grey geese which may have been migrating GWFG. There needs to be a full analysis of the impact the proposed development would have on them. Tag data is available and may help to infer the level of known flight activity in this area for an analysis. GWFG move in family groups so a single line shown on the tag data infers a group of birds moving

[52] AEWA International Single Species Management Plan (ISSAP)

together. Only a few birds are tagged but even from this we can get a reasonable indication of migration movements. Loch Urrahag just south west of Barvas is an important site for this species and birds migrating from Greenland may be at risk of collision and/or distributional responses.

B.6.18 Disturbance and Displacement to Birds from Vessel Movements

At the time of the application, the ports to be used during construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases are unknown. This means that this potential impact has not been assessed, as the port(s) and the route vessels will take is currently unknown. We advise that once this information becomes available it should be discussed with NatureScot so that the potential impacts can be assessed

B.6.19 Assessment of other impact pathways

This advice relates to impact pathways not already covered above. For all these pathways where embedded mitigation is proposed it should be implemented.

Table 55: Assessment of other impact pathways occurring during all phases for Offshore ornithology

Impact pathway and phase	**NatureScot conclusion**
Barrier effects resulting from the turbine area (only assessed for fulmar)	No AEoSI
Disturbance and Displacement to Birds from Vessel Movements outside the turbine area (construction, O&M and decommissioning)	Please see section above
Indirect Impacts to Habitat and/or prey	No AEoSI for any SPA features assessed
Underwater noise	No AEoSI for any SPA features assessed
Artificial light	No AEoSI for any SPA features assessed – noting advice above around post consent monitoring (if the application gains consent)
Suspended sediments	No AEoSI for any SPA features assessed

B.6.19.1 UXO Clearance

The potential for direct impacts from Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) clearance was not discussed in the RIAA, as the applicant has undertaken some pre-application surveys and believes that UXO clearance will not be needed. UXO clearance detonations may directly affect marine birds through injury, and indirectly impact marine birds through underwater noise, disturbance and damage to the seabed. Therefore, if the applicant does find that UXO clearance is required this will need to be assessed and the relevant licences applied for.

NATURESCOT ADVICE ON SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Appendix C Marine mammals

Marine mammals are considered in Chapter 13: Marine Mammals and the following relevant supporting appendices:

- Appendix 3.1 - Percussive Piling Installation Approach
- Appendix 13.2 - Passive Acoustic Monitory Survey Report
- Appendix 13.3 - Underwater Noise Modelling Assessment
- Appendix 13.4 - Marine Mammal Population Modelling

Our advice on the harbour porpoise qualifying species of the Inner Hebrides and Minches Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Risso's Dolphin qualifying species of the North-east Lewis Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area (NCMPA) is included in this Appendix.

On the basis that an adequate MPA assessment has not been presented by the Applicant, we are unable to determine whether the activity is capable of affecting, other than insignificantly, the Risso's dolphin protected feature and thus whether there is a significant risk of hindering the conservation objectives. As a result, we advise:

- **A standalone proposal alone and cumulative NCMPA assessment for all relevant impact pathways is carried out for the North-east Lewis NCMPA as this has not been adequately assessed.**

With respect to the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, we advise **we are unable to conclude no adverse effect on site integrity (AEoSI) due to behavioural disturbance from pile driving during construction** given uncertainty on the disturbance levels used in the assessment. Further details are provided below.

C.1 **EIA Summary**

The assessment for marine mammals concludes no significant impacts alone or cumulatively. However, we raise a fundamental concern with the assessment approach and conclusions which are predicated on the successful use of noise abatement systems providing a 12dB noise reduction. Further information on this aspect as well as other issues are provided below.

C.1.1 *Piling noise reductions through use of Noise Abatement Systems (NAS)*

The EIA Report lacks evidence or detail regarding how a 12dB noise reduction through the use of NAS would be achieved, and as a result we do not consider the assessment to be based on a true worst-case scenario (WCS).

It is unclear from the information presented if the WCS adopted for disturbance from piling noise is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e., with or without the use of NAS). Considering our concerns on the feasibility of achieving a 12dB noise reduction, we require clarification on:

- **If the worst-case scenario modelled is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e., NAS).**
- **If pre-mitigated noise contours have not been used to calculate disturbance, we request that the assessment is carried out using pre-mitigated noise contours (i.e., in the absence of NAS).**

In addition, given the use of NAS is presented as fundamental to the assessment, we request the following additional information to reflect a range of potential mitigated impact scenarios and to provide confidence in the assessment conclusions:

- **A sensitivity analysis for key impact metrics from piling noise using a range of lower noise level reductions (e.g., 6dB, 8dB) with minimal achievable reductions (worst case) and maximum reductions (best case) presented.**

Furthermore, should Scottish Ministers grant consent, we advise:

- **Detailed information should be outlined through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol on the type of NAS to be deployed alongside a deployment proof of concept suitable for 45 – 67 m water depths.**
- **Field data or literature demonstrating typical performance of the chosen system and how this evidence supports the assumed 12 dB reduction provided within the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol.**
- **A monitoring proposal to validate the EIA Report / PDE noise abatement predictions and to better understand the likelihood of impact for disturbance from piling and the use of NAS.**

C.1.2 *NatureScot conclusions on significant effects*

We raise issues with magnitude and sensitivity scoring in our advice below, and as such we disagree with the outcome of the assessment. Instead, we conclude **significant impacts** for:

- **Disturbance from piling, for the proposal alone for Risso's Dolphin within Celtic Greater North Sea** (CGNS) **MU and Bottlenose Dolphin within Coastal West Scotland and the Hebrides MU** (CWSH)**. This also** has the potential to **hinder the conservation objectives of the NE Lewis NCMPA for** Risso's **dolphin and should be included in the MPA assessment that is required.**
- **Disturbance from piling, cumulatively for Risso's dolphins, white-beaked dolphin, minke whale, harbour porpoise and the coastal bottlenose dolphin population.**
- **Disturbance or displacement / temporary foraging habitat loss from presence of vessels for proposal alone for all receptors. We consider this can be reduced to not significant levels following development of the Vessel Management Plan (VMP).**

As such, should Scottish Ministers grant consent, we advise that:

- **The Applicant must consider the implications of underwater noise from piling further, through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) post-consent, for all species considered in the EIA Report.**
- **The Applicant must consider the implications of our revised conclusions further, through the development of the VMP and MMMP with updated assessments, post-consent, to identify reductions to the predicted impacts. Given these predicted impacts, we advise that monitoring to validate the EIA Report predictions and implementation of NAS to better understand the management and mitigation of these impacts is required.**
- **A monitoring proposal to validate the EIA Report predictions and better understand the likelihood of impacts for disturbance from piling and other impacts may be required, particularly considering the utilisation of the area by a wide range of marine mammal species.**

Impacts arising from UXO clearance (auditory injury and disturbance) have not been assessed as part of the EIA or RIAA as the Applicant states it is not anticipated to be required. An assessment on impacts arising from UXO should have been presented within the application, though we accept that mitigation measures for UXO clearance can be considered post consent, if required. As a result, we recommend:

- **The Applicant must consider the impacts from auditory injury and disturbance from UXO clearance events further in the MMMP post-consent and that further mitigation measures are defined and secured (if necessary). If large UXOs are identified, we recommend further consultation with ourselves and Marine Directorate to agree and finalise any mitigation, which may include seasonal restrictions.**

C.1.3 *Clarifications and/or Additional Information*

There are other aspects of the assessment where we request clarification and/or additional information, including:

- **Clarification on whether three drilling vessels for the installation of 25 turbines could be operating concurrently with the percussive piling activities of 35 turbines. Should drilling and percussive piling occur concurrently, then we request that this is assessed appropriately.**
- **A quantitative assessment is carried out using fixed noise thresholds to assess the disturbance potential of other construction noise sources.**

C.2 **RIAA Summary**

The overall quality of the RIAA with respect to marine mammal SACs is not up to the generally high standard of the EIA. As previously outlined, it is unclear if the WCS for disturbance from piling is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e. the 12dB reduction through use of NAS). Until this is clarified and additional information provided, we are **unable to conclude** the screened in impact pathway **will not result in AEoSI to the harbour porpoise qualifying feature of the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC.**

As a result, we request clarification on:

- **Whether the assessment presented in the RIAA is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels from piling noise.**
- **Should the assessment be based on post-mitigated noise contours, we request that assessment is carried out using pre-mitigated noise contours and presented as additional information. This should identify the distance from the impact source to the SAC and/or the percentage of overlap of the contours and the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, is presented as a minimum and if relevant.**

C.3 **Baseline characterisation**

C.3.1 *Study area*

In Section 13.4.2 of Chapter 13, two study areas are outlined. The wider ranging spatial scope from noise impacts are assessed using the species-specific Management Units (MUs) outlined by the Inter Agency Marine Mammal Working Group (IAMMWG) and seal monitoring units outlined by the Scientific Committee On Seals (SCOS). The more localised marine mammal Study Area is composed of the Array Area plus Offshore Cable Area of Search (OCAS) plus a 100 km buffer based on the maximum foraging ranges of grey seals. We accept these study areas.

C.3.2 *Digital Aerial Surveys (DAS) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM)*

We welcome the inclusion of the desk-top review, 2-year DAS report, and extensive PAM campaign and summary report. These data are vital to understand the area use by marine mammals, and the different survey methods have complemented each other to provide information to inform the assessment of potential impacts.

DAS surveys found nine species of marine mammal over the survey period (March 2022 – February 2024).

PAM deployments over the course of ~340 calendar days found the presence of ten marine mammal species vocalising in the region. The analysis found the presence of several species that were not observed during DAS surveys, highlighting the need for these surveys to support visual efforts over the recommended two-year survey period. We welcome the use of the North Atlantic dolphin classifier - PAMGuard ROCCA module used for the broadband PAM analyses, and while there are caveats associated with it, it is promising to see it support applications in cetacean high usage areas such as this.

The 14 species identified within the baseline and taken forward for assessment are:

- Harbour porpoise
- Minke whale
- Common dolphin
- Bottlenose dolphin
- White-beaked dolphin
- Risso's dolphin
- Killer whale
- Long-finned pilot whale
- Atlantic white-sided dolphin
- Beaked whale spp.
- Humpback whale
- Fin whale
- Grey seal
- Harbour seal

We note the information provided for fin whale indicates this species is a rare visitor to the area. However, frequent seasonal sightings of this species are made by shore-based observers as well as sightings logged on the HWDT Whale Track sightings map, noting most sightings are within The Minch.

C.3.3 *Densities*

The densities the applicant has used for cetacean species assessment follow our advice at scoping, using the most precautionary density from the resources investigated. Therefore, we accept the cetacean densities referenced.

However, we disagree with the Seal Monitoring Unit (SMU) abundances presented for grey seals in Table 13-20 of Chapter 13. Table 13-20 of Chapter 13 lists August counts, pup production, and densities from Carter et al. (2020, 2022). While the Western Isles SMU is correct for harbour seals, it is unclear where the figure for grey seals (31,000) in the table has been derived. The recommended estimate to use in lieu of population estimates now available in SCOS, 2025 is listed in the Table below (given as Nmin). The SAC counts and pup production numbers presented in the EIA are correct.

While we have previously advised the use of Carter et al., 2022, and the 2022/2023 SCOS reports, for future applications updated seal population and habitat usage data are available[53,54,55].

Table 56: Grey seal abundances reported in the EIAR, and from the referenced SCOS reports (2022, 2023).

SMU/SAC	EIAR Count	EIAR Pup production	Nmin (SCOS, 2022, 2023)
Western Isles	31,000	16,083	21,512

C.4 **Assessment approach**

C.4.1 *Sensitivity*

Value has not been included in the definition of criteria for sensitivity because "Marine mammals are afforded high levels of protection under UK and international legislations". However, we advise that value is consistently considered within the sensitivity criteria across other ecological receptors. Not including value/importance within the sensitivity criteria disregards the inherent reason why cetaceans and seals are given a high level of legislative protection through the Habitats Regulations and fails to fully acknowledge the potential risks to individuals and populations.

Where we disagree with the sensitivity assigned, this is indicated in our advice below in Table 57.

C.4.2 *Significance matrix*

We have noted the tendency for significance matrix tables presented in EIA Reports to be heavily weighted towards minor or negligible outcomes. This results in the conclusions reached in the impact assessment likely to be underestimating impacts. This is in addition to discrepancies with the individual sensitivity and magnitude scorings, which again are likely to underestimate impacts. We are considering the value of preparing guidance on this aspect to help developers in the preparation of their EIAs.

C.4.3 *Underwater Noise Modelling*

Overall, Appendix 13.3 Underwater Noise Modelling Assessment (hereafter referred to as UWN report) provides a detailed and transparent assessment of the underwater noise impacts using the INSPIRE (Subacoustech) model, which we broadly accept.

The use of an average/slightly conservative model fit means real-world noise levels may be higher than predicted.

Sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the UWN report present a discussion regarding a transition from impulsive to non-impulsive sound beyond 3.5 – 5 km whereby the ranges will not be "fully impulsive". However, due to uncertainty in the evidence base, we highlight that these assumptions currently cannot be relied upon, and impulsive thresholds must still be applied. We are satisfied that impact ranges have been derived using the impulsive criteria in the UWN modelling.

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[53]Carter, M. I. D, Bivins, M., Duck, C. D., Has e, G. D., Morris, C. D., Moss, S. E. W., Thompson, D., Thompson, P. M., Vincent, C., Russell, D. J. F. (2025) Updated habitat-based at-sea distribution maps for harbour and grey seals in Scotland. Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St Andrews, Commissioned Report to Scottish Government.
[54] SCOS (2025). Scientific advice on matters related to the management of seal populations: 2025. Natural Environment Research Council Special Committee on Seals.
[55] SCOS (2024). Scientific advice on matters related to the management of seal populations: 2024. Natural Environment Research Council Special Committee on Seals.

Southall *et al.* (2019)[56] criteria for assessing impacts of underwater noise on marine mammals have been used in this assessment, which was advised by NatureScot at scoping. Whilst we accept its use in this instance, we advise that we have now adopted the NMFS (2024)[57] thresholds going forward.

C.4.4 *Assumptions on noise level reductions using Noise Abatement Systems*

The Applicant's underwater noise assessment is predicated on the use of NAS to deliver a 12 dB reduction in piling noise (section 3.5 of Appendix 3.1). This reduction is treated as secured and is embedded throughout the modelling, underpinning all conclusions on marine mammal impacts, including predicted PTS/TTS ranges, behavioural disturbance zones, and cumulative effects.

We raise significant concerns with this assumption, considering:

- No specific NAS has been identified or discussed.
- No supporting evidence has been provided to demonstrate that a 12dB reduction is achievable considering project location and parameters.
- No site-specific feasibility assessment of NAS deployment has been undertaken.
- No additional detail is provided within the draft MMMP.
- There has been limited use or experience of NAS in Scottish waters to date.

While existing literature highlights that bubble curtain systems can achieve reductions of 10 – 20 dB depending on system design, air volume and environmental factors, this is not guaranteed. Additionally, bubble curtain performance is known to curtail in deeper water depths due to hydrostatic pressure and the need for significantly higher air flow to maintain bubble density.

Data from MarinEARS[58] highlights that at >40 m water depth, reductions of 15 – 16 dB have been achieved but only with high-capacity double bubble curtain systems under optimised conditions, with typical reductions more usually in the 8 – 13 dB range. Given the Proposed Development is located within 45 – 67 m water depths, achieving a 12 dB reduction requires a specific engineered solution and not a general assumption of feasibility.

Where other developments have proposed the use of NAS, they have based their impact assessment on the lowest reliably achievable performance, supported by evidence and sensitivity analyses. This precautionary approach is one we support given the novelty of NAS in mitigating offshore wind construction noise in the UK.

In light of the above, we do not consider the current assessment and conclusions, based on the assumption of 12dB noise reduction, to be robust or reflective of a worst-case scenario.

As a result, we require the following additional information to provide confidence in the assessment conclusions, reflecting a range of potential mitigated impact scenarios:

- A sensitivity analysis for key impact metrics using a range of noise level reductions (e.g., 6dB, 8dB) with minimal achievable reductions (worst case) and maximum reductions (best case) presented.

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[56] Southall, B. L., Finneran, J. J., Reichmuth, C., Nachtigall, P. E., Ketten, D. R., Bowles, A. E., Ellison, W. T., Nowacek, D. P., & Tyack, P. L. (2019). Marine Mammal Noise Exposure Criteria: Updated Scientific Recommendations for Residual Hearing Effects. *Aquatic Mammals*, *45*(2), 125-232.

[57] NMFS. (2024). *Update to: Technical Guidance for Assessing the Effects of Anthropogenic Sound on Marine Mammal Hearing (v3): Underwater and In-Air Criteria for Onset of Auditory Injury and Temporary Threshold Shifts*.

[58] https://marinears.bsh.de/FIS_SCHALL_PORTAL/pages/index.jsf

Additionally, should Scottish Ministers be minded to grant consent, we advise that construction activities should not be permitted to commence until the Applicant has provided the following information through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP), in consultation with NatureScot and MD-LOT / MD-SEDD:

- **Detailed information on the type of NAS to be deployed alongside a deployment proof of concept suitable for 45 – 67 m water depths.**
- **Field data or literature demonstrating typical performance of the chosen system and how this evidence supports the assumed 12 dB reduction.**
- **A monitoring proposal to validate the EIA Report / latest PDE noise abatement predictions and to better understand the likelihood of impact for disturbance from piling and the use of NAS.**

The predicted maximum achievable noise abatement levels based on the latest project parameters with updated supporting assessments should be clearly presented within the PS / MMMP.

C.5 **Impact assessment**

For impacts which have the potential to result in auditory injury, the Applicant has deemed the sensitivity of receptors to be lower than we would expect. It is outlined in the EIA that a receptor has limited ability to recover, adapt or tolerate an impact, which may result in an effect on an individual's survival and/or reproductive rate (e.g. vital rates). Despite this, a sensitivity of '**medium'** is assigned.

Our understanding of hearing sensitivities in most species is limited, and the importance of frequencies outside the apparent sensitive ranges is relatively unknown. Due to the number of uncertainties in the impact of auditory injury to individuals, we do not agree with this sensitivity score.

Additionally, it is an offence in Scottish inshore waters to injure any animal belonging to a European Protected Species. Our position is that any auditory injury, even partial and not resulting in full deafness of an individual, meets the criteria of injury.

This leads to the sensitivity for all marine mammal species being given a revised score of **'high'** for all impacts that may result in auditory injury and is relevant for the EIA, MPA assessment and the RIAA.

Table 57 below, provides a summary of our conclusions for each impact for the project alone, where our scoring differs to the Applicant

Table 57 Applicant assessment conclusions and NatureScot revised conclusions for impacts to marine mammals. Red reflects revised conclusion. Blue reflects additional information needed to finalise conclusions

Effect	**Receptor**	**EIA Report assessment conclusions**			**NatureScot revised conclusions**		
		Magnitude	**Sensitivity**	**Significance**	**Magnitude**	**Sensitivity**	**Significance**
Auditory injury from piling noise	All	Negligible	Medium	Negligible	Low	High	Minor
Disturbance from piling noise	Risso's Dolphin within CGNS Management Unit (MU) and Bottlenose Dolphin within CWSH MU (proposal alone)	Low	Low	Negligible	Medium	Medium	**Moderate**
	Risso's dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, minke whale, harbour porpoise and the coastal bottlenose dolphin population (cumulatively).	Low	Low	Negligible	Medium	Medium	**Moderate**
	All other	Negligible	Low	Negligible	Low	Medium	Minor
Auditory injury from other construction noise	All	Negligible	Medium	Negligible	Low	High	Minor
Disturbance from other construction noise	All	Negligible	Low	Negligible	Low	Medium	Minor
Vessel collision (construction and operation)	Beaked whale species, Minke Whale, Humpback Whale, Fin Whale	Low	Medium	Minor	Low	Medium	Minor
	All other	Low	Low	Negligible	Low	Low	Negligible

Disturbance or temporary habitat loss from presence of vessels	All	Low	Low	Negligible	Medium (Low with a VMP)	Medium	Minor/**Moderate**
Accidental release of pollutants (construction and operation)	All	Low	High	Minor	Low	High	Minor
Increases in SSC and reduction in water quality (construction and operation)	All	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Indirect effects of impacts on prey availability	All	Low	Low	Negligible	Low	Low	Negligible
Disturbance from turbine noise	Harbour Porpoise, Minke whale, Humpback whale and Fin whale	Low	Low	Negligible	Low	Low	Negligible
	Killer whale	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Low	Negligible	Negligible
	All other	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Low	Low	Negligible
Barrier effects	Harbour porpoise, White-beaked dolphin, Common dolphin, Bottlenose dolphin, Risso's dolphin, Atlantic white-sided dolphin, Long-finned pilot whale and Killer whale	Low	Low	Negligible	Low	Low	Negligible
	All other	Low	Low	Negligible	Low	Low	Negligible
Long term habitat loss	All	Low	Low	Negligible	Medium	Low	Low

C.5.1 *Auditory injury from piling noise*

We disagree with Section 13.8.1.31 of the EIA and the scoring of medium for marine mammals' sensitivity to auditory injury and suggest this should be high to reflect their reliance on hearing for foraging, navigation, communication and predator avoidance.

Section 13.8.1 states that "results show that, both with and without the 12 dB mitigation applied, the number of animals receiving PTS is less than 1 across all receptors, which represents less than 0.01% of the UK population of each receptor". This is incorrect, Table 13-26 reports unmitigated impacts to HP as 3 individuals for instantaneous PTS and 120 individuals for cumulative PTS. Table 13-28 shows unmitigated impacts for Minke whale as 67 individuals for cumulative PTS and for fin whale as 40 resulting from cumulative PTS.

The Applicant's mitigated PTS results are predicated on the use of NAS to deliver a 12 dB reduction in piling noise. As noted in Section C.4.4 we do not consider the current assessment based on a 12 dB to be reflective of the worst case scenario. In light of this uncertainty, for auditory injury, we have adopted a precautionary approach and based the assessment on pre-mitigated noise levels. Therefore, we advise the worst-case scenario to be as shown under 'pre-mitigation' in Table 58 below.

Table 58: Instantaneous PTS and cumulative PTS noise contours arising from piling for both with mitigation and without mitigation

Impact percussive piling	**Instantaneous PTS**	**Cumulative PTS**
Mitigation	150 m	< 100 m
Pre-mitigation	840 m	6,300 m

Despite the uncertainty regarding the achievement of a 12dB reduction, we accept that risk of instantaneous auditory injury (SPLpeak) only occurs within mitigable distances and will be avoided with other actions which are to be included in a MMMP.

We note that the ranges for cumulative auditory injury (SELcum) are greater, and result in larger numbers of animals being affected. While these lead to low overall percentages of MU populations affected, it still results in impacts to multiple animals. As such, we consider that magnitude should be scored as low, with the sensitivity of all receptors to auditory injury as high.

Using high sensitivity to auditory injury from pile driving results in minor significance of impact and, we accept the conclusion of **minor** which is **not significant in EIA terms**.

C.5.1.1 *iPCoD*

Section 13.8.1.14 of the EIA states that for cumulative PTS *"As a result of no animals being affected, iPCoD was not run for any of the 5 species for which parameters are available (because the model requires at least 1 whole animal to be affected in order to investigate any population-level effect)"*. As we do not consider the EIA contains sufficient evidence in support of a 12dB reduction through NAS, we highlight the potential that ≥1 whole animal may be affected.

As per Section C.4.4 above, a range of potential noise level reductions (e.g., 6dB, 8dB) from NAS should be remodelled to understand the potential for ≥1 whole animal to be affected. While we broadly accept that unmitigated cumulative PTS numbers will likely be reduced to acceptable levels through MMMP / PS development we can advise further following receipt of additional information remodelling a range of other noise level reductions.

C.5.2 *Disturbance from piling noise*

It is unclear from the information provided if the WCS adopted for disturbance from piling noise is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels. Based on our concerns on the feasibility and lack of information on the 12 dB noise reduction, we require clarification on:

- **If the worst-case scenario modelled is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e., NAS). If pre-mitigated noise contours have not been used to calculate disturbance, we request that the assessment is carried out using pre-mitigated noise contours (i.e., in the absence of NAS).**

Irrespective of the above, we accept the dose-response method for calculating disturbance for cetaceans. However, we disagree with the sensitivity scores for cetacean species for piling disturbance and advise that all species should be medium.

With the values provided for number of animals disturbed, and the percentages of relevant UK MUs disturbed, magnitude scores should also be revised to medium for bottlenose dolphin CWSH and Risso's dolphin.

Changing both sensitivity and magnitude scores to reflect vulnerability to disturbance and the percentages of UK MUs calculated to be disturbed **results in a moderate significance for bottlenose dolphin CWSH and Risso's dolphin CGNS**, which is **significant in EIA terms**.

For all other receptors, the changes to sensitivity result in minor significance which is **not significant in EIA terms**.

The Applicant should consider the implications of our revised conclusions further if consented, within the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) with updated assessments, post-consent, to identify reductions to the predicted impacts. Given these predicted impacts, we advise that monitoring to validate the EIA Report predictions and better understand the likelihood of these impacts is required.

C.5.3 *Auditory injury from other construction noise*

The reference sources for the expected noise emissions are found in Appendix 13.3, Volume 2c, Underwater Noise Modelling Report. We note that the source levels in the EIAR should be presented with an accompanying reference metric as described on page 2-6 of the Underwater Noise Modelling Report. As such they should be detailed as SPL_{RMS} dB re 1 µPa to characterise noise and vibration of a continuous nature. The activities which will give rise to this impact pathway are detailed in Table 13-24.

We note that drill and grout construction is planned to install piles within the south-west portion of the array for 25 of the turbines. We accept that temporary and permanent auditory injury is <100 m for fleeing and stationary receptors and therefore within mitigable ranges.

While the Appendix 13.3 provides the detail on the noise sources considered, it is unclear which of the various scenarios are then presented in the EIAR. Table 12-38 lists the activities alongside the hearing groups, impact distance and number of animals affected, but the worst-case scenario (stationary animal) has not been presented, and PTS has been presented as SELcum dB re 1 µPa rather than SPLRMS dB re 1 µPa which is the correct pressure metric.

Based on the worst-case stationary scenario outlined in Appendix 13.3, the predicted numbers of animals affected can be found in Table 59 below. Note that we would have expected the applicant to have shown this information clearly in the EIA Report.

Table 59 predicated numbers of animals affected from auditory injury from other construction noise

Activity	**Group**	**Auditory injury impact range (m)**	**No. animals impacted**
Dredging (suction)	VHF	570	14.1
Grinding	LF (multiple species)	140	<1
Rock placement	VHF	900	35.3
Vessels (med)	HF (multiple species)	130	<1

The underwater modelling shows that the activities listed would not be expected to cause permanent or temporary auditory injury (AUD INJ and temporary threshold shift (TTS), respectively) for a fleeing receptor outside of 100 m, with the exception of very high frequency (VHF) cetaceans.

We recognise the precautionary nature of stationary auditory injury SPL_{RMS} which requires an individual to remain within the impact range for 24 hours. Dredging activities may cause auditory injury within 570 m for stationary harbour porpoises (VHF). Auditory injury is also possible for stationary low frequency (LF), VHF, and high frequency (HF) species for grinding, rock placement, and medium vessel noise, respectively. However, it is unlikely that an animal would remain in the impact range for the duration needed to elicit an auditory impact. Combined with standard marine mammal mitigation (use of acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs), marine mammal observers (MMOs)), we accept that this impact can be mitigated.

TTS is possible for fleeing harbour porpoises within 1200 m of rock placement activities, and for multiple stationary receptors across the range of proposed activities. There is not specific mitigation required for TTS, and with standard marine mammal mitigation in addition to the low probability of animals remaining within the impact range for 24 hours, we accept the conclusions.

As per Section C.4.1, we disagree with the scoring of medium for marine mammals' sensitivity to auditory injury and suggest this should be high to reflect their reliance on hearing for foraging, navigation, communication and predator avoidance. Considering the variety of other noisy construction activities and the length of time these would be undertaken, we also disagree with the magnitude score of negligible, this should be low. However, with the proposed embedded mitigation measures we agree impacts will be non-significant in EIA terms.

The applicants should make efforts to identify how many vessels will be using ultrasonic biofouling devices and communicate this in the VMP post-consent. We also expect that a detailed schedule of works will be provided post-consent that will provide more information on the duration and timing of the proposed construction activities.

We agree there are no significant effects on the North-east Lewis MPA and the Sea of the Hebrides MPA due to the small number of Risso's dolphins (HF) and minke whale (LF) predicted to be impacted in a worst-case scenario (stationary animal for 24 hours), as well as the localised impact ranges that do not extend to the sites. However this information should be included within the full NC MPA assessment for completeness.

C.5.4 *Disturbance from other construction noise*

Section 13.8.4 of the EIA provides summaries of peer-reviewed published literature that explore disturbance in cetaceans, which we welcome. However, most of the studies explore the impacts of vessel noise, and there are fewer resources cited that examine the other activities predicted as part of the construction.

There has been no attempt to quantify the numbers of animals expected to be disturbed by the construction activities, and this has not been explored in the underwater noise modelling report.

We would expect the application of fixed noise thresholds to assess the disturbance potential of continuous noise sources, such as the Level B harassment levels (SPL value of 160 dB re: 1 µPa; Southall et al., 2007). We require more information to enable assessment of this impact and identify whether the significance score given is appropriate.

As a result, we request the following additional information:

- **A quantitative assessment using fixed noise thresholds to assess the disturbance potential of continuous noise sources.**

We request that the numbers of vessels using ultrasonic anti-fouling devices are identified by the applicant and included in the post-consent Vessel Management Plan. With the consistent presence of marine mammals within the area shown by DAS and PAM, there is a valuable opportunity to continue monitoring efforts during construction and operation to better understand the impact of disturbance from vessels and other construction noise sources.

It is also unclear from the information presented if drill and grout activities could be operating concurrently with percussive piling. As a result, we request clarification on:

- **Whether three drilling vessels for the installation of 25 turbines could be operating concurrently with the percussive piling activities of 35 turbines. Should drilling and percussive piling occur concurrently, then we request that this is assessed appropriately.**

C.5.5 Vessel collision (construction and operation)

Baseline vessel presence numbers in the Shipping and Navigation study area is provided in Section 13.8.5. During the winter period, there was an average of 5-6 unique vessels per day recorded within the Shipping and Navigation Study Area. During the summer period, there was an average of between 7-8 vessels per day recorded within the Shipping and Navigation Study Area, and an average of 1 per day recorded within the Array Area itself.

We note different sensitivity scores for small cetaceans and pinnipeds, and larger baleen and beaked whales are given, which we accept. The chapter sections do not include the predicted numbers of vessels present, however, elsewhere in the EIAR it is indicated that a maximum of 35 and 10 vessels in the project boundary at any one time are expected during construction or operation, respectively. It would be beneficial to understand the anticipated daily average vessel presence within the area during construction and operation, and this should be clearly detailed alongside proposed transit routes in subsequent iterations of the Vessel Management Plan (VMP) (see also Section **Error! Reference source not found.** of RIAA advice below).

The Outline Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan does not contain any specific information pertaining to marine mammals. The embedded mitigation measures (M029 & M015) in Table 13-40 of the EIA also do not relate to marine mammals. Post-consent the embedded mitigation should be updated to provide more detail on the actions to be taken to avoid vessel

collisions. Any collisions that occur should be reported to NatureScot and the details submitted to the International Whaling Commission Global Vessel Strikes Database

With more detailed, appropriate mitigation, we accept the overall significance score of negligible/minor for vessel collision for both construction and operation.

C.5.6 Disturbance or temporary habitat loss from vessel presence

The section explores many studies that have examined the impact of vessel presence on marine mammals. As noted, it is challenging to confirm whether vessel presence alone, or vessel noise influenced the results seen.

Ultimately, we disagree that the magnitude of the effect is low, due to the predicted increase in vessel presence (max 35 and 10 at any one time for construction and operation, respectively). Instead, we recommend this should be medium (with the potential to be lowered to low through development of the VMP) making the significance score **moderate.** As a result, we advise:

- **The Applicant should consider the implications of our revised conclusions further, through the development of the VMP and MMMP with updated assessments, post-consent, to identify reductions to the predicted impacts. Given these predicted impacts, we advise that monitoring to validate the EIA Report predictions and better understand the likelihood of these impacts is required.**

Most of the marine mammal species recorded in the DAS and PAM campaigns respond negatively to the presence of vessels, emphasising the importance of adherence to appropriate vessel mitigation measures, including the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code. As the vessel mitigation measures are not detailed in the application, it is integral that this is developed post-consent. With the consistent presence of marine mammals within the area shown by DAS and PAM, there is a valuable opportunity to continue monitoring efforts during construction and operation to better understand the impact of vessel presence.

C.5.7 Accidental release of pollutants (construction and operation)

We accept the magnitude of low for the release of pollutants for both construction and operations with appropriate mitigation in place. We also agree with the sensitivity score of high that reflects the susceptibility of marine mammals to pollution events and the potential for longer-term impacts on individuals and populations.

We understand that a detailed Marine Pollution Contingency Protocol (MPCP) has not yet been finalised, and this will be expected to cover the mitigation measures in place to avoid pollutant release and the process followed if one does occur. Further information on turbine coating degradation from wind/weather and chemical composition of coatings is also needed, to understand the possibility of introduction to the marine environment. We accept this can be finalised post-consent and agree that the overall significance on receptors is minor and not significant in EIA terms.

C.5.8 Increases in suspended sediment concentration and reduction in water quality (construction and operation)

Chapter 10 provides the detailed construction activities that would create suspended sediment/reduction in water quality. This includes preparation of the seabed, drilling of pin piles and cable installation. Smaller sediment sizes in the southwest of the array are expected to cause sediment plumes to travel further out of the array area.

It is likely that there will be an impact to marine mammal receptors resulting from an increase in SSC and the resulting movements and availability of prey species away from baseline during construction and we consider this impact pathway should have been addressed under impacts on prey availability. However, we accept the conclusions of this impact during the construction and operational phases.

C.5.9 Indirect effects of impacts on prey availability

Section 13.8.9 does not examine the likelihood of prey presence or interpret the baseline habitat that may encourage aggregations or presence of certain species. Nor does it cite the PAM report to quantify the consistent presence of marine mammals that may represent foraging activity. Continuous year-round presence of harbour porpoise would suggest foraging occurs. Consistent detections of bottlenose dolphin, Atlantic white-sided dolphin and white-beaked dolphin during the summer months may also indicate that the area offers seasonal foraging opportunities for these species. The benthic habitat of rocky reef and Laminaria beds is likely to provide shelter and foraging for a broad range of fish, invertebrate and cephalopod species, further emphasising the potential as marine mammal foraging habitat.

We consider that construction activities have the potential to disturb fish species and make them less available as prey for marine mammals. We recognise that several mitigation measures have been identified for Atlantic salmon that would place seasonal restrictions on piling, and that the applicant has suggested drill and grout pile installation for the south-western portion of the array. These actions would likely reduce disturbance for other fish species and avoid significant loss of prey availability for marine mammals during pile installation periods. Other construction activities may cause prey to temporarily leave the area; however, these effects would be short-term and reversible.

As above, potential changes in prey availability due to SSC and the possible reduction in cetacean presence from baseline should have been assessed under this impact pathway.

Given the short-term nature of the construction and the agreements in place to mitigate more disruptive impacts, we advise that these impacts are not significant in EIA terms.

However, we encourage continued PAM monitoring during the construction phase to better understand cetacean presence and foraging behaviour.

C.5.10 *Disturbance from turbine noise*

The section recognises that operational fixed turbine noise is low frequency and typically low energy (relative and absolute scale). We welcome the inclusion of monitoring of the ambient sound levels at the site, which are presented in the PAM survey report. This found that ambient sound levels were influenced by tides and spring-neap cycles. The highest sound levels were recorded in January 2024 with a median ambient $SPL_{(RMS)}$ of 91.8 - 98.1 dB re 1 µPa. The ambient sound levels were also influenced by vessels including engine noise, single- and multi-frequency echosounders / fish-finders, and fishing activity.

We also welcome the exploration of underwater noise from turbines in the underwater modelling report using the Tougaard et al. (2020) study and the caveat that the project turbines are larger than those modelled from the research. The modelling report found that there was no significant impact of turbine rotor diameter (236 - 280 m) on noise outputs. The modelling found that any marine mammal would have to remain within 100 m of a turbine for >12 hours to exceed permanent or temporary hearing thresholds, with the modelled turbine sizes and at wind speeds of up to 11 m/s.

We accept the scoring of low for harbour porpoise and LF cetacean sensitivity to OWF operational noise but suggest that this score is also applied to HF cetaceans (rather than negligible) to reflect the insufficient understanding of how this receptor group perceives and responds to this sound source. This does not change the significance of the outcome in EIA terms. We also suggest changing the sensitivity from negligible to low for seal species, as while seal responses are better studied in the North Sea where there are extensive anthropogenic structures, this is unknown for seals on the Scottish west coast where an OWF / or any marine installation of this scale would be a novel presence in the marine environment. This does not change the significance of the outcome in EIA terms.

Overall, we accept that the operational OWF noise for marine mammal receptors is not significant, however, with the lack of in situ data from operational OWFs on the Scottish west coast, we would encourage inclusion of post-construction PAM monitoring as a consenting condition to better understand possible impacts.

C.5.11 *Barrier effects*

The PAM and DAS surveys found high numbers of cetaceans and seals in the area at all times of the year, and the occurrence of these species could be affected by the physical presence of the wind farm.

Several studies indicate that turbines can provide additional foraging opportunities to marine mammals through the growth of invertebrate and 'fouling' species that in turn provide prey for fish species. This may particularly benefit odontocetes that focus on targeting individual prey items as part of their hunting strategies. Attraction to anthropogenic structures has been documented and may suggest barrier effects are insignificant in some regions. Similar benefits to mysticetes are not yet fully understood. Large baleen whales such as minke whales, humpback whales and fin whales may be more reluctant to enter OWF arrays if the spacing between the turbines is small, however we note that the minimum spacing is 900 m. However, studies that examine the effect of OWFs within migration routes for baleen whales are more limited, as raised in the EIAR.

We accept that the published literature on the potential barrier effects of operational wind farms is limited and mainly focuses on harbour porpoise and seal species. There are few studies that specifically explore the presence of other marine mammal species around turbines post-construction. As such, there is uncertainty in predicting the possible barrier effect the operational Project may have on the species consistently present (e.g., harbour porpoise, seals), seasonally present (bottlenose dolphin, Atlantic white-sided dolphin, white-beaked dolphin and humpback whale) and those that may be more transient (killer whale, pilot whale).

We accept the sensitivity, magnitude and significance scoring for this impact, however, reiterate that a commitment to continued marine mammal monitoring (particularly PAM) post-construction would be hugely beneficial to further understand barrier effects. As the area is used by a diverse range of cetaceans, we advise that monitoring is a condition if the project is to be consented.

C.5.12 *Long term habitat loss / indirect effects of impacts on prey availability (operation)*

We note the potential for habitat change from the removal of substrate required for array installation, and the introduction of novel artificial structures to the present array area environment. This section is light on supporting evidence that explores the long-term impact of OWFs. There are several published reports and studies that have been able to investigate marine mammal interactions with OWFs (e.g., PrePARED), albeit most of these are focused on the North

Sea and are not representative of the diversity of cetacean and pinniped species observed in the proposed development array area.

We highlight that the Proposed Development has the potential to alter the structure and location of habitats, and may change prey species assemblages as a result of introducing artificial substrate in a region that has limited large scale marine development. Given the uncertainty surrounding the long-term impacts on species that are shown to use the area consistently, seasonally, and on a more transient basis, we suggest that the sensitivity score be considered as low-medium. However, overall, we accept the conclusion that this impact is not significant.

C.5.13 *UXO Clearance*

Impacts arising from UXO clearance (auditory injury and disturbance) have not been assessed as part of the EIA or RIAA as the Applicant states it is not anticipated to be required. It is disappointing that a discussion on UXO has not been presented, with supporting evidence for why UXO clearance and a resulting impact assessment is not required. We would expect impacts under this pathway, including the number of animals with the potential for auditory injury / disturbance post-mitigation to be provided to understand the mitigated level of impact, irrespective of future licencing requirements.

However, we accept that full mitigation measures for auditory injury from UXO clearance can be considered post-consent when more information is known on the exact number and size of the UXOs that will need to be cleared. Please note our preference and recommendation for low-order deflagration as the primary method of disposal, in line with UK and Scottish Government guidance. Low-order deflagration has been successfully concluded at another wind farm in Scottish waters as a viable method for reducing sound levels and impact ranges.

The Applicant will need to consider the implications of UXO clearance impacts including auditory injury and disturbance, on marine mammals further, through the development of the Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) post-consent and the UXO specific licencing process, for all species considered in the EIA Report.

C.6 **Cumulative assessment**

We accept the approach to the long-list and the majority of the short-listed projects for the cumulative effects assessment for disturbance from pile driving activities. We wish to highlight that the impact ranges from pile driving activity from Talisk OWF, Havbreday OWF and West of Orkney OWF likely overlap the CWSH MU for bottlenose dolphins. Disturbance numbers from these projects should have been incorporated into the cumulative assessment to accurately reflect the cumulative disturbance on this population. However, considering the points highlighted below we accept that the current assessment is appropriately precautionary at this stage and this can be re-visited post-consent.

We highlight:

- As with the project alone assessment, we require clarification if the numbers of individuals disturbed from this application were calculated with or without the use of NAS. This clarification may alter our final advice.
- The Applicant has concluded low sensitivity to disturbance for all species, however as with the project alone assessment we advise that this is scored as medium. Based on the percentage of the reference population disturbed for harbour porpoise (10.2 % disturbed), white-beaked dolphin (53.7%), bottlenose dolphin (CWSH 28.9%), Risso's dolphin (31.3%) and minke whale (40.2%) we would revise the magnitude scoring to medium for harbour

porpoise and medium/high for all other species listed, which results in a significance of effect of 'Moderate' which is potentially significant in EIA terms.

NatureScot recognise the layers of precaution built into the cumulative assessment in regard to assessing disturbance from pile driving activities, which include the logistical constraints regarding vessel availability for the number of projects modelled, the inherent variability in construction timelines, wide project design envelopes, worst-case scenarios used for all projects screened in and the precautionary assumptions in the approach to assessing disturbance.

Therefore, considering the points highlighted above and the precautionary assumptions at this current stage we request that as with the project alone the **Applicant will need to consider the implications of our revised conclusions further, through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) with updated assessments, post-consent, to identify reductions to the predicted impact to Risso's dolphins, white-beaked dolphin, minke whale, harbour porpoise and the coastal bottlenose dolphin population.**

C.6.1 *Cumulative disturbance from turbine noise*

Section 13.13.4 assesses the risk of cumulative disturbance for each receptor hearing group; however, the details are very limited and there is no quantitative attempt to assess numbers of animals disturbed or the propagation of turbine noise from the scoped in developments. Despite this we accept the conclusions presented.

C.7 **North-east Lewis NCMPA**

During screening, we advised that "*Although not part of the HRA process, we advise that the Risso's dolphin feature of North-East Lewis MPA is assessed and considered in the EIA, especially until more is known about noise contours*."

The North-east Lewis NCMPA is designated for Risso's dolphin. Overall, we do not consider a full and adequate MPA Assessment has been undertaken, with impacts to the Risso's dolphin qualifying feature only discussed at the end of each impact pathway section, rather than as a standalone assessment. These short assessments contain no supporting evidence or information to make conclusions on the capability of the project to affect the protected features / hinder the conservation objectives of the MPA possible. We also highlight our conclusion of significant effects under EIA for Risso's Dolphin within Celtic Greater North Sea MUs from piling disturbance. As a result, we consider a robust MPA Assessment important and require:

- **the impacts arising from the Proposed Development both alone and cumulatively to the North-east Lewis NCMPA to be adequately assessed in a standalone MPA assessment, addressing the possible connectivity of animals from this site to the project area, and investigate area use by animals to more fully understand the potential impacts.**

C.8 **Mitigation**

Table 13-25 lists the proposed embedded mitigation measures and overall, we support those listed, noting that most measures are related to the development of plans to be submitted post-consent.

As outlined above, detailed mitigation for certain impacts is yet to be finalised.

C.8.1 *Outline Piling Strategy*

Refinement of piling parameters that will be undertaken during Concept Engineering and Front End Engineering Design (FEED) phases will help understand whether the underwater noise

modelling is adequately representative, to define the piling timeline and to confirm the piling type. Details around the use of PAM, ADDs, MMOs, soft start and ramp-up, including timings should be agreed post-consent as part of the Piling Strategy.

As above, we advise that the Applicant will need to consider the implications of our revised conclusions further, through the development of the Piling Strategy and Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol (MMMP) with updated assessments, post-consent, for all species considered in the EIA Report.

C.8.2 *Marine Mammal Mitigation Protocol*

We encourage the submission of a detailed MMMP as soon as UXO and piling parameters are refined.

Although basking sharks are covered under the fish chapter, any mitigation measures to be implemented for marine mammal species should be applied to basking sharks.

C.8.3 *Outline Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan*

The Outline Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan does not contain any specific information pertaining to marine mammals. The embedded mitigation measures (M029 & M015) in Table 13-40 of the EIA also do not relate to marine mammals. Post-consent the embedded mitigation must be improved and updated to provide more detail on the actions to be taken to avoid vessel collisions.

This should include adherence to the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code, maintaining vessels on steady, non-erratic courses (predictable routing) where possible, avoiding approaching within 500 m of seal-haul out sites and the consideration of speed restrictions for both small, manoeuvrable vessel types and larger vessels. For example, all vessels 65 feet and greater in length could be restricted to speeds of 10 knots or less in and around the array area. Speed restrictions have been shown to directly reduce the likelihood of collisions with marine mammals.

Once ports and harbours have been selected, we recommend that a qualitative assessment of disturbance from specific routes to these harbours is included as an appendix to the NSVMP.

Should the use of uncrewed vessels be considered at any stage of the Proposed Development, bespoke mitigation should be discussed through consultation with NatureScot, to ensure JNCC guidance can be adhered to, particularly in relation to geotechnical and geophysical surveys.

C.9 **Monitoring**

No monitoring has been proposed by the Applicant. **We advise that monitoring to validate the EIA Report predictions and better understand the likelihood of these impacts of disturbance from piling and UXO clearance is required**. Site-specific noise monitoring during construction should be undertaken to validate the assessments in the EIA Report and we recommend that the NPL Good Practice Guide (2014)[59] is followed.

In addition, as above, we advise that given the area is used by a diverse range of cetaceans and has a limited amount of anthropogenic infrastructure, a commitment to continued marine mammal monitoring (particularly PAM) post-construction would be hugely beneficial to further understand several impact pathways, including:

[59] Good Practice Guide for Underwater Noise Measurement, National Measurement Office, Marine Scotland, The Crown Estate, Robinson, S.P., Lepper, P. A. and Hazelwood, R.A., NPL Good Practice Guide No. 133.

- disturbance from vessels
- barrier effects; and
- indirect effects on prey availability / habitat loss (see Section F.4.2.1 of our Benthic Ecology advice and various parts of Section D.3 of our Diadromous Fish advice).

C.10 **RIAA**

Overall, the quality and clarity of the Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA) was not in-keeping with the generally good standard of the wider EIA for marine mammals. We highlight that the RIAA should be a standalone document, with the requisite information on impacts to the qualifying features of designated sites clearly presented. However, much of the assessment instead relied on signposting to various sections of the EIA and associated appendices, with conclusions relying heavily on those presented in the EIA.

Assessing the likely significant effects to European sites should focus on the impact to the designated feature within the SAC and not the population within the relevant Management Unit, as has been presented. This is an oversight when only drawing on information and the assessment presented in the EIA. Overall, the approach adopted is disappointing and has made assessment of impacts to European sites difficult to untangle from EIA conclusions.

In line with our pre-application advice, only the following SACs with marine mammals qualifying species have been screened into the RIAA:

- Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC – harbour porpoise

The impact pathways screened into the assessment are appropriate, though we highlight that the detail for each is provided in the main EIA and appendices, meaning the logic set out in the RIAA is difficult to follow.

When assessing the Inner Hebrides and the Minches SAC, we advise the pressure pathway should be considered when determining connectivity, i.e. whether an activity is capable of exerting a pressure on the feature *within* the SAC. If the activity is sufficiently distant from the site, such that it is clear that any pressures will not impact the features within the site, we are able to conclude the proposal will not undermine the Conservation Objectives.

C.10.1 *Auditory injury from piling*

As outlined above, we do not consider the current assessment based on a 12 dB to be robust or reflective of the worst case scenario. In light of this uncertainty, for auditory injury, we have adopted a precautionary approach and based the assessment on pre-mitigated noise levels.

Neither the pre-mitigated instantaneous or cumulative PTS impact ranges for harbour porpoises will reach the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC (~ 45 km from the Array), therefore we accept that there is **no potential for AEoSI** from auditory injury from percussive pile driving activities.

C.10.2 *Disturbance from piling*

The EIA assessment shows that the modelled disturbance noise contours do not reach the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC and were shown to be ~19.1 km from the worst-case piling location modelled.

However, as outlined in section C.5.2, based on our concerns on the feasibility and lack of information on the 12dB noise reduction, we require clarification if the worst-case scenario presented is based on post- or pre- mitigated disturbance levels (i.e. NAS).

- **We request that the assessment is carried out using pre-mitigated noise contours (if this is not what is currently presented within the EIA/RIAA). We would request that the distance from the impact to the SAC is presented and/or the percentage of overlap of the contours and the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC, as a minimum and if relevant.**

We are **unable to conclude no AEoSI** from disturbance from percussive pile driving activities until this has been clarified.

C.10.3 In combination assessment

As per proposal alone, we require clarification on if the numbers of individuals disturbed from this application were calculated with or without the use of NAS. This clarification may alter our final advice on in-combination effects. For all other impact pathways, we accept that there is **no potential for AEoSI in-combination.**

C.10.4 Underwater noise during operation and maintenance

We note that a number of impacts that have been screened in for assessment have not been covered in this section, including:

With the understanding that the UWN modelling for the operational turbines are based on smaller WTGs sizes than what is being considered for this application and likely underestimated the potential for PTS and TTS ranges, we accept that this impact will result **in no AEoSI** of the SAC, due to the impact ranges not reaching the designated site.

NATURESCOT ADVICE ON SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Appendix D Diadromous fish ecology

Diadromous fish are one of several fish and shellfish receptor groups assessed in Chapter 12 of the EIA and the following supporting documents:

- Chapter 12: Fish Ecology, Volume 2a
- Chapter 12: Fish Ecology – Figures, Volume 2b
- Appendix 12.1: Fish Ecology Baseline, Volume 2c
- Appendix 12.1.3: Fish Tracking Study (Atlantic Salmon Fish Tagging Survey)
- Appendix 12.2: Consultation on Atlantic salmon underwater noise assessment and associated data analysis, Volume 2c
- Appendix 12.3: Overview of Percussive Piling Fish Ecology Mitigation, Volume 2c
- Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment

We provide comments and advice on diadromous fish in this Appendix and separately advise on marine fish and shellfish in Appendix E.

The EIA for diadromous fish concludes no significant impacts both alone and cumulatively, which we support for many impact pathways. Where we do not support the EIA conclusions, we provide our own comments and conclusions.

Due to a critical lack of evidence on Fish Aggregation Effects (see section D.3.12 below) of the Proposed Development on diadromous fish species, their prey species, and their predators, we advise that a full assessment of this impact pathway is not possible without additional site-specific data. **We therefore advise that a monitoring package is secured to validate the predictions made in the EIA.**

The HRA for diadromous fish similarly concludes no Adverse Effects on Site Integrity (AEOSI) for any pressure. Again, primarily in relation to the Fish Aggregation Effects pressure, but also considering other pressures we are **unable to conclude no AEOSI for the following sites and species**:

- Langavat SAC – Atlantic salmon; and
- North Harris SAC – Atlantic salmon, Freshwater Pearl Mussel (via impacts to their salmonid hosts).

We therefore advise that Marine Directorate should carry out an Appropriate Assessment to assess the impacts of the Proposed Development on the Conservation Objectives of the relevant SACs.

We recommend that a monitoring package is secured, understanding that monitoring itself is not mitigation. We recommend that a Diadromous Fish Management Plan (or similar) is also secured via consent condition, with the purpose of:

- agreeing the scope and methods of diadromous fish monitoring; and
- identifying and agreeing management steps to be implemented if monitoring detects increased levels of predation on diadromous fish, by fish-eating birds, seals, or other predatory fish

D.1 Study area

The diadromous fish study area is defined in Section 2.3 and in Plate 2-1. We are unclear on what is being presented in Plate 2-1, nevertheless we accept the Study Area as set out in the narrative description: *"encompassing coastal and offshore waters extending along the west coast of Scotland/Alba, from the southern extent of the Outer Hebrides/Na h-Eileanan Siar to the mainland coast."*

D.2 Baseline characterisation

D.2.1 Desktop study

Table 3-1 describes the sources used in the desktop study. This aggregates several Marine Scotland/ Marine Directorate publications into a single item, whereas it would have been preferable to see the full list of named reports. For completeness we would also have included the Salmon and Sea Trout - Scottish Salmon Rivers data layer[60] which is available on NMPi.

Some of the key 'publicly available' datasets used to inform the Fish Ecology Baseline are also included in Open Access scientific papers. As Open Access these data are available to all and would have been useful to include in this desktop study. Many of these have Scottish Government or Government agency co-authors. For example:

- Adams, C. E., Forrester, R., Newton, M., Lothian, A. J., Honkanen, H. M., Thambithurai, D., Wilkie, L., Smith, M. A., Walters, M., Miller, R., Muller, K., Shaw, B., Burns, S., Conroy, C., Daphne, C., Laughton, R., Toth, M., Williams, K., Robertson, S., ... Rodger, J. R. (2026). Inshore marine coastal zone migration patterns in Atlantic salmon post-smolts emigrating from eight rivers in north-east Scotland. *Journal of Fish Biology*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.70280
- Lilly, J. M., Honkanen, H. H., Bailey, D. M., Bean, C. W., Forrester, R., Rodger, J., & Adams, C. E. (2022). Investigating the behaviour of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar L.*) post-smolts during their early marine migration through the Clyde Marine Region. *Journal of Fish Biology*, 101(5), 1285–1300. https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.15200
- Lothian, A. J., Newton, M., Barry, J., Walters, M., Miller, R. C., & Adams, C. E. (2018). Migration pathways, speed and mortality of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) smolts in a Scottish river and the near-shore coastal marine environment. *Ecology of Freshwater Fish*, 27(2), 549–558. https://doi.org/10.1111/eff.12369 (not Open Access)
- Newton, M., Barry, J., Lothian, A., Main, R. A., Honkanen, H., McKelvey, S. A., Thompson, P., Davies, I., Brockie, N., Stephen, A., O'Hara Murray, R., Gardiner, R., Campbell, L., Stainer, P., & Adams, C. (2021). Counterintuitive active directional swimming behaviour by Atlantic salmon during seaward migration in the coastal zone. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 78(5), 1730–1743. https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsab024
- Newton, M., Main, R., Gardiner, R., Kynoch, R., Gilbey, J., Cauwelier, E., Watret, R., Stainer, P., Bridcut, E., Archer, J. A., & Gauld, N. R. (2026). Distribution of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) from epipelagic trawling surveys and genetic analysis in Scotland. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 83(2), fsag007. https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsag007
- Ounsley, J. P., Gallego, A., Morris, D. J., & Armstrong, J. D. (2020). Regional variation in directed swimming by Atlantic salmon smolts leaving Scottish waters for their oceanic feeding grounds—a modelling study. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 77(1), 315–325. https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsz160

[60] Salmon and Sea Trout - Scottish Salmon Rivers data layer

- Rodger, J. R., Lilly, J., Honkanen, H. M., del Villar, D., Kennedy, R., Ó Maoiléidigh, N., Boylan, P., Rosell, R., Morris, D. J., O'Neill, R., Waters, C., Cotter, D., Wilkie, L., Barkley, A., Green, A., Beck, S. V., Ribbens, J., Henderson, J., Parke, D., ... Adams, C. E. (2025). Inshore and offshore marine migration pathways of Atlantic salmon post-smolts from multiple rivers in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland, and Ireland. *Journal of Fish Biology*, 106(5), 1422–1439. https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.15760

D.2.2 Site-specific study

We welcome the inclusion of the 2024 ZSL salmon smolt tracking study which clearly shows tagged Atlantic salmon smolt travelling from Langavat SAC through the Proposed Development array area.

D.2.3 Species

The EIA identifies the following species to be fully assessed:

- Atlantic salmon;
- sea trout; and
- European eel.

We accept the list of species scoped in, which aligns with pre-application advice, noting that Atlantic salmon and sea trout can act as hosts for Freshwater Pearl Mussel (FWPM).

We welcome their identification as 'high' value receptors throughout the EIA. However, we provide additional commentary below on the conservation status and ecology of Atlantic salmon.

Appendix 12.1 section 4.4.2.1 refers to the status of Atlantic salmon in 2023. We advise that data extending up to 2025 are now available which shows a worsening conservation status for this species. In 2023 the IUCN assessed the global threat status for Atlantic salmon and carried out a regional assessment, which concluded that Atlantic salmon in Great Britain are considered to be within the 'Endangered' threat category:

- Global Assessment – 'Near Threatened' - Darwall, W.R.T. 2023. *Salmo salar*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023: e.T19855A67373433. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2023-1.RLTS.T19855A67373433.en.
- Regional Assessment – 'Endangered' - Darwall, W.R.T. & Noble, R.A. 2023. *Salmo salar* (Great Britain subpopulation). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023: e.T213546282A213546288. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2023-1.RLTS.T213546282A213546288.en.

In addition to this, Nunn et al (2023) also assessed the threat status of Atlantic salmon at a GB and Scottish level using IUCN criteria. This review concluded that Atlantic salmon were 'Endangered' at a GB level and at a Scottish level. See:

- Nunn, A.D., Ainsworth, R.F., Walton, S., Bean, C.W., Hatton-Ellis T.W., Brown, A., Evans, R., Atterborne, A., Ottewell, D. & Noble, R.A.A. (2023). Extinction risks and threats facing the freshwater fishes of Britain. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 33(12), 1460-1476. https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.4014

In terms of Atlantic salmon behaviour, Sections 4.4.2.3 - 4.4.2.10 describe the migration of post-smolts around the west coast and northwest Scotland. We welcome the inclusion of narrative on individual fish behaviour during migration (Section 4.4.2.5), and the emigration of post-smolts from rivers where there have been no tracking studies (4.4.2.10) for which we have no data at all.

Sections 4.4.2.11 – 4.4.2.14 address the return migration of adult salmon to natal rivers. The data available for Atlantic salmon adults can be even less precise than that for post-smolts. This is understandable given the difficulties involved in tracking these fish. External tagging programmes (such as those described by Malcolm et al. (2010), and Downie et al. (2018)) show how difficult it can be to untangle the migration patterns of returning adult fish using such approaches.

The description of kelt behaviour in 4.4.2.15 is acceptable, but we caution against inferring that data from Canadian rivers in terms of temporal usage by salmonids of estuarine environments is similar to that experienced in Scotland.

We note the acknowledgment in Section 4.4.2.16 that *"it is necessary to consider that adult salmon may migrate through the Offshore Project Boundary multiple times during their adult life, as grilse, kelts and repeat spawners"*.

The EIA uses rod catch data as a basis for Atlantic salmon and sea trout stock assessments, an approach that we discussed at the pre-application stage and accept. However, it is important to note that rod catch assessments often come with no measure of effort which can affect how comparable their data are. Catch-independent measures such as fish counters are much more precise. Nevertheless, the reporting of average catches between a defined period (i.e. 2011-2023 in Table 4-13, or the rod catch reported from the last year of the records available at the time of writing, remain useful. The same applies to sea trout.

The adult stock assessments are, as stated in Section 4.4.2.22, provided by Marine Scotland/ Marine Directorate and based on data from rod catch and fish counters. As such we have confidence that these data are correct and useful. They appear to be in the right range given the numbers of fish recorded from each system, although we note that some are notably small (e.g. Carloway, Forsa, Caslabhat & Tamanbhaigh and Laxdale).

D.2.4 Designated sites

The EIA identifies the following as relevant designated sites:

- Langavat SAC (Atlantic salmon);
- North Harris SAC (Atlantic salmon, FWPM); and
- Little Gruinard River SAC (Atlantic salmon) (noting that this SAC is immediately ruled out of further consideration).

We accept this list of designated sites which aligns with our pre-application advice. In pre-application advice we specified the need to consider and maintain sea trout populations (as well as Atlantic salmon) as a host for FWPM from North Harris SAC.

Regarding Little Gruinard River SAC, its location relative to the Proposed Development makes it unlikely that fish from this SAC would round the Sound of Harris and proceed north along the coast to east Lewis, but we know from the work of Newton et al. (2021) that Atlantic salmon post-smolts can migrate in ways which are unexpected and counterintuitive.

Post-smolts from more distant Atlantic salmon SACs such as the Endrick Water SAC, and the River Derwent Water SAC in northwest England, are known to migrate through Scottish coastal environments. However, tracking data contained Rodger et al. (2025) does support the view that these SACs shouldn't be included, despite gaps in the coverage of that study.

D.3 Impact assessment

D.3.1 Variation between diadromous fish species ecology

It is important to note that the marine ecology of Atlantic salmon, sea trout and European eel is quite different. Both Atlantic salmon and sea trout are anadromous – living as juveniles in freshwater, migrating to sea to grow to adulthood, migrating back to freshwater to spawn. Whereas European eel is catadromous – living as juveniles in the sea, migrating to freshwater to grow and live as adults, before migrating back to marine spawning grounds.

Even within the anadromous fish group, sea trout have a very different coastal ecology to Atlantic salmon. Sea trout may arrive in coastal environments during the Spring, spending several months in that coastal environment, before migrating back into freshwater to spawn in the Autumn. Whereas Atlantic salmon rapidly pass though coastal areas – where they may feed, but are doing so while they migrate.

Given the above differences in ecology and life history each species may respond differently to the impact pathways presented in the assessment. It would have been useful for these species to be considered separately throughout the assessment and in the significance of effect summary tables, instead of grouped as 'diadromous fish' (for example see Table 12-23). Where relevant our advice is provided on a species-by-species basis.

D.3.2 Construction phase: Short term seabed habitat loss and/ or disturbance

Atlantic salmon occupy the upper layers of the water column and are unlikely to be impacted by seabed habitat loss or disturbance (although the tracking study did make reference to occasional deep dives by post-smolts and we know that they will feed in the coastal environment). Overall exposure to this stressor may be less than that experienced by sea trout because they will be transiting though the impacted area.

Sea trout, despite being highly mobile, may, in contrast to Atlantic salmon, be present and feeding in the area for much longer periods than Atlantic salmon and should be considered differently. We therefore question the statement in Section 12.8.1.24 that *"diadromous fish species exhibit high tolerance to short term seabed habitat loss and indirect ecological change and are considered to have high recoverability to this impact"* – as its origin is unclear and is not referenced. The assessment would benefit from citing sources for this assertion.

European eel reach the continental shelf as Leptocephali (small leaf-shaped fish larvae) before changing shape to the one that we commonly associate with them (they are called glass eels on first metamorphosis). Their reliance on coastal benthic habitats as a feeding area when making this transition from Leptocephali to glass eels is not widely reported within the scientific literature, but there is a cessation/reduction in feeding behaviour during this time. This suggests that a loss of feeding opportunity may not be significant for this species. See e.g.:

- Van Wichelen, J., Verhelst, P., Perneel, M., Van Driessche, C., Buysse, D., Belpaire, C., Coeck, J., & De Troch, M. (2022). Glass eel (*Anguilla anguilla L.* 1758) feeding behaviour during upstream migration in an artificial waterway. *Journal of Fish Biology*, 101(4), 1047–1057. https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.15171

In summary, for Atlantic salmon we would consider this impact to be of minor/negligible significance, for sea trout moderate/possibly moderate because of their coastal ecology, and for European eel negligible/minor. We accept the overall conclusion of Negligible and Not Significant for Atlantic salmon and European eel, however we have less confidence in this conclusion for sea trout.

D.3.3 Construction phase: Increases in suspended sediment concentration and associated sediment deposition

There are several ways in which suspended sediment may impact diadromous fish – such as behavioural alteration, disruption of migration (delay or forcing a change of direction), reduced feeding efficiency or loss of prey habitat).

Suspended sediment concentrations - would need to be high and extend over a long exposure and unavoidable (in a spatial sense) in order for this impact pathway to have a significant physiological impact on any of the three diadromous fish species considered here.

As an example of survival in environments with a high suspended sediment load, we refer to the continued presence and survival of all three of these species within the Severn Estuary (an SAC for these species) which records suspended solid concentrations of up to 5000mg l-1. See:

- Jonas, P.J.C. & Millward, G.E. 2010. Metals and nutrients in the Severn Estuary and Bristol Channel: Contemporary inputs and distributions. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 61(1-3), 52-67. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2009.12.013

We support that this impact magnitude is likely to be low and accept the overall conclusion of Not Significant. This conclusion is based on the high suspended sediment concentrations being localised and temporary.

D.3.4 Construction phase: Release of drilling fluid during trenchless construction and construction of HDD exit pits

Drilling fluid is a slurry of clay mineral bentonite and any releases would temporarily increase suspended sediment concentration, so impacts would be similar in nature to those of the previous impact pathway. As such our previous commentary (see D.3.3) on the ecology and likely exposure will also be the same.

Sensitivity for all three species is suggested to be low (Section 12.8.3.20). Again, our position is that this conclusion is more likely for Atlantic salmon and European eel than for sea trout, due to differences in use of coastal waters.

As previously, we agree that the juvenile life stages of Atlantic salmon and sea trout will have limited exposure to this impact pathway, but juvenile European eel (which are catadromous) rather than anadromous could be exposed at the 'juvenile stage'. For European eel there is an absence of any information in the published literature on the impact and lethal limits of suspended solids on this species at any life-stage within the sea.

We accept that this impact magnitude is likely to be low and accept the overall conclusion of Not Significant. This conclusion is based on the high suspended sediment concentrations being localised and temporary.

D.3.5 Construction phase: Underwater noise and vibration (impulsive noise)

The assessment reflects the extensive pre-application dialogue with, and advice from, NatureScot and MD-SEDD on this topic. It is well written, clearly structured, and generally robust. The use of recognised frameworks (notably Popper et al. 2014 hearing group classifications), clear explanation of acoustic metrics (SPL, SEL), and transparent presentation of modelling assumptions are all welcome. The distinction between worst case (stationary receptor) and more realistic (moving receptor) scenarios is good practice, and we welcome the distinction made between the behaviour of migrating fish (e.g. post-smolt and returning adult Atlantic salmon) and non-migrating fish (e.g. sea trout, Atlantic salmon kelts).

Percussive piling is correctly identified as the primary source of impulsive noise during the construction phase. A central element of this assessment is the commitment to 12dB noise reduction to percussive piling activities achieved via Noise Abatement System (NAS). While we welcome this commitment, we highlight a lack of clarity on which technologies can achieve this level of noise reduction. As noted elsewhere in this advice, all downstream assessment of underwater noise impacts is based on securing this noise level reduction.

We also accept that non piling noise sources (e.g. drilling) have been fully identified.

We highlight that including NAS as embedded mitigation and not as secondary mitigation means there is no true 'unmitigated' assessment included in the EIA. Please refer to our detailed comments on this issue in our marine mammal advice (see C.4.4).

Diadromous fish have been classed as high value receptors. All species are described as having high tolerance to underwater noise, leading to an overall sensitivity of Low for sea trout and European eel, and Medium for Atlantic salmon which is based on their conservation status. We advise that sea trout should also be classified as Medium sensitivity due to their coastal ecology.

Multiple swim speeds have been presented in relation to Temporary Threshold Shift (TTS) ranges. For example, Table 12-32 presents swim speeds of 0.6 ms^{-1} and 1.5 ms^{-1}, representing 'moving' and 'fleeing' speeds respectively. Swim speeds were a discussion point at the pre-application stage and we welcome the rationale on how these were calculated as presented in Appendix 12.2. We welcome the use of 'stationary' receptors as a worst-case scenario for assessment. We also accept the use of TTS as a proxy for migration disruption in diadromous fish.

The assessment demonstrates a clear spatial overlap between the predicted TTS impact ranges and both the coastline and key migratory corridors associated with Loch Roag/ Loch *Ròg*, indicating a plausible mechanism for impedance or delay of diadromous fish migration, particularly Atlantic salmon. Importantly, this overlap occurs even with the assumed 12dB noise reduction from the Noise Abatement System incorporated into the modelling. As such, the predicted TTS contours—and associated migration effects—represent a mitigated scenario rather than a true worst case. Should the assumed 12dB reduction not be fully achieved in practice, the spatial extent of TTS would be expected to increase further, potentially resulting in greater overlap with coastal and loch associated migratory pathways.

The assessment concludes that there would be Moderate and Potentially Significant impacts of impulsive noise on Atlantic salmon (see Table 12-35), which we accept. We advise we reach the same conclusion for sea trout. We accept the conclusion for European eel of Negligible/ Minor and Not Significant.

The assessment then goes on to consider secondary mitigation for Atlantic salmon. We provide detailed comments on this below in D.4, but in summary we consider this package of mitigation to be comprehensive.

D.3.6 Construction phase: Underwater noise and vibration (continuous noise)

Sources of continuous noise during construction include vessel operations, dredging, drilling, jet trenching, rock placement and other construction activities. We accept that all these activities generate lower levels of noise than percussive piling, noting they will be intermittent over the estimated 5 year construction period.

Again, diadromous fish have been classed as high value receptors. All species are described as having high tolerance to underwater noise, leading to an overall sensitivity of Low for sea trout

and European eel, and Medium for Atlantic salmon which is based on their conservation status. We advise that sea trout should also be classified as Medium sensitivity due to their coastal ecology.

The assessment concludes Negligible and Not Significant impacts of continuous noise on all diadromous fish species (see Table 12-38), which we accept.

D.3.7 O&M phase: Long term seabed habitat loss/ change

As stated above Atlantic salmon and European eel are likely to transit through the Proposed Development during migrations, whereas sea trout are expected to spend longer in the coastal environment. Therefore, any impact caused by a long term loss of habitat due to the footprint of the array would likely be limited to a reduction in the area available for foraging by sea trout.

As stated in 12.9.1.6, this may *"affect only a small proportion of available habitat relative to the wider marine area."* And the affected areas will be *"spatially discrete and localised"* (12.9.1.5). Although identified as a 'High Value Receptor' (Section 12.9.1.9), the potentially higher impact on sea trout than on Atlantic salmon and European eel is not identified in this Section 12.9.

It is useful to look at the potentially higher impact identified for sandeel in Section 12.9.1.15. Sandeel are a prey item for sea trout (and post-smolt Atlantic salmon), and can serve as a signpost that a loss of habitat for this species can also have a negative impact on those diadromous fish species as predators, and indeed this example is discussed within this document at Section 12.9.1.18.

While we can agree with the broad statement that *"diadromous species are generalist predators and capable of shifting foraging strategies across broad spatial scales"*, it does not mean that this applies equally to each diadromous fish species.

The sensitivity of diadromous fish to this impact pathway differs from species to species, with sea trout (and possibly post-smolt Atlantic salmon), being more sensitive than European eel. We advise that receptor sensitivity to this impact pathway is likely to be to be high/medium for sea trout (and possibly post-smolt Atlantic salmon), and low for European eel.

There is no information presented identifying the site-specific importance of sandeel as a prey item for sea trout and post-smolt Atlantic salmon in this location - it is therefore difficult to reach a robust conclusion on this impact pathway. However, we acknowledge the footprint of the Proposed Development is a small percentage of the available habitat in the wider region, enabling us to support the overall conclusion of Not Significant for Atlantic salmon and European eel, however we have less confidence in this conclusion for sea trout.

D.3.8 O&M phase: Short term seabed habitat loss and/ or disturbance

Much of our advice in section D.3.2 above (addressing the same impact pathway but during the construction phase) applies here.

Section 12.9.2.2 helpfully states that short term seabed habitat loss and/or disturbance has the potential to degrade or remove fish habitats, including foraging, spawning and nursery areas. With regard to diadromous fish, we agree that short term seabed habitat loss will not impact the availability of spawning or nursery habitat, but it could displace individuals and impact the availability of prey items, particularly for sea trout.

In terms of the assessment in Table 12-40, we agree that this is likely to be Negligible in terms of its effect on European eel and Not Significant. But for sea trout we consider the impact to be Minor.

Again the grouping together of all three species as 'diadromous fish' obscures some of the important differences between the species' ecology. Nevertheless we accept that effects from this impact pathway are likely to be localised and temporary, and we are able to support the overall conclusion of Negligible and Not Significant for Atlantic salmon and European eel, however we have less confidence in this conclusion for sea trout.

D.3.9 O&M phase: Increases in suspended sediment concentration and associated sediment deposition

Much of our advice in section D.3.3 above (addressing the same impact pathway but during the construction phase) applies here.

We agree that the ability of Salmonids to tolerate high concentrations of suspended solids (see previous reference to the Severn Estuary as an example), the temporary nature of sediment suspension and the ability of these fish species to move/ avoid such areas enable us to support the overall conclusion of Negligible and Not Significant.

D.3.10 O&M phase: Underwater noise and vibration

Underwater noise during the operation & maintenance phase arises from vibrations from the rotating machinery of the WTGs being transmitted to the sea. We note the predicted TTS impact range of <50 m for diadromous fish, assuming a stationary receptor in this impact zone for 12 hours, which is very localised.

Again, diadromous fish have been classed as high value receptors. All species are described as having high tolerance to underwater noise, leading to an overall sensitivity of Low for sea trout and European eel, and Medium for Atlantic salmon which is based on their conservation status. We advise that sea trout should also be classified as Medium sensitivity due to their coastal ecology.

The assessment concludes Negligible and Not Significant impacts of underwater noise during the O&M phase on all diadromous fish species (see Table 12-42), which we accept.

D.3.11 O&M phase: Electromagnetic fields

The available published evidence does appear to indicate that any impact by EMF is likely to be low and possibly insignificant. Possibly insignificant because while there appears to be no evidence that overall migration success is affected, there is some indication (Section 12.9.5.27) that 'short-term behavioural changes' may occur for Atlantic salmon and sea trout.

For European eel the level of sensitivity appears to be higher (see Section 12.9.5.29) and the impact potentially more significant, so we welcome the approach set out in Table 12-44 to consider this species separately, however the commentary and final conclusion is very similar for each species.

We support the overall conclusion of Minor and Not Significant for this impact pathway.

D.3.12 O&M phase: Fish aggregation effects

Introduction of permanent infrastructure and greater structural complexity in the environment is likely to lead to changes in predator – prey interactions through changes to fish assemblages, species composition and density.

Both sections 12.9.6.24 and 12.9.6.25 respectively, suggest that Atlantic salmon and sea trout are less likely to be impacted because they have evolved to withstand some losses to predation. Section 12.9.6.24 states that recoverability may be different now because of the depleted status of Atlantic salmon populations and the potential for additional pressure to exceed natural compensatory mechanisms. Similar comments are made in relation to sea trout in Section 12.9.6.25, and for European eel in Section 12.9.6.27. The EIA narrative identifies that additional predation may have a negative impact on these species.

In terms of assessing this impact, we are not clear how this can be quantitatively assessed without additional site-specific data.

Other parts of the EIA briefly consider these predator – prey relationships, for example Chapter 13, Section 13.9.8 considers indirect effects of impacts on prey availability on marine mammals. Chapter 14 discusses prey availability to bird species but does not appear to discuss piscivorous birds specifically. Similarly, it is possible that the Proposed Development will increase the density of piscine predators, for example Section 12.9.6.22 briefly discusses gadoid predation of migratory Atlantic salmon (and presumably post-smolt sea trout).

We advise there is a critical lack of data on this impact pathway, which is reflected in the ScotMER Diadromous Fish Evidence Map[61] and is the focus of the current OWEC PrePARED[62] research programme.

Without site-specific data we are unable to estimate how many additional predators may be associated with these new structures, nor the number of potential 'additional' predator encounters diadromous fish species will be exposed to. **We therefore do not support the EIA conclusion due to this critical lack of evidence, and we advise that a monitoring package is secured to validate the predictions made in the EIA.**

D.3.13 Decommissioning phase: Short term seabed habitat loss and/ or disturbance during decommissioning activities

Again, much of our advice in section D.3.2 above (addressing the same impact pathway but during the construction phase) applies here.

Section 12.10.1.4 states "*The potential for infrastructure to remain in-situ will be confirmed through consultation on the Decommissioning Programme to ensure the most suitable approach is taken*.", and so at this stage it is unclear how extensive or significant this impact pathway might be, although we note the maximum design scenario where all infrastructure will be removed.

'Short-term' disturbance is defined as lasting up to five years. This would be a significant period within the lifetime of sea trout, which is the species likely to be most affected by this impact pathway. It is difficult to assess the scale or significance of impact at this stage where the scale and length of works is unclear, and so the scale of impact particularly on sea trout is unknown.

[61] https://www.gov.scot/publications/diadromous-fish-specialist-receptor-group/
[62] https://owecprepared.org/

This aspect should be considered further as part of decommissioning plans. For the time being, we accept the overall conclusion of Negligible and Not Significant for Atlantic salmon and European eel, however we have less confidence in this conclusion for sea trout.

D.3.14 Decommissioning phase: Increases in suspended sediment concentration and associated sediment deposition

Again, much of our advice in section D.3.3 above (addressing the same impact pathway but during the construction phase) applies here.

Noting again that data is limited for European eel, we agree that this impact magnitude is likely to be low and accept the overall conclusion of Not Significant. This conclusion is based on the high suspended sediment concentrations being localised and temporary.

D.4 Mitigation

The package of embedded mitigation measures is summarised in Table 12-22. Much of the detail on these measures is to be provided via post-consent plans, which we accept.

The embedded mitigation includes a noise abatement system (NAS) which will achieve a noise reduction of 12dB. We address this element of mitigation in detail in our marine mammal advice (see C.4.4), noting that all downstream assessment of underwater noise impacts is predicated on the delivery of this noise reduction.

The EIA concludes significant impacts on diadromous fish arise solely via underwater noise, and so a package of secondary mitigation measures is identified to reduce these impacts to a Not Significant level. We summarise the secondary mitigation as follows:

- Spatial mitigation (see Plate 3-1 in Appendix 12.3)
    - No piling zone across the entire Western portion of the array
    - Purple zone - closer to shore - piling only in September/ October
    - Orange zone - further from shore - piling from end-May to October, with continuous 12 hour 'quiet periods' during peak adult migration
- Temporal restrictions (see Table 3-1 in Appendix 12.3)
    - Smolt migration - April and most of May - no piling permitted at all
    - Adult migration - no piling in Purple coastal zone from May to August, and continuous 12 hour 'quiet periods' in the Orange zone in June/ July
- Piling strategy
    - Detail to be provided at a post-consent stage based on the above measures

This package of secondary mitigation seems comprehensive and robust, and we offer the following advice.

We accept the rationale in attempting to set out and maintain ‘acoustically quiet’ areas within key migration windows. We welcome the identification of key migration windows noting however, adult Atlantic salmon will return throughout the year, post-smolt and adult Sea trout will also be in coastal areas throughout the late Spring and Summer months and that European eel adults will migrate out of freshwater systems between August and September.

We welcome the applicant’s incorporation of our pre-application advice that the smolt migration period may extend through April to 25 May each year. Section 3.4.2.2 states that “*As Malcolm et al. 2015 study is over 10 years old, the Applicant may choose to undertake a dedicated study (prior to construction commencing) to understand if the Percussive Piling Programme could be extended*

into April/May. The purpose of this study would be to provide further information on the timing of smolt emigration through Loch Roag/Loch Ròg."

his acknowledges that data on smolt migration times is incomplete. We would require justification through site specific studies for any changes to the current proposed percussive piling programme. We highlight that smolt migration periods can be strongly impacted by temperature and flow conditions and these can vary interannually. This means that a smolt timing study which extends over a single year may be insufficient to provide generalised data as a basis for adjusting work timings. **We advise that any such dedicated study which aims to modify the Percussive Pilling Programme should be based on at least 2 years of data to account for interannual variation.** Any pre-construction studies should be discussed and agreed with NatureScot and MD-SEDD if this Proposed Development is consented

Continuous quiet periods are welcome, but 3.4.3.1 states that "These quiet periods are not fixed to a specific time of day". If a moratorium exists for percussive piling during the key smolt migration period, then these continuous quiet periods should also be designed to mitigate impacts on returning adult Atlantic salmon, sea trout and adult European eel. Godfrey et al. (2015) and Hedger et al. (2022) showed that returning adult Atlantic salmon were predominantly located in upper layers of the water column, but some fish also made dives to deeper areas (the reason for which was unclear but could be related to a number of factors – including feeding). Neither confirm whether this migration occurred mainly during the day, at night or both, but it is clear that some individual behaviours exist that make it hard to generalise. So this means that it is difficult to state whether a shutdown in percussive piling activity would be most beneficial during the day, night or crepuscular period. See:

- Godfrey, J.D., Stewart, D.C., Middlemas, S.J. & Armstrong, J.D. 2015. Depth use and migratory behaviour of homing Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) in Scottish coastal waters, *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 72(2), Pages 568-575. https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsu118
- Hedger, R.D., Kjellman, M., Thorstad, E.B.,Strøm J.F. & Rikardsen, A.H. 2022. Diving and feeding of adult Atlantic salmon when migrating through the coastal zone in Norway. *Environmental Biology of Fish*, 105, 589–604. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10641-022-01269-x

Tracking studies have also revealed that adult European eel typically migrate at night (for example Lennox et al. 2018; Verhelst et al. 2023) and this would suggest that a cessation at night would be most beneficial for this species. And the most sensitive period is likely to be between at least August and September. See:

- Lennox, R.J., Økland, F., Mitamura, H., Cooke, S.J. & Thorstad,E.B. 2018. European eel Anguilla anguilla compromise speed for safety in the early marine spawning migration, *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 75(6), 1984–1991, https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsy104
- Verhelst, P., Westerberg, H., Coeck, J., Harrison, L., Moens, T., Reubens, J., Van Wichelen, J. & Righton, D. 2023. Tidal and circadian patterns of European eel during their spawning migration in the North Sea and the English Channel. *Science of the Total Environment*, 905, 167341. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.167341

D.5 Monitoring

The EIA does not set out any monitoring commitments for diadromous fish. However, our position is that monitoring is required to validate EIA predictions, and to inform any further mitigation/ management measures relating to impacts to SACs via the HRA process.

We recommend that a Diadromous Fish Management Plan is secured and that a key component of this is a collaborative approach to designing effective monitoring, if the Proposed Development is consented.

It is useful to consider aquaculture developments as an analogue. Where we have advised that salmonid populations are likely to be impacted by an aquaculture development, we have required the development of an environmental management plan which places obligations on developers to monitor the status of salmonid fish within an 'affected area'. This involves monitoring the status of these populations in a way which allows these data to be compared and placed in context regionally and nationally. We typically ask that data are collected in a manner which is consistent with the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland, which is developed and administered by the Marine Directorate and carried out by the DSFB/ Fishery Trust network.

There is no similar network for European eel (and these would need to be surveyed in a different way). Given the paucity of data on European eel numbers, it would be sensible to use any pre-construction time to develop a baseline against which impacts can be assessed – in a BACI-type approach. Installing adult fish counters and deploying screw traps will give a better understanding of population status.

The EIA and our advice have a strong focus on Atlantic salmon SACs but it is important to note that other Atlantic salmon populations exist within Harris and Lewis. We know very little about these and how they interact (and provide resilience at a population level) with SAC salmon populations. Population genetics studies may answer some of this and should be considered as part of a Diadromous Fish Management Plan.

Additional information on the use of coastal habitats by sea trout, with additional tracking of post-smolts during the construction phase – in order to ascertain whether these fish are actively avoiding construction areas or spending more time at the sites once installed and established would help close knowledge gaps.

The key evidence gap which should be addressed via monitoring relates to increased predation risk by a range of mammal, bird and other fish species. As noted above the OWEC PrePARED research programme focusses on this and may be a useful source of information when designing monitoring.

D.6 Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment

The Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment includes consideration of 'Migratory Fish and Freshwater Pearl Mussel'. Section 7.1.1.2 sets out the relevant SACs:

- North Harris SAC (Atlantic salmon and FWPM);
- Langavat SAC (Atlantic salmon).

It also summarises our pre-application advice that *"if there is no adverse effect on the salmon and sea trout populations of the North Harris SAC, then there would be no adverse effect on the FWPM, given their reliance on salmonids for part of their life cycle."*

The assessment that follows essentially echoes the EIA. It identifies a range of pressures on the target species (See Table 7-1). It assesses the impacts of each pressure and concludes for all, except underwater noise, that none pose any risk of AEOSI for the above SACs.

For underwater noise the assessment cannot conclude no AEOSI, and so then considers the secondary mitigation measures which we have summarised in section D.4 above. Section 7.3.2 re-

assesses underwater noise impacts on each of the Conservation Objectives for the relevant SACs and species, and reaches a conclusion of no AEOSI for all.

We do not support this conclusion, primarily in relation to

- Fish Aggregation Effect pressure (described as 'Physical presence (of structures)' in the RIAA)

Also noting our uncertainty over impacts to sea trout and therefore freshwater pearl mussel in relation to:

- Construction phase: Short term seabed habitat loss and/ or disturbance (described as 'Direct physical impact (to habitat)' in the RIAA)
- O&M phase: Long term seabed habitat loss/ change (described as 'Habitat loss/gain' in the RIAA)
- O&M phase: Short term seabed habitat loss and/ or disturbance (described as 'Direct physical impact (to habitat)' in the RIAA)

We are **unable to conclude no AEOSI for the following sites and species**:

- Langavat SAC – Atlantic salmon; and
- North Harris SAC – Atlantic salmon, Freshwater Pearl Mussel (via impacts to their salmonid hosts).

We advise that Marine Directorate should carry out an Appropriate Assessment to assess the impacts of the Proposed Development on the Conservation Objectives of the relevant SACs.

We recommend that a monitoring package is secured, understanding that monitoring itself is not mitigation. We recommend that a Diadromous Fish Management Plan (or similar) is also secured via consent condition, with the purpose of:

- agreeing the scope and methods of diadromous fish monitoring; and
- identifying and agreeing management steps to be implemented if monitoring detects increased levels of predation on diadromous fish, by fish-eating birds, seals, or other predatory fish

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Appendix E Marine fish ecology

Marine fish ecology is considered in Chapter 12 of the EIA Report, with other relevant material presented in the following Appendices:

- Appendix 12.1 - Fish Ecology Baseline
- Annex 12.1.2 - eDNA Report
- Appendix 12.3 - Overview of Percussive Piling Fish Ecology Mitigation
- Appendix 13.3 - Underwater Noise Modelling Assessment

The assessment for fish ecology concludes **No Significant effects** for all impact pathways and receptors, which we support.

Our interest in marine fish species and the conclusions being reached relate to the importance of these species as both prey species and as core components of the marine ecosystem. Impacts to marine fish must therefore be considered in the context of wider ecosystem resilience.

E.1 Study area

There are three separate study areas for fish receptors, including marine fish, sun fish and basking shark, and diadromous fish. The marine fish ecology study area is based on the results of UWN modelling, with the UWN Zone of Influence (ZoI) set based on the 150 dB noise contour. We accept this approach to defining study areas.

E.2 Baseline characterisation

Table 12-7 provides details on the data sources used to inform the baseline. The data is drawn from publicly available data, and literature, including consideration for data from other offshore wind environmental assessments. All data sources used are reviewed in relation to the Proposed Development and are clearly presented.

We agree with the conclusion presented within Section 4.1.2.13 of Appendix 12.1 that suitable herring spawning habitat may be present, but will be small, scattered patches providing isolated areas and most likely in the southern region due to the predominance of hard substrate across much of the boundary. The results of the eDNA survey support this statement.

We note the habitat mapping undertaken as part of site-specific survey sampling doesn't reflect the broadscale predictive mapping. As a result, it is likely that models for sandeel and cod that base parameters on broadscale mapping are also inaccurate for this site.

Plate 4-5 Potential sandeel habitat show that highest likelihood and densities of sandeel occur in the southwestern region of the Array Area and mostly outside of the Turbine Area. It is acknowledged that small pockets of suitable habitat may exist elsewhere across the Offshore Project Boundary that support localised populations. Based on the site-specific surveys which indicate much of the site is hard substrate, we agree with this reasoning.

Section 12.6.1.29 outlines Important Ecological Features (IEFs) when describing receptors. These can be habitats, species, ecosystems, and their functions/processes that are considered to be important and potentially impacted by the offshore project. IEFs are listed in Table 12-20 and criteria used to assess IEFs is given in Table 12-19.

Within Table 12-19, reference should be made to the The Sandeel (Prohibition of Fishing) (Scotland) Order 2024. Additionally, we recommend that sandeel is considered of national

importance within Table 12-20 considering their status as a PMF and component features of some NCMPAs.

E.3 Impact assessment

Table 12-4 details the receptors requiring assessment for fish ecology. Overall, we accept the impact pathways and receptors scoped in and out of the assessment.

Where we have specific comments on the impact assessment process or conclusions, these are provided in the sections below.

E.3.1 Short term seabed habitat loss and/or disturbance during construction

We welcome the commitment in Table 12-23 that states *"construction, where suitable sandeel habitat has been identified (the Array Area), is scheduled to avoid key sensitive periods of sandeel life history, including the spawning season (November - February, demersal egg phase"* and highlight this should be captured in post consent documents such as the Piling Strategy / Fish Mitigation Plan (where applicable).

E.3.2 Underwater Noise (UWN) during construction

Impacts arising from UWN are considered in the context of mortality and mortal injury, recoverable injury, TTS, masking, and behavioural changes. Each of these are presented for groups 1 to 5 receptors, as recommended by Popper et al., 2014 and fish have been modelled as either fleeing or static receptor. We accept this approach for assessing UWN impacts.

The injury contour for stationary fish receptors is <50 – 70 m of the piling locations and TTS noise contours extend up to 15 km. For fleeing receptors, TTS is modelled up to 10.5km. Impacts arising from UWN will also be reduced for suitable herring and spawning sandeel habitat due to zonal restrictions in the south of the Array Area where percussive piling is prohibited, and we welcome this approach.

As above, within Section 12.8.4.58 we recommend sandeel be considered as high value given their nationally important status as PMFs. However, his doesn't change the overall outcome which remains Not Significant.

Herring should be considered and assessed separately from the other group 3-4 fish presented in Section 12.8.4.59. This is on the basis of the differing life stages of herring, which unlike other group 3-4 fish, spawn on the seabed. Herring have been assigned a sensitivity to UWN as medium. We disagree and suggest this should be high due to herring being vulnerable during spawning when mating may override the instinct to flee and on the basis of herring being a high value prey species and PMF. However, the overall significance would remain Minor and Not Significant.

Table 12-34 draws on mitigation which states that activities causing impulsive UWN will not overlap with the winter period when sandeels are hibernating in the seabed and therefore it is not expected that hibernating sandeels will be impacted. We welcome this commitment and highlight this should be reflected in post consent documents such as the Piling Strategy.

E.3.3 UWN during O&M

As outlined in sections above, we consider sandeel should be assigned 'high' value. Herring should be considered separately from other Group 4 fish during the sensitivity assessment as their life cycle / spawning habits are different. We recommend both herring and sandeel should be assigned high sensitivity to UWN during O&M. However, we accept that this doesn't change the outcome of assessment and that impacts will remain Not Significant.

E.3.4 Long term seabed habitat loss/change

Section 12.9.1.12 provides justification for assigning a medium sensitivity of herring to long term seabed habitat loss/change, though we highlight that references are either missing from the reference list (e.g., Hay et al., 2001), or are for sandeel rather than herring (e.g., Wright et al., 2000). On the basis of advice from ICES[63] regarding herring's sensitivity to disturbance or loss of habitat, we consider sensitivity for this impact should be high rather than medium. This change does not alter the outcome of assessment impacts, which will remain Not Significnat.

E.3.5 EMF

Section 12.9.5.9 specifies that cable burial is expected to be between 0.2 – 0.5 m, with a maximum depth of 2 m. This is shallower than proposed burial depths for other offshore wind developments, however we recognise that due to the predominantly hard substrate, burial will be difficult in most instances. The use of rock armouring will likely be used to protect the cable and this may give rise to opportunities for fish and shellfish to use this type of protection as refuge and potentially be exposed to EMF for longer periods. However, we accept the conclusions presented. We are aware that through ScotMER, a project undertaking in-field measurements of EMF is underway and once this has reported, this may influence future assessment and/or mitigation requirements in terms of EMF effects.

E.4 Cumulative assessment

Impacts for cumulative assessment have been selected from the long list of impacts and considered against a wider number of developments within a cumulative ZoI extending 113 km from the development. Cumulative impact pathways are limited to UWN from percussive piling, short term seabed habitat loss, and/or disturbance and increased SSC.

Overall, we accept this approach to cumulative impacts and the conclusions drawn.

E.5 Mitigation

Embedded mitigation has been proposed to reduce potential impacts on environmental receptors. Table 12-22 describes the embedded mitigation measures relevant to Fish Ecology. Embedded mitigation measures are primarily commitment to productions of plans (e.g., Cable Installation Plan completed prior to construction commencing). This approach to embedded mitigation is in line with similar developments, and therefore we accept this.

E.6 Monitoring

No monitoring of marine fish is currently proposed. However, as outlined in our marine mammals, diadromous fish and benthic ecology advice, we encourage longer term monitoring efforts for long term habitat loss / change and resulting changes to predator – prey dynamics, fish aggregations and utilisation of the area by marine mammals. We highlight that these monitoring efforts could be extended to marine fish receptors, in particular important prey species such as herring.

[63] ICES. 2025. EU, Norway, and UK joint request to incorporate the Long-Term Management Strategy option MS3 (ICES, 2025a) in the advice for herring (*Clupea harengus*) in Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d, autumn spawners (North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, eastern English Channel). Replacing advice provided in April 2025. In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2025. ICES Advice 2025, sr.2025.09.

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Appendix F Benthic ecology

Benthic interests are considered in Chapter 11: Benthic and Intertidal Ecology, and the following, relevant supporting appendices:

- Appendix 11.1 – Subtidal Environmental Baseline Survey, Technical Report
- EIAR Volume 4: Offshore Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Management Plan

Overall, the documents provide an appropriate level of detail and are presented well, with our pre-application advice being considered and appropriately addressed. The assessment for Benthic Ecology concludes **No Significant effects** both alone, and cumulatively, which we support.

Please note that we do not advise on Blue Carbon in this appendix but instead provide our advice in Appendix H.

F.1 Study area

The Benthic and Intertidal Ecology Study Areas include the Offshore Project Boundary (208 km^2) and encompasses the Array Area and Offshore Cable Area of Search (OCAS).

A secondary Zone of Influence (ZOI) from the Project has been informed by suspended sediment worst case scenarios as determined by tidal excursion extent and coastal process dynamics. The ZOI buffer zone extends up to 6 km to the northeast and southwest of the Offshore Project Boundary. The study area is in line with our Scoping Advice, and appropriate for benthic receptors.

F.2 Baseline characterisation

Existing and site-specific data has been reviewed and is presented clearly in Appendix 11.1 and is adequately described in Chapter 11. It is noted that the original plan for drop down camera footage (DDV) stations had to be amended due to several locations being screened out due to presence of hard substrate. As a result, only 11 stations were sampled. Despite this species and habitats of conservation value have been correctly identified and considered, including Scottish Priority Marine Features (PMFs) and Annex I reef.

PMF habitat 'Kelp beds' was mapped across a 10 km^2 area within the OCAS and found to be almost continuously present across the entire length of the nearshore region of the PMF survey area. Annex I reef was observed across ~95 % of the survey area and assigned good ecological value across most of the Offshore Project Boundary based on taxa richness and taxonomic distinctness.

The biotope complex of A4.214 'Faunal and algal crusts on exposed to moderately wave-exposed circalittoral rock' was found ubiquitously throughout the Array Area and OCAS. In describing the baseline environment in Chapter 11, terminology such as habitat types and biotopes/biotope complexes is often used interchangeably which can at times be confusing.

Two Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) were identified from the site-specific surveys: *Goniadella gracilis* and *Bonnemaisonia hamifera.* We provide further advice on INNS below.

Overall, data collection methods for baseline characterisation follow our guidance, and the correct data sources and methods have been used to characterise the Offshore Project Boundary, as detailed in Section 11.6.

F.3 Assessment approach

Table 11-5 presents the impacts scoped out of the assessment, and we accept that the assessment identifies the appropriate potential impacts, following the Scoping Opinion.

Table 11-14 presents the maximum design scenario (MDS) considered in the assessment of impacts on benthic and intertidal ecology, and includes the maximum anticipated footprint for activities/impacts across each Project Phase.

Section 11.5.3 sets out the approach to evaluate significance of effect for benthic and intertidal features including the use of a sensitivity matrix (tolerance x recovery) as well as consideration of value of a feature. We broadly support the approach detailed in Section 11.5.3 and in Chapter 5: Approach to the EIA, though we note, that the significance matrix outlined in Table 11-11 is to an extent under-precautionary. For example, a combination of low magnitude and high sensitivity results in a minor effect. In instances of high value receptors, a low magnitude impact combined with a high sensitivity may result in a moderate effect.

F.4 Impact assessment

We broadly accept the final assessment of residual likely significance in Table 11-36, which concludes **no likely significant effects** throughout construction, O&M and decommissioning. Further comments which do not alter the overall conclusions are provided below.

F.4.1 Construction and Decommissioning

Overall, we agree with the significance of effects for construction impacts as **Not Significant** for benthic and intertidal receptors.

F.4.2 Operation and Maintenance

F.4.2.1 Long term habitat loss

It is calculated that there will be the long term loss of habitat in the order of 2.41 km^2. Wee recognises that with respect to this impact pathway, the existing baseline of natural hard substrate found throughout the Project Boundary will be replaced with artificial hard substrate particularly with regard to cable protection measures. This is both a direct loss and a replacement of one habitat type to another.

With respect to PMF habitat 'Kelp beds' it is stated in Table 11-25 that the Landfall Exit Pit Area is located 500 – 1500 m offshore thereby avoiding disturbance of the intertidal zone entirely. However, Figures 11-5 and 11-7 illustrate that EUNIS biotopes / results of the PMF survey, place the exit pit area directly within an area of kelp beds. On the basis of long-term habitat loss / alteration to kelp beds, and National Marine Plan General Policy 9b - protection for PMFs, we consider that the low magnitude of impact combined with its high sensitivity to habitat loss would result in a **minor - moderate (not significant)** impact. We consider this conclusion better reflects the feature's value.

For all other impacts during the O&M phase, the assessment concludes **no significant effects on benthic receptors**, which we accept.

F.4.2.2 Electromagnetic fields

We welcome the assessment of Electromagnetic Fields (EMF). Chapter 12 Fish Ecology summarises the approach and results of EMF modelling and distance from cable infrastructure. The modelling provides a predicted worst-case scenario for varying cable configurations which is helpful to see. For decapod crustacean receptors, the EIA assigns a 'precautionary' sensitivity of 'low', citing Scott *et al.,* 2021.

Scott *et al.,* 2021 also highlights the need for in-situ measurements of EMF from existing cables and we are aware that through ScotMER a project undertaking in-field measurements of EMF is underway and once this has reported, this may, influence future assessment and/or mitigation requirements in terms of EMF effects.

F.5 Cumulative assessment

Section 11.13 details the benthic and intertidal ecology cumulative effects assessment. No other projects have been screened in on the basis that no developments fall within the benthic ZOI. We agree that there are negligible risks of cumulative impacts to benthic receptors.

F.6 Mitigation and monitoring

Table 11-15 sets out the benthic and intertidal ecology embedded environmental measures. Embedded mitigation measures are primarily a commitment to productions of plans (*e.g.,* Cable Installation Plan completed prior to construction commencing). We accept that the embedded mitigation within them is in line with similar developments.

We welcome the commitment to micro-site infrastructure around key sensitive habitats (M001) though question the feasibility of micrositing on the basis of competing priorities such as ground conditions.M002 states that through development of a Cable Installation Plan impacts to benthic receptors will be reduced *"by maximising cable burial and minimising suspended sediments".* It is unclear how maximising cable burial will minimise impacts to features, given this will result in a greater amount of suspended sediments from jetting/trenching rather than minimised SSC. In developing the Cable Installation Plan, potential impact pathways to benthic receptors such as permanent loss of habitat (from surface laying) and increased SSC (from burial) should be considered and the least impactful installation method chosen with respect to the relevant receptors at that location.

We recommend that if the Proposed Development is consented, consideration and where possible Nature Inclusive Design (NIDs)[64] is implemented for scour/cable protection.

It is also unclear how M023 "offshore construction will only be undertaken during the April-October period" will reduce impacts to benthic receptors. This seasonal restriction does not reduce the overall construction timeframe or remove impact pathways and does not avoid sensitive periods such as spawning (generally spring and summer).

No monitoring is proposed for benthic ecology as predicted impacts for benthic and intertidal ecology are Not Significant.

If NID measures are installed, we recommend that monitoring is implemented to identify the potential changes that might occur via a comparison of pre and post installation.

Given the relative uniqueness (with respect to the absence of other large scale anthropogenic infrastructure) and accessibility of this site, we encourage benthic monitoring, which could be planned alongside O&M / inspection works. This would help build the knowledge base regarding benthic habitat changes post construction and could build on the work of research programmes such as the ORJIP BenCh project[65]. Furthermore, this would feed into other considerations with

[64] https://www.offshorewindscotland.org.uk/the-scottish-offshore-wind-industry/sowec/sowec-publications/cemnid-final-report/

[65] Carbon Trust, 2025. ORJIP BenCH: Benthic habitat changes post-construction of offshore wind, final report. Available at: https://www.carbontrust.com/our-work-and-impact/guides-reports-and-tools/orjip-benthic-habitat-changes-post-construction-of-offshore-wind-bench [accessed 15/04/2026]

respect to utilisation / foraging by predators including marine mammals and/or diadromous fish species.

We recommend that all environmental data collected is publicly available and we would be happy to discuss methods of data collection and analysis further if the Proposed Development is consented.

F.6.1 INNS Management Plan

This appears to be a comprehensive mitigation and contingency plan, clearly presented and in line with guidance. Further detail will be required post consent, if granted. We note the existing presence of two INNS and the final INNS Management Plan should clearly identify what steps will be taken to avoid the further spread of these species from offshore wind activities if the Proposed Development is consented.

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Appendix G Marine and Coastal Processes

Physical processes are considered in Chapter 9 of the EIA and the following supporting documents:

- Chapter 9: Physical and Coastal Processes, Volume 2a
- Appendix 9.1 Modelling Calibration Report
- Appendix 9.2 Modelling Results Report

The assessment for Marine and Coastal Processes concludes **No Significant effects** both alone and cumulatively, which we support.

We provide advice in this appendix, but this does not affect the outcome of the assessment, nor the conclusion to our advice.

G.1 Study area and baseline characterisation

We support the study area and parameters used for the baseline assessment.

G.2 Impact assessment

The 'Impact Magnitude criteria' definitions in Table 9-8 differ to those that have become standard in North Sea offshore wind farm EIAs. Therefore, it is of particular importance that if changes to physical processes are carried over to other EIA topics, what is carried over is not necessarily the conclusion of Magnitude – which is "negligible" in all cases. Instead, **the details of Magnitude should be carefully considered**. This reflects how changes to physical processes act as an impact pathway upon other receptors. For example, rather than accepting that changes to tidal flow are "negligible", the maps of modelled changes should be fully examined and those changes described.

We offer the following comments on three elements of Magnitude in Table 9-8:

- "immediate spatial extent" would benefit from being more clearly defined, particularly for a "medium" assessment which reads "immediate spatial extent (the Array Area / OCAS)";
- scale of impact relative to natural variability: It is unclear how the terms "greater than", "smaller than" are defined. More appropriate would be whether effects are within or outwith natural variability; and
- duration of effect is considered only in absolute terms (days, weeks, long-term), but we would advise a more appropriate approach is considering the duration relative to that of the process(es) that are changed.

G.2.1 Effects on physical processes receptors

We agree with the findings at 9.9.2.26 that effects of altered wave climate on North-West Coast of Lewis Geological Conservation Review (GCR) site would not be significant. However, we consider that the site's Sensitivity is incorrectly assessed as Low because the GCR site "*is routinely exposed to… winter storm events*" (Section 9.9.2.35). We also question the assessment of Magnitude (see comments above).

To inform the assessment of any future, similar development proposals in this area, we provide our own summary assessment as follows:

The North-West Coast of Lewis GCR site has national value, and could not recover from elevated wave attack because the Quaternary deposits that make up parts of its coastal cliffs were produced by processes no longer operating. Therefore, its Sensitivity should be described as at

least Medium. Modelling in the EIA suggests storm waves reaching the coast could be reduced in height by up to 20cm (see e.g. Plate 5-20 in Appendix 9.2). This effect would occur well outwith the Array Area and would be continuous in that it would alter all relevant storm events – therefore its Magnitude should be described as Medium.

The reduced wave attack could adversely affect the GCR site in terms of reducing exposure of the Quaternary deposits for scientific study. However, this would be outweighed by the benefit that it would slow the ongoing, long-term erosional loss of the deposits driven by sea-level rise. Therefore, on balance, we conclude that this mix of adverse and beneficial effects on the GCR site would be Not Significant.

G.2.2 Effects under-estimated or not considered

We consider that the Maximum Design Scenario does not fully consider the potential extent of cable protection – this is particularly noticeable given that the seabed in the proposal area is characterised as partly rocky. This issue is deferred instead to the post-consent Cable Protection Plan (Table 9-21, M002). Our calculation from Table 3-16 in Chapter 3 is that the maximum length of protection for surface-laid or inadequately-buried cabling could be 788km. As the width incorporating a 'pre-lay rock carpet' could be 5m, protection could have a footprint of nearly 4km^2. With protection (e.g. rock armour) only being 1.1m high, any resulting scour seems unlikely to be severe, but it also could add up to a large area of seabed modification.

Likewise, the EIAR does not consider potential for widespread clearance of sedimentary bedforms for cabling. Presence / absence of bedforms is not mentioned in the Baseline (e.g. 9.6.2.34). It is not clear whether bedforms were considered in analysis of bathymetric survey; this appears to be deferred instead to post-consent surveying (Section 3.5.33 in Chapter 3).

Potential scour around turbine foundations is scoped out of Chapter 9 on the basis of a commitment to install scour protection. However this does not account for potential secondary scour around the protection, which would be 3m high and would more than double the footprint of each foundation (Table 3-10 in Chapter 3).

We do not seek further clarification on these points but instead expect them to be addressed at the post-consent stage via Cable Protection Plan and any other relevant plans, if the Proposed Development is consented.

G.3 Cumulative assessment

We agree with the overall findings regarding cumulative effects (Section 9.13).

NATURESCOT ADVICE ON SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Appendix H Blue carbon

Blue Carbon interests are considered in Chapter 10: Marine Sediment and Water Quality and Chapter 11: Benthic and Intertidal Ecology.

In this Appendix we provide advice on the Blue Carbon assessment and conclusions. We do not provide comment on other elements of Chapter 10 or Chapter 11.

The assessment for Blue Carbon concludes No Significant impacts, which we support.

We recognise that Blue Carbon assessments are a relatively new element of EIA Reports for proposed marine energy projects. Whilst advice included within this appendix is specific to the proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm EIA Report, there are some instances in which we provide comment on aspects of the assessment process which do not affect the outcome of the assessment or the overall conclusions reached in our advice; we hope these comments will be of benefit to future Blue Carbon assessments.

Furthermore, the biodiversity value and ecosystem functions provided by Blue Carbon habitats are well understood and afforded protection through a variety of policies. In addition, there is an increasing need to also recognise the climate change mitigation potential in line with the Blue Carbon Action Plan[66].

H.1 Study area

The study area is defined as the Proposed Development, including the Array Area and Export Cable Corridor (ECC) to mean high water springs (MHWS), as well as a Zone of Influence (ZOI) of up to 6 km based on the peak spring tidal excursion ellipse. We accept this approach.

H.2 Baseline characterisation

Tables 10-6 and 11-6 list the data sources used to inform the EIA for marine sediment and water quality and benthic and intertidal ecology, respectively. Many key data sources we would recommend for the Blue Carbon assessment are missing from these tables, although some are referenced within the specific sections, including:

- Burrows, M. T., Smeaton, C., Tillin, H., Grundy, S., Sugden, H., Moore, P., Fitzsimmons, C., Austin, W., O'Dell, A. (2024). The United Kingdom's Blue Carbon Inventory: Assessment of Marine Carbon Storage and Sequestration Potential in Scotland (Including Within Marine Protected Areas). A Report to The Wildlife Trusts, WWF and the RSPB. Scottish Association for Marine Science, Oban.
- Cunningham, C. and Hunt, C. 2023. Scottish Blue Carbon - a literature review of the current evidence for Scotland's blue carbon habitats. NatureScot Research Report 1326.
- Daewel, U., Akhtar, N., Christiansen, N., & Schrum, C. (2022). Offshore wind farms are projected to impact primary production and bottom water deoxygenation in the North Sea. Communications Earth and Environment, 3(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-022-00625-0
- Diesing, M., Thorsnes, T., & Rún Bjarnadóttir, L. (2021). Organic carbon densities and accumulation rates in surface sediments of the North Sea and Skagerrak. Biogeosciences, 18(6), 2139–2160. https://doi.org/10.5194/bg-18-2139-2021

[66] https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-blue-carbon-action-plan/

- Hunt C, Demšar U, Dove D, Smeaton C, Cooper R and Austin WEN (2020) Quantifying Marine Sedimentary Carbon: A New Spatial Analysis Approach Using Seafloor Acoustics, Imagery, and Ground-Truthing Data in Scotland. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 7:588. https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2020.00588
- Smeaton, C., Austin, W., & Turrell, B. (2020). *Re-evaluating Scotland's sedimentary carbon stocks*. (2 ed.) (Scottish Marine and Freshwater Science; Vol. 11, No. 2). Marine Scotland. https://doi.org/10.7489/12267-1
- Smeaton, C., Hunt, C.A., Turrell, W.R. and Austin, W.E.N. (2021). Marine Sedimentary Carbon Stocks of the United Kingdom's Exclusive Economic Zone. Frontiers in Earth Science, 9 https://doi.org/10.3389/feart.2021.593324
- Smeaton, C. and Austin, W.E.N. (2022). Quality not quantity: Prioritizing the management of sedimentary organic matter across continental shelf seas. Geophysical Research Letters, 49, https://doi.org/10.1029/2021GL097481
- Turrell, W. R., Austin, W. E. N., Philbrick, S. P., Tilbrook, C., & Kennedy, H. (2023). Clarifying the role of inorganic carbon in blue carbon policy and practice. Marine Policy, 157(October), 105873. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2023.105873
- Watson, S. C. L., Somerfield, P. J., Lemasson, A. J., Knights, A. M., Edwards-Jones, A., Nunes, J., … Beaumont, N. J. (2024). The global impact of offshore wind farms on ecosystem services. Ocean and Coastal Management, 249 (September 2023). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2024.107023

In this case, this does not affect the outcome of the assessment or the overall conclusions reached in our advice, but we highlight this for future Applicants to be aware of.

Additionally, we note that various surveys were undertaken, which have been used to inform the Blue Carbon assessment and we welcome this approach. A Priority Marine Feature (PMF) survey was conducted, recording habitats such as kelp beds, which informed part of the Blue Carbon habitat assessment. Moreover, site-specific sediment samples of Total Organic Carbon (TOC) were collected during the subtidal environmental baseline survey. The mean TOC across the study area was 0.38% ± 0.02%, and this was used to inform the sedimentary Blue Carbon assessment.

H.3 Assessment approach

H.3.1 Blue Carbon habitats

We broadly support the impacts included for Blue Carbon habitats, as per Table 11-4, which mostly consider increases in suspended sediment concentrations, increases in sediment deposition and habitat loss / disturbance (both temporary and long-term). Typically, we advise that changes in physical processes resulting from the presence of the subsea infrastructure associated with the Proposed Development are included in an assessment e.g. scour effects, changes in wave/tidal current regimes and resulting effects on sediment transport. We therefore recommend that future Blue Carbon assessments should also include this as an impact pathway where relevant, as sediment and associated carbon accumulation may result from the Proposed Development (Daewel, *et al.*, 2022; Watson *et al.*, 2024). This could be further impacted at decommissioning stage, through further disturbance of sediment accumulation rates. Noting relatively low sediment accumulation rates in the North Sea, but that this does vary spatially and this site is not in the North Sea. (Diesing, Thorsnes, & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).

H.3.2 Sedimentary Blue Carbon

For sedimentary Blue Carbon, only the change in Blue Carbon resource in the sediment is considered within Table 10-4. Typically, we would expect this to be broken down into temporary

disturbance of seabed (e.g. from preparatory works) and long-term seabed loss (e.g. infrastructure footprint). However, we note that some differentiations have been drawn in Table 10-12 for the quantitative assessment and we therefore accept that the impacts have been accounted for.

Table 10-12 includes the total volume of disturbed sediment through construction of 738,303.5 m^3 and the total short-term seabed disturbance from maintenance and remedial works of 27,610,800 m^2. However, Table 10-15 cites a lower total volume of disturbed sediment through construction of 721,598.5 m^3, which has been carried through to the assessment.

We note that the value used in the assessment (721,598.5 m^3) and have assumed that this correctly accounts for the worst-case scenario of seabed disturbance during construction.

The site-specific mean TOC values have been used in the assessment and applied to the total volume of sediment disturbed. The mean (± SE) TOC across the study area was 0.38% ± 0.02%, which is lower than the recorded TOC from the data collected by Marine Directorate (2022)[67] around the Isle of Lewis and Isle of Harris, which ranged from 0.27% to 1.31%, with a mean (± SE) of 0.84% ± 0.09%. However, we note that there was no direct overlap with the proposed development and the Marine Directorate survey area, so it is difficult to ascertain with confidence how representative the Marine Directorate samples are for Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

Moreover, the Applicant has followed a precautionary approach of assuming that 100% of the disturbed volume will result in CO_2 emissions to the atmosphere, as provided in our scoping advice. Whilst we acknowledge that this is likely an overestimate, there is high uncertainty around the fate of disturbed sedimentary organic carbon.

As such, despite the difference in TOC between the site-specific surveys and the Marine Directorate (2022) regional surveys, we accept the overall assessment approach used and consider that an appropriate level of precaution has been applied.

H.4 Impact assessment

H.4.1 Blue Carbon habitats

Assessment to Blue Carbon habitats is presented in Chapter 11: Benthic and Intertidal Ecology. During the site-specific surveys, kelp beds were mapped covering an area of 9.7 km^2. As well as being afforded protection through their PMF status, kelp beds are also considered a Blue Carbon habitat. Kelps are very productive and can sequester large amounts of CO_2. They attach to rocks and other substrates using holdfasts, and as such, they do not have root systems and do not transfer carbon to underlying sediments. Kelps in particular have a fast turnover rate and decompose easily; however, due to their large volumes, a proportion of their biomass can become buried in seabed sediments for longer timescales.

A quantitative assessment is not presented for kelp, but we accept that the HDD trenchless cable installation beneath the intertidal zone will minimise disturbance to the kelp beds within the proposed development.

As such, we agree with the magnitude of low, sensitivity of medium and overall significance of minor for Blue Carbon habitats, which is not significant in EIA terms.

H.4.2 Sedimentary carbon

[67] https://data.marine.gov.scot/dataset/geochemical-analysis-quality-and-reactivity-organic-matter-held-marine-sediments-united

H.4.2.1 Disturbance during construction

Assessment of impacts to sedimentary Blue Carbon is presented in Chapter 10: Marine Sediment and Water Quality. Using the estimated total volume of disturbed sediment through construction of 721,598.5 m^3, the mean sediment bulk density of 1,417.6 kgm^{-3} and the mean proportion of TOC of 0.38%, it is stated that a total of 14,583.15 tonnes of CO_2 could theoretically be released to the atmosphere. However, following the same calculation process and inputted values, we work this out to be approximately 14,253.19 tonnes of CO_2. Despite this difference, we agree that even with their figure which is greater, this magnitude is considered low due to the footprint of the Proposed Development relative to the total seabed area, and net benefit of displaced greenhouse gas emissions across the operational lifetime.

Regarding sensitivity, we consider that the sedimentary carbon is deemed to be of high vulnerability, low recoverability and high value. This is because sediment accumulation on the seabed can be very low and recovery therefore is slow. As such, we agree that the sensitivity would be classed as high.

Overall, we agree with the conclusion of minor significance, which is not significant in EIA terms.

H.4.2.2 Disturbance during operation

Whilst no modelling has been undertaken to quantify the impacts of sediment resuspension (and therefore potential carbon remineralisation) during the operation and maintenance phase, we accept that the impacts are likely to be significantly lower than the disturbance during construction. As such, we agree with the conclusion of negligible magnitude and high sensitivity, with the overall significance considered to be minor overall, which is not significant in EIA terms.

H.4.2.3 Disturbance during decommissioning

We note that specific methods for assessing the release of sedimentary carbon during decommissioning will be determined closer to the time. Noting our comments around changes to physical processes and potential carbon accumulation above, we acknowledge that any carbon released from disturbance during decommissioning activities is likely to be less than that released during construction. As such, we are able to conclude at this stage that any potential impacts to sedimentary Blue Carbon from decommissioning activities would be a minor significance overall, which is not significant in EIA terms.

H.5 Cumulative assessment

The Blue Carbon assessment presented does not include a detailed cumulative assessment. We advise that future assessments should consider the cumulative impacts of disturbance from other developments, including on longer-term carbon which is stored deeper.

H.6 Mitigation and monitoring

Certain embedded mitigation measures presented in Table 11-15 are described as potentially reducing the impact to Blue Carbon habitats, including M002 (Cable Installation Plan and Cable Burial Risk Assessment) and M005 (best practice techniques for seabed excavations). Additionally, we note the embedded measure M054 in Table 10-13 and 11-15 which intends to limit physical disturbance to the seabed by minimising use of anchors and using dynamic positioning where possible instead. This measure could help reduce seabed disturbance (and therefore release of sedimentary carbon), which we welcome.

NATURESCOT ADVICE ON SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM

Appendix I Derogation

The applicant has shortlisted four compensation measures.

- Mammalian predator management
- Corvid management
- Disturbance pressure management
- Bycatch reduction

I.1 Overall comments

Our advice on compensation measures is constrained by the limited information provided on this topic. We recommend that in addition to the listed delivery criteria, the Applicant should also consider the potential indirect effects of such a measure, both potential benefits to non-target species, and potential adverse effects on non-target species, habitats and designated sites (e.g. the potential impacts of fence building on SSSI features, accidental poisoning or trapping of native species, potential impacts to food webs through the removal of mammals or corvid control).

I.2 Mammalian predator management

This measure is proposed for kittiwake and razorbill. The Applicant provides a review of the evidence supporting the proposal of mammalian predator management as a potential measure. The Applicant does not yet have details concerning potential locations, target mammal species, or methodology. We are therefore unable to provide detailed advice on this measure.

I.3 Corvid management

This measure is proposed for kittiwake and razorbill, and the measure would likely target carrion crows. NatureScot have raised concerns around corvid management as a compensation measure, particularly any lethal management measures, and we are very unlikely to support this measure being progressed. Extreme caution must be applied when considering the killing of one native species in order to benefit another.

It would be helpful if the Applicant could provide more detail about the potential non-lethal corvid management measures, with examples of existing management projects where this is available. For example, habitat modification to restrict corvid access is listed as a potential measure – further detail and examples of what this habitat modification would involve would be helpful for our understanding of the potential risks of this measure.

Ideally, the local corvid population would also be monitored to ensure that the measure does not cause undue damage, particularly if the measure includes lethal control.

Indirect adverse impacts on corvids and other species should be considered, for example, diversionary feeding may carry some potential risks, such as increasing the risk of disease spread by causing high densities of individuals, the translocation of predatory corvids may potentially result in the death of the translocated individual, or an increase in corvid predation at the release site.

I.4 Disturbance pressure management

This measure is proposed for kittiwake, razorbill and gannet and would include measures relating to managing visitor pressure and recreational disturbance. The Applicant provides a review of the evidence from the literature of the impacts of human disturbance on seabirds and the potential benefits of the management of this disturbance.

We expect that disturbance pressure management measures would be highly location specific, and so cannot provide detailed advice until such information is available. We strongly recommend that the Applicant considers performing site visits and surveys, as reports of the presence and severity of existing disturbance can be very helpful in determining the nature and potential efficacy of any proposed measures.

I.5 Bycatch reduction

This measure is relevant to razorbill and gannet. The Applicant provides a brief review of the evidence from the literature of the impacts of bycatch on these species, the areas within UK waters where there are particular hotspots of gannet and razorbill bycatch, and the types of fishing gear which cause the most bycatch for these species.

The Applicant may wish to consider performing pilot studies in order to determine current bycatch rates and the efficacy of potential bycatch reduction measures.

NATS Safeguarding

From:	NATS Safeguarding
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Cc:	NATS Safeguarding
Subject:	RE: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date:	20 April 2026 11:55:56
Attachments:	image003.png image004.png image005.png image007.png image008.png image009.png image010.png image011.png

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The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

However, please be aware that this response applies specifically to the above consultation and only reflects the position of NATS (that is responsible for the management of en route air traffic) based on the information supplied at the time of this application. This letter does not provide any indication of the position of any other party, whether they be an airport, airspace user or otherwise. It remains the LPA's responsibility to ensure that all the appropriate consultees are properly consulted.

If any changes are proposed to the information supplied to NATS in regard to this application which become the basis of a revised, amended or further application for approval, then as a statutory consultee NERL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission or any consent being granted.

Yours Faithfully

NATS

NATS Safeguarding

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NATS Internal

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By email MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot
Marine Directorate
Licensing Operations Team
375 Victoria Road
Aberdeen
AB11 9DB

Friday 1st May 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Letter of Support – *Spiorad na Mara* Offshore Wind Farm

I am writing on behalf of Navantia UK Arnish, a locally based fabrication yard in the clean energy supply chain, to express our support for the proposed *Spiorad na Mara* offshore wind farm.

We are a registered supplier of the Clean Industry Bonus (CIB) Scheme and are located within a qualifying CIB zone, as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), falling within 'Overall Deprivation' decile 5 and 'Geographical Access to Services Indicator' decile 1. In communities with these characteristics, investment of this scale is economically material, supporting employment, stimulating local supply chains, and anchoring long term investment and industrial activity.

From our perspective as a local supplier, *Spiorad na Mara* represents a significant opportunity to:

- Support local supply chains: Enable local companies to win work and retain value in the region. Northland Power has signalled a strong focus on local content, including boat landings, secondary steel, and importantly pin pile production. Pin piles are a core Arnish capability (and the reason Arnish was established), and we are currently the only UK facility able to mass produce them.
- Deliver clean industry growth: As a CIB registered supplier, we are committed to sustainability, skills development and the Fair Work Charter. Projects such as *Spiorad na Mara* provide the pipeline that underpins investment and growth. Navantia UK and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have recently completed a collaborative investment programme to ensure Arnish is positioned to deliver renewable projects of this scale. An active, capable local supply chain also strengthens delivery certainty for developers. While project specific CIB commitments will be formalised through the Contracts for Difference process, locally based CIB registered suppliers strengthen confidence that those commitments can be delivered credibly and at scale.
- Enhance skills and employment: Increase demand for labour, apprenticeships and training to build long term workforce capacity. Navantia UK already operates a very successful apprenticeship programme, which Northland Power has indicated strong support for. A sustained project pipeline helps to maintain and widen the opportunities for the local community.
- Strengthen Scotland's net zero ambitions: Increase renewable electricity generation in support of energy security and climate targets, while enabling a just transition for industry and communities.

In summary, Navantia UK supports the proposed *Spiorad na Mara* offshore wind farm and recognises the material economic value it can generate for the region.

Yours faithfully
[Redacted]

General Manager
Navantia UK Arnish
[Redacted]

North Bragar Grazings Committee

NORTH BRAGAR GRAZINGS COMMITTEE

Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides

HS2 9DA

FORMAL OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION

Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Northwest of Lewis - 00011742 & 00011743

TO:

Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations Team

Scottish Government, 375 Victoria Road, Aberdeen, AB11 9DB

MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

FROM: North Bragar Grazings Committee, Bragar, Isle of Lewis, HS2 9DA

DATE: 1st May 2026

RE: Formal Objection – Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – Application for Section 36 Consent, Section 36A Declaration, and Marine Licences under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

Introduction and Standing

North Bragar Grazings Committee (hereafter 'the Committee') submits this **formal objection** to the application by Spiorad na Mara Limited (a subsidiary of Northland Power (75.5%) and ESB (24.5%)) for consent to construct and operate an offshore wind farm located approximately 5–13 kilometres off the west coast of the Isle of Lewis.

The application is made under the following legislative framework:

- **Electricity Act 1989 (sections 36 and 36A):** https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/29/contents
- **The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/101):** https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/101/contents
- **The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/455):** https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1990/455/contents/made
- **Marine (Scotland) Act 2010:** https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents
- **The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/115):** https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/115/contents

The Committee holds responsibility for the management of common grazing's in the North Bragar area of the west coast of Lewis. It represents the rights and interests of crofting shareholders whose livelihoods, working land, landscape, cultural heritage, and quality of life are directly and materially affected by this proposal. The Committee is also a party to an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) contract with NatureScot and the Scottish Government in respect of these grazings, supporting protected species including corncrake (Crex crex) and breeding waders.

The Committee objects to this application in its entirety and requests that the Scottish Ministers refuse consent. The Committee further requests that a Public Local Inquiry be held, given the scale of the development, the extent of community opposition, and the complexity of issues raised.

Legislative and Policy Framework

Electricity Act 1989 – Duty to Have Regard to Natural Beauty and Conservation

Under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, the Scottish Ministers may grant consent subject to conditions, or refuse consent. Paragraph 3(1) of Schedule 8 to the Act places a duty on Scottish

Ministers to 'have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest, and of protecting sites and buildings of architectural, historic or archaeological interest.' Paragraph 3(2) requires them to 'do what they reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites or buildings.'

The Committee submits that the proposed development would cause irreversible harm to the natural beauty of this outstanding Atlantic coastline, and to the flora, fauna, and features of special interest present on and adjacent to the North Bragar common grazings. The application should accordingly be refused on these grounds alone.

Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/101)

Under these Regulations, the Scottish Ministers must not grant consent for EIA development unless an environmental impact assessment has been carried out and the environmental information properly taken into account.

The Committee submits that the EIA Report is deficient in respect of: (a) the impact on Schedule 1 protected species on and adjacent to the North Bragar common grazings; (b) cumulative visual and seascape impact; (c) the impact on cetaceans and seabirds; and (d) the full socio-cultural impact on Gaelic-speaking crofting communities.

The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/455)

These Regulations govern the procedure for section 36 applications, including publicity and consultation requirements.

The Committee notes that crofting shareholders with a direct material interest in the onshore cable route, including those in Barvas and the townships through which the cable corridor will pass, have not been formally or meaningfully consulted about the onshore works as required. This is addressed fully at Section 4 below.

Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

Under Part 4 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, the Scottish Ministers must not grant a marine licence unless satisfied that any adverse effects on the environment are acceptable. Section 14 imposes a general duty to further the achievement of sustainable development in the Scottish marine area.

The Committee submits that the scale, proximity, and permanence of the proposed development is inconsistent with this duty and with the protection of the marine environment the Act requires.

Marine Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/115)

Under these Regulations, the Scottish Ministers must not grant a marine licence for an EIA project unless an environmental impact assessment has been carried out and the environmental information properly taken into account.

The Committee submits that the marine EIA is deficient in respect of marine mammal impacts, European Protected Species licensing, seabird collision risk, and cumulative assessment.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

NPF4, adopted 13 February 2023, is part of the statutory development plan and a material consideration. The Committee invokes the following policies:

> ***Policy 1 (Climate and Nature Crises):*** *Requires significant weight to be given to the nature crisis as well as the climate crisis. NPF4 does not make renewable consent automatic.* Permanent destruction of an outstanding coastal landscape and disturbance of protected species habitat are directly contrary to the nature crisis objective.
>
> ***Policy 3 (Biodiversity):*** *EIA development must demonstrate biodiversity will be in a demonstrably better state.* This has not been demonstrated for habitats and species on the North Bragar grazings, the coastline, or the marine environment. Existing AECS obligations cannot count toward this requirement.

Policy 4 (Natural Places): *Protects sites of nature conservation importance and species of conservation concern.* Corncrake, white-tailed sea eagle, breeding waders, cetaceans, and protected seabird populations are directly relevant.

Policy 5 (Soils): *Provides significant protection for peatland and carbon-rich soils.* The cable corridor and haul roads across Barvas Moor must demonstrate no damage to this irreplaceable peatland system. No adequate solution has been presented.

Policy 11(e) (Renewable Energy): *Significant landscape and visual impacts must be addressed. The Scottish Government has affirmed post-NPF4 that the key test remains 'the right development in the right place.'* This is not the right place.

Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place): *Requires development to be 'distinctive', respecting natural landscapes and reinforcing identity*. A 338-metre industrial wind array visible from every township on the west side of Lewis, with permanent aviation warning lighting on the horizon, is the antithesis of this principle.

Scale, Visual Impact, and Seascape

The proposed turbines, at up to 338.4 metres in height with a maximum rotor diameter of 280 metres, would represent an extraordinary and irreversible intrusion into one of Europe's most outstanding coastal landscapes, higher than the Eiffel Tower, visible from every township, beach, and area of working crofting land on the west side of Lewis. These structures would permanently dominate the western seascape at a minimum distance of 6 kilometres from shore.

The Committee also raises the specific and unaddressed issue of aviation warning lighting. Mandatory red warning lights on up to 60 turbines of this height would produce a permanent illuminated industrial feature on the western horizon, directly degrading dark sky quality and impairing the viewing of the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis), of growing cultural, tourism, and economic significance to the west side of Lewis. The EIA does not adequately address this impact.

These impacts are contrary to section 36 and Schedule 8 of the Electricity Act 1989, and to NPF4 Policies 11 and 14.

Onshore Cable Works, Crofting Land Rights and Absence of Shareholder Consent

The Onshore Route and Its Impact on Crofting Land

The onshore transmission infrastructure is proposed to make landfall in Barvas, with the cable corridor running southward through the crofting township, directly crossing individual crofts, apportionments, and common grazings belonging to multiple grazings committees and their shareholders.

The Committee states unequivocally: shareholders of North Bragar Grazings and crofters with land in the path of the proposed cable corridor have not been consulted about the onshore works. This is not a procedural technicality, it is a fundamental failure. No planning consent for a development of this nature should proceed where the rights and interests of crofting shareholders and individual crofters over their own legally protected land have been ignored.

The Crofting Law Position

Common grazings in Scotland are governed by the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 (as amended by the Crofting Reform Acts of 2007 and 2010). The rights of shareholders are among the most legally robust land rights in Scotland, rooted in crofting legislation stretching back to the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886.

Common grazings cannot be used for non-crofting purposes without proper process. A grazings committee does not have unilateral power to consent to the use of common grazing land for industrial cable infrastructure on behalf of shareholders. Any such use requires, at minimum, the informed consent of shareholders at a properly constituted meeting, and may require the consent

or direction of the Crofting Commission. The applicant has not obtained, and to this Committee's knowledge has not sought, that consent from shareholders.

Equally, individual crofts are held under crofting tenure with full statutory security under the 1993 Act. Individual crofters cannot be compelled to surrender or accept permanent interference with their croft land without due legal process and proper compensation. Routing an industrial cable corridor through working croft land without the free, informed, and individually obtained agreement of each affected crofter would, if permitted, represent a severe erosion of crofting rights that Scottish land law was specifically designed to prevent.

A Dangerous Precedent for All Crofting Communities in Scotland

The Committee wishes to raise a matter of fundamental principle that extends beyond this single application.

If the Scottish Ministers grant consent for a development that includes an onshore infrastructure route through crofts, apportionments, and common grazings, without the proper agreement of affected shareholders and individual crofters, they will set a dangerous precedent. It will signal to multinational energy companies that crofting land, protected by over 140 years of legislation specifically designed to safeguard the rights of rural communities against powerful outside interests, can be effectively appropriated for commercial industrial purposes without meaningful consent from those communities.

This is precisely the scenario that crofting law was created to prevent. The original purpose of the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886 was to protect crofting communities from having their land and livelihoods overridden by powerful landowners and commercial interests without recourse. Allowing a multinational energy developer to route infrastructure through working crofts and common grazings without shareholder consent would betray that foundational purpose and would set a precedent felt by crofting communities from Lewis to Caithness.

The Committee submits that the Scottish Ministers, who are also the counterparty to AECS contracts with many of the grazings committees whose land would be affected, have a particular responsibility to ensure that crofting rights are not overridden in the name of their own renewable energy targets.

Specific Demands Regarding the Onshore Works

The Committee requires the following before any consent can be considered:

> **Individual written notice to all affected crofters:** Every crofter with a croft, an apportionment, or grazing share in the path of the proposed cable corridor must receive formal individual written notice of the route and its implications.
>
> **Formal shareholder meetings:** Each affected grazings committee must be given adequate time and information to convene a properly constituted shareholder meeting to consider and vote on whether to accept or refuse access to their common grazings for the onshore infrastructure.
>
> **Crofting Commission formal assessment:** The Crofting Commission must be formally consulted and must provide a written assessment of whether the proposed use of common grazings and croft land for this cable corridor is lawful under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 without further statutory process or Commission approval.
>
> **No consent before resolution:** No section 36 consent or marine licence should be granted until all onshore crofting land rights, shareholder consent requirements, and legal process questions have been fully resolved to the satisfaction of affected crofters and grazings committees.

The Committee further reserves the right to raise these matters before the Scottish Land Court and the Crofting Commission if the applicant proceeds to seek access to or use of common grazings or croft land without proper shareholder consent.

Livestock, Crofting Agriculture and Construction, Impacts Not Addressed in the Environmental Impact Assessment

The crofting townships situated along the array area are working agricultural communities in which cattle, sheep and other livestock graze common grazings and inland crofts continuously throughout the year. On the west coast of Lewis, the lambing season typically runs from late March through to May, with calving occurring across a similar period. This window coincides directly with the phase of major civil engineering activity that would follow any winter weather pause in construction operations, including horizontal directional drilling at the landfall, cable trenching across croft land and common grazings, heavy plant and vehicle movements on and off the A857, and haul road construction and consolidation across Barvas Moor.

Construction activities of this character and scale generate sustained noise, ground-borne vibration and visual disturbance across a wide area. The scientific and veterinary literature is consistent in recording that sudden acoustic disturbance during active lambing causes ewes to abandon newborn lambs, and that prolonged noise and vibration during the calving period induces physiological stress responses in cattle with measurable consequences for reproductive performance and herd productivity. These are not theoretical or speculative concerns; they are documented and recognised risks in planning and environmental guidance applicable to infrastructure projects on agricultural land.

It is material that the applicant's own community engagement process elicited direct expressions of concern from local residents regarding the effects of construction activity on livestock behaviour, on the management of common grazings, and on the seasonal use of machair land. Those concerns appear in the applicant's Focus Group Summary Report. They are not reflected in any technical chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. The EIAR contains no livestock impact assessment, no seasonal construction noise protocol specific to the lambing and calving period, and no analysis of the cumulative acoustic environment to which grazing animals on the common grazings would be exposed across the full construction programme.

This constitutes a material omission. Scottish Ministers are being asked to determine an application for a development whose construction phase will directly border and traverse active crofting land during the most sensitive period of the agricultural calendar, without any assessment of the consequences for the livestock and livelihoods of the crofting families affected.

Policy / Legal Basis: *Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 4 / Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, Schedule 2 / Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 Both sets of EIA Regulations require assessment of significant effects on agriculture, land use and the socio-economic conditions of affected communities. Agriculture on croft land and common grazings is a land use of specific statutory character protected under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993.*

The failure to assess the impact of construction noise and disturbance on crofting livestock, a concern identified through the applicant's own consultation process, represents a gap in the environmental information that Scottish Ministers are required to have before them under both sets of Regulations. This deficiency cannot be remedied by conditions attached to a consent. A livestock and crofting impact assessment, incorporating a seasonal construction noise protocol covering the lambing and calving

periods, must be submitted and assessed before any consent is granted for any element of this project.

Protected Species, AECS Contract, and Biodiversity

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) Contract

North Bragar Grazings is currently in an AECS contract with NatureScot and the Scottish Government, representing a formal funded commitment to manage these grazings for biodiversity and protected species. Any construction, infrastructure, or operational disturbance arising from this development that interferes with the AECS management regime would constitute a material breach of the Committee's contractual obligations, obligations entered into with, and funded by, the Scottish Government itself.

It would be directly contradictory for the Scottish Government to fund and contractually require specific habitat management for protected species on one hand, while consenting a development that disrupts that management on the other. NatureScot must provide explicit written advice on whether consent is compatible with the AECS contract before any determination is made. Furthermore, under NPF4 Policy 3, measures already required by existing contractual obligations cannot count toward the 'demonstrably better state' biodiversity requirement, the applicant must demonstrate additional, independently verifiable biodiversity enhancement.

Specifically, our AECS contract is to remove livestock from the grazings to ensure that waders and birds are able to nest and raise their broods without interruption and any disturbance would breach our contract and the management that we have worked so hard on for decades. Pre ACES we were in a Rural Priorities.

Corncrake (Crex crex) — Schedule 1

Corncrake is Schedule 1 protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive. Any intentional or reckless disturbance during the breeding season is a criminal offence. The Western Isles population represents one of the last viable UK strongholds for this species. The North Bragar grazings are actively managed under the AECS contract to support this population. The EIA must demonstrate, not merely assert, that no disturbance will occur. A specific Schedule 1 licence from NatureScot would be required, and cannot be assumed. We have corncrakes on our grazings every year and have evidence to support this.

White-Tailed Sea Eagle (Haliaeetus albicilla) — Schedule 1

White-tailed sea eagles are present in the North Bragar area. Schedule 1 protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive, any disturbance at or near the nest is a criminal offence. With a wingspan of up to 2.45 metres, the largest eagle in Europe, this species is highly documented as vulnerable to turbine collision. The Committee raises: (a) severe collision risk from birds transiting between coastal and offshore foraging grounds through a 280-metre rotor diameter array; (b) long-term displacement from established foraging habitat; and (c) the foreseeable criminal liability that would arise should a sea eagle be killed or disturbed as a result of this development. Full survey data, explicit NatureScot collision risk modelling, and resolution of all species-specific issues are required before any consent is granted.

Breeding Waders

The North Bragar grazings support breeding waders managed under the AECS contract. These species are of significant conservation concern in Scotland and highly sensitive to disturbance. The EIA must fully assess construction and operational impacts on breeding wader habitat and populations on and adjacent to the grazings. Waders include redshank, curlew, ringed plover, dunlins all nesting.

Marine Mammals — European Protected Species

All cetacean species are European Protected Species under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. The EPS licence for geophysical surveys expired October 2024. The Committee requests formal confirmation that all EPS licensing requirements for all project phases have been satisfied before any consent is granted. Pile-driving and subsea noise during construction requires specific assessment against cetacean populations in these waters.

Seabirds

The west coast of Lewis hosts internationally significant seabird populations on major migratory flyways. The Committee is seriously concerned about collision mortality, displacement, and the impact of mandatory aviation warning lighting on nocturnal migrants and burrow-nesting seabirds, particularly petrels and shearwaters, which are fatally attracted to artificial light at sea.

The west coast of Lewis is also a critical staging and transit zone for migratory wildfowl and wading birds travelling between their wintering grounds in the British Isles and their breeding grounds in Iceland, Greenland, and the high Arctic. The North Atlantic flyway that passes directly through these waters supports internationally important populations of species including whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), pink-footed goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), barnacle goose (*Branta leucopsis*), and a range of Arctic-breeding waders. Whooper swans were observed in the village of Bragar itself in spring 2026, demonstrating that the area is actively used as a resting and staging point by birds on their northward passage to Iceland and Greenland. These large, slow-flying birds are particularly vulnerable to turbine strike, especially during low-visibility conditions. The proposed wind farm array would lie directly across this migratory corridor at a critical point in the spring and autumn passage seasons. The EIA has not adequately assessed collision risk to migratory wildfowl, nor has it addressed the potential for the development to displace or disrupt staging birds from coastal habitats on and adjacent to the North Bragar grazings. The Committee requires that a full migratory bird collision risk assessment, informed by dedicated radar and visual survey data covering complete spring and autumn passage periods, be carried out and made available before any consent is granted.

Peatland and Carbon-Rich Soils

The onshore cable corridor crosses Barvas Moor, one of the largest and most intact blanket bog systems in Europe, a carbon store of the highest significance, a complex hydrological system, and a priority habitat supporting protected and priority species. At public consultation events, it was noted that the existing road across this moor is already a floating structure, and the applicant presented no adequate solution to the challenge of constructing a haul road across active deep peat without irreversible disturbance to the peat body, water flows, and carbon storage. This directly engages NPF4 Policy 5 and the Scottish Government's own peatland restoration commitments. A full and credible peat disturbance and carbon release assessment is required before any consent is considered.

The applicant's decision to submit separate consent applications for the offshore and onshore elements of this project, with the onshore Transmission Works application not yet submitted to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, constitutes unlawful project splitting, preventing Scottish Ministers from assessing the full environmental, cultural, and land rights impacts of the development in the round, as required by Schedule 8 of the Electricity Act 1989, the EIA Regulations, and the principle established in *R v North Yorkshire County Council ex parte Brown* [2000] 1 AC 397 that the environmental impact of a project must be assessed as a whole and not artificially fragmented.

Failure of Genuine Community Engagement

The developer's own consultation summary acknowledged that concerns about environmental, cultural, and economic risks were felt to outweigh benefits, and that 'a recurring theme in the feedback was the perception that the consultation was more of a PR exercise than a genuine attempt to engage with the community, and that local voices, especially those opposed to the project, were not being listened to.'

This characterisation, appearing in the developer's own published document, demonstrates that the pre-application consultation process has not delivered the meaningful engagement required under the Marine Licensing (Pre-application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 and the Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990. Furthermore, community benefit arrangements remain entirely voluntary, unenforceable, and at the developer's discretion. There is no statutory guarantee of a fair return to crofting communities for a development that will permanently alter their landscape and working land for a minimum of 35 years.

Scheduled Ancient Monument, Commonwealth War Graves and the Iolaire Graves

Teampull Eoin (St John's Chapel) — Scheduled Monument 3926

Situated at Port Mhòr Bragar, directly on the Atlantic shoreline within the Bragar village facing the proposed wind farm array, stands Teampull Eoin (St John's Chapel) a site of the very highest heritage significance in Scottish law. This is Scheduled Ancient Monument 3926, first scheduled in 1977 and rescheduled by Historic Scotland in 2005. The monument comprises the ruins of a 15th-century medieval church and its graveyard, together with an underlying prehistoric settlement mound representing continuous human habitation of this coastline over at least two millennia. The monument is confirmed to be of national importance by Historic Scotland on the grounds that it represents a multi-period, multi-use site of exceptional rarity: well-preserved medieval buildings of this character are not common in the Western Isles, and the chapel is considered representative of the small churches that served local communities throughout the later medieval period. The extensive graveyard, with its simple and largely unmarked grave markers, is specifically identified as a particularly well-preserved example of Western Isles burial practice in the post-Reformation period.

The graveyard at Teampull Eoin is not a historical relic: it is an active burial ground, still in use today, in which it is estimated that approximately 2,000 people are interred. It sits on a small headland at the edge of the beach at Port Mhór Bragar, with an unobstructed direct view westward and north-westward across the Atlantic, the precise orientation toward the proposed Spiorad na Mara array. Any person standing at the graves of North Bragar's dead, including at the graves of those who died in the First and Second World Wars, will look directly across the water towards an array of up to 60 wind turbines reaching 338 metres above mean sea level.

Commonwealth War Graves

Bragar Churchyard (Cladh Bhràdhagair), which encompasses Teampull Eoin and the active graveyard, is a registered Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemetery containing 36 identified Commonwealth war casualties of the First and Second World Wars. It is one of the most westerly CWGC sites in the United Kingdom. These 36 graves represent men from the local townships, including North Bragar, who gave their lives in the service of their country. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has a statutory duty to maintain these graves in perpetuity, and the setting and dignity of CWGC sites is a material planning consideration recognised by Scottish Ministers. The proposed development would permanently industrialise the seascape visible from these graves. No condolence, community benefit payment, or mitigation measure can undo that permanent change to a place of national commemoration.

The Iolaire Graves

The graveyard at Teampull Eoin bears the graves of men from Bragar who drowned in the sinking of HMY Iolaire on 1 January 1919, the greatest peacetime maritime disaster in United Kingdom waters since the Titanic. The Iolaire was carrying over 280 men of Lewis and Harris home from naval service after surviving the First World War. More than 200 were killed when the yacht struck rocks at the entrance to Stornoway harbour in the early hours of New Year's Day. In the parish of Barvas alone, and on the west side of Lewis, whole families and communities lost fathers, brothers, and sons on a single night. The Iolaire dead are buried in churchyards throughout Lewis, including at Bragar, where the graveyard is recorded as being so overcrowded with Iolaire victims that at least one widow could not be buried beside her husband. Since 2 September 2019, the

wreck of HMY Iolaire has been formally designated as a protected military war grave under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986, administered by the Ministry of Defence.

The Iolaire disaster is not a distant historical event for the communities of the west side of Lewis. It is living memory, carried in family names, in Gaelic song, in the overcrowded graveyard. The men buried at Teampull Eoin served their country across the Atlantic, survived a world war, and died within sight of home. The graveyard in which they rest faces out to that same Atlantic. The proposal before Scottish Ministers is that an industrial wind array, owned by a Canadian and Irish multinational corporation, should permanently occupy that horizon, visible from the graves of those men, and from the graves of those who mourned them.

Deficiencies in the EIA and Legal Requirements

The Committee raises the following specific deficiencies in the Environmental Impact Assessment as it relates to this site. First, Teampull Eoin (Scheduled Monument 3926) is a designated Scheduled Ancient Monument and therefore a statutory consultee asset requiring specific treatment in the SLVIA (Chapter 18) and Cultural Heritage (Chapter 15) chapters of the EIAR. The Committee requires confirmation that Historic Environment Scotland has been formally consulted as a statutory consultee specifically in relation to the visual impact of the proposed development on the setting of this Scheduled Monument, and that any response received has been published and properly considered. Second, the CWGC graves at Bragar Old Churchyard represent a site of national commemorative significance whose setting and outlook is a material consideration. The EIAR must specifically address the visual impact of the development as experienced from this cemetery. Third, as Marine Scotland's own mapping records confirm, protected places and controlled sites designated under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 are a material consideration in marine licensing decisions. Fourth, the cumulative effect of the proposed development on the Gaelic cultural landscape, including its impact on a Scheduled Monument of national importance, a CWGC cemetery, and the living memorial traditions of west Lewis communities, has not been adequately assessed and cannot be mitigated by conditions.

Policy and Legal Basis: Electricity Act 1989, Schedule 8, paragraph 3 (duty to preserve natural beauty and protect sites of architectural, historic or archaeological interest); Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014; Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (Scheduled Monument consent and setting); NPF4 Policy 14 (design, quality and place); Protection of Military Remains Act 1986; Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, s.14 (sustainable development duty).

Cultural Heritage and Gaelic Identity

The landscape, seascape, and Gaelic cultural heritage of the west coast of Lewis are inseparable. The coastline, the sea horizon, the soundscape, and the darkness of the night sky are woven into the identity, place names, traditions, and living language of crofting communities here. NPF4 Policy 14 requires development to be 'distinctive' and to respect the character of natural landscapes. The Gaelic cultural landscape of the Outer Hebrides is one of the most irreplaceable in Europe. No technical EIA can quantify, and no mitigation can restore, the permanent loss of an unspoiled Atlantic horizon.

Cumulative Impact

The cumulative visual and environmental impact of Spiorad na Mara in combination with other offshore and onshore wind energy developments proposed or consented in the Outer Hebrides has not been adequately assessed. The combined effect on the landscape, seascape, ecology, and communities of Lewis and Harris must be considered in totality by the Scottish Ministers.

Conclusion and Formal Requests

North Bragar Grazings Committee objects to the granting of consent for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm. The development as proposed will cause severe, permanent, and irreversible harm to the natural beauty of this coastline; to Schedule 1 protected species dependent on the North Bragar grazings; to the AECS contract obligations of the Committee; to the legal land rights of crofting shareholders and individual crofters along the onshore cable route;

to the peatland of Barvas Moor; to the marine environment; and to the Gaelic cultural landscape of the west side of Lewis.

The Committee formally requests that the Scottish Ministers:

Refuse consent for the application;

Convene a Public Local Inquiry in view of the scale, complexity, and level of community opposition;

The Committee reserves the right to submit further representations as the application progresses, and requests to be notified of all future submissions, consultee responses, and procedural steps including any Public Local Inquiry.

Signed on behalf of North Bragar Grazings Committee

Name (Print): [Redacted]

Position: Grazing's Clerk

Date: 1/5/26

Address: [Redacted]

Email: northbragargrazingscommittee@gmail.com

The Committee reserves the right to obtain independent legal advice on crofting law and to raise matters before the Scottish Land Court and/or Crofting Commission as appropriate. The word 'precedent' is used in this document in its ordinary English sense of 'an example or standard that may be followed in future cases.'

North and New Shawbost Common Grazings

FORMAL OBJECTION — NORTH AND NEW SHAWBOST COMMON GRAZINGS

To: Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team Re: Section 36 Consent Application — Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Application references: 00011742 & 00011743

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

06/05/26

This objection is submitted on behalf of the North and New Shawbost Common Grazings Committee, acting in its statutory capacity under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. It is submitted with the support of the Grazings Committee and reflects the view of the shareholders of the North and New Shawbost Common Grazings.

We object to the above application on the following grounds.

THE DEVELOPER'S CONDUCT TOWARD THIS COMMON GRAZINGS DEMONSTRATES A PATTERN OF DELIBERATE AVOIDANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During the pre-application phase of this project, Spiorad na Mara Limited, through its solicitors, wrote to the North and New Shawbost Grazings Committee proposing the installation of a meteorological mast. This communication took the form of a letter accompanied by a diagram. No meaningful engagement was offered and no opportunity was provided for the Grazings Committee or its shareholders to discuss the proposal, raise concerns, or negotiate terms. https://www.stornowaygazette.co.uk/business/battle-lines-set-over-spiorad-na-mara-4587146

The Grazings Committee voted unanimously to refuse consent for the meteorological mast on the common grazings.

The developer's response to this unanimous refusal was to place the meteorological mast on nearby private land, specifically in order to avoid the requirement to obtain the consent of the Grazings Committee.

The choice to circumvent the statutory rights of a crofting community body rather than engage with it, demonstrates, at the earliest stage of this project's development, that the applicant's approach to community engagement was to find ways to proceed without it, ignoring the legal land rights of crofters that have protected us from exploitation for 140 years.

THIS CONDUCT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS OF NPF4 AND THE ELECTRICITY WORKS REGULATIONS

National Planning Framework 4 requires that community engagement in the planning process be early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate. The Scottish Government's own guidance is explicit that engagement should not be a public relations exercise but a genuine attempt to understand and respond to community concerns.

The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 require that the environmental impact assessment process be informed by engagement with affected communities and statutory consultees.

The North and New Shawbost Common Grazings Committee is a statutory body established under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. It has legally recognised functions in the management and regulation of common grazings land that lies within and adjacent to the area affected by this project, including the onshore cable corridor and landfall area. It represents the interests of crofting shareholders whose livelihoods, land use, legal rights and community identity are directly affected by this development.

Deliberate repositioning of infrastructure onto private land to avoid the need for consent, does not constitute meaningful pre-application consultation with this statutory body.

THE DEVELOPER'S APPROACH IS CONTRARY TO NPF4 POLICY 11 AND THE ISLANDS (SCOTLAND) ACT 2018

NPF4 Policy 11 requires that development proposals maximise net economic impact including local and community socio-economic benefits. A developer that responds to a unanimous community refusal by finding a way to proceed without community consent cannot credibly demonstrate that it is maximising benefit to the local community.

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 places a statutory duty on Scottish Ministers to have regard to island communities in the exercise of their functions, and requires that an Island Communities Impact Assessment be conducted where a development is likely to have significantly different effects on island communities. Crofting communities are quintessentially island communities within the meaning of that Act. The North and New Shawbost Common Grazings represents exactly the kind of community the Act exists to protect. The developer's documented failure to engage meaningfully with this statutory crofting body is a dimension of the broader failure to conduct a compliant Island Communities Impact Assessment.

THE CONDUCT TOWARD THIS COMMON GRAZINGS IS CONSISTENT WITH A WIDER PATTERN OF DELIBERATE AVOIDANCE

The conduct described above is not an isolated incident, it is consistent with a pattern of behaviour that runs through the entire pre-application process for this project, identified in the applicant's own Focus Group Summary Report, in which local people described the consultation process as more of a public relations exercise than a genuine attempt to engage with community concerns. It is consistent with a pre-application consultation conducted in English in a community where Gaelic is the daily vernacular, and with a Social Impact Assessment deliberately deferred until after consent, and with the submission of this planning application at the busiest time of year for crofters, the lambing season, without any apparent regard for the practical impact on the community it was supposed to have consulted.

The pattern extends beyond the meteorological mast. The proposed cable landfall location is sited on a small parcel of private land that is surrounded on multiple sides by crofts and common grazings. This is the same strategy applied twice, the deliberate identification and use of a small piece of private land specifically to avoid the legal and community engagement obligations that would arise from working on crofting land or common grazings. Taken together, the siting of the meteorological mast and the siting of the cable landfall reveal a consistent and deliberate approach: when community consent is required, find private land; when a statutory crofting body must be engaged, find a way around it.

Scottish Ministers should be in no doubt that what is presented in this application as community consultation has been systematically shaped, from the earliest stages of the project, by a strategy of minimum engagement with the crofting communities most directly affected.

CROFTING IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE LIVING CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE GAELIC COMMUNITY AND HAS NOT BEEN ASSESSED

Crofting on the westside of Lewis is the material foundation of the Gaelic-speaking community: the system of land tenure, seasonal labour, shared resource management and community organisation through which the culture, language and social fabric of these villages has been sustained across generations. The common grazings are the physical expression of a communal relationship with the landscape that is as old as the communities themselves, managed collectively through statutory Grazings Committees that are a product of that cultural tradition.

The EIAR's failure to assess the living intangible cultural heritage of the Gaelic-speaking communities of the westside of Lewis is a fundamental deficiency within this application and is therefore also a failure to assess the cultural significance of crofting itself. The two are inseparable. The oral traditions, the seasonal practices, the place names, the community rituals that constitute the intangible cultural heritage of these villages are lived through the croft, the grazing, the burn, the machair and the sea. There is no indication in the EIAR that this has been understood.

The North and New Shawbost Common Grazings Committee submits that the failure to assess the cultural significance of crofting as an expression of Gaelic community life is a material gap in the environmental information before Scottish Ministers.

THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT CLIMATE SCHEME COMMITMENTS OF WESTSIDE GRAZINGS COMMITTEES HAVE NOT BEEN ASSESSED, AND THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS AREA IS EXCEPTIONAL

A number of Grazings Committees on the westside of Lewis, including the North and New Shawbost Common Grazings, are active participants in the Scottish Government's Agri-environment Climate Scheme (AECS). These commitments reflect a formal, publicly funded agreement between the crofting community and the Scottish Government to manage the land in ways that protect and enhance biodiversity, in particular the wading bird populations for which the westside of Lewis is internationally significant.

The ornithological significance of this area, at the community level rather than simply the offshore level, has not been adequately assessed in the EIAR. Shawbost is one of the most important breeding grounds for corncrake in the entire United Kingdom. The corncrake (Crex crex) is a Species of Principal Importance under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, listed as a priority species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and its recovery in the Western Isles represents one of the most significant conservation successes in recent Scottish natural heritage management, a success built in significant part on the land management practices of crofting communities participating in agri-environment schemes precisely like those operated by westside Grazings Committees.

The common grazings and adjacent crofting land at Shawbost also support breeding lapwing, curlew and golden plover, all Red-listed species in the UK, all Species of Principal Importance under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, and all species whose breeding success is directly dependent on the undisturbed management of the crofting landscape in which they nest. These species are ground-nesting and acutely sensitive to disturbance and noise during the breeding season.

The EIAR does not assess the impact of this development on these terrestrial and crofting-edge bird populations. The construction programme will generate sustained disturbance — vessel noise, construction activity, increased traffic and human presence — across a five-year period encompassing multiple breeding seasons. For corncrake, lapwing, curlew and golden plover, disturbance during the breeding season is a direct threat to recruitment and to the long-term viability of populations whose recovery has been achieved through decades of careful land management by the very crofting communities this development has failed to engage with.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government's own AECS agreements with westside Grazings Committees represent a public commitment to the conservation of these species in this landscape. A development that undermines the conditions necessary for the fulfilment of those agreements, by generating sustained disturbance during the breeding season across a multi-year construction period, places those agreements, and the public investment they represent, at risk. The EIAR contains no assessment of this conflict and no mitigation is proposed.

THE DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT COMPLY WITH SCHEDULE 9 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT 1989

Section 38 and Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 impose a specific duty on electricity generators in respect of the natural environment. Schedule 9 paragraph 1(1) requires that a licence holder or applicant shall:

"(a) shall have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest, and of protecting sites, buildings, structures, objects or equipment of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and (b) shall do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings, structures or objects."

The flora and fauna of the westside villages of Lewis, including the marine mammal populations, the SPA-qualifying seabird populations, the protected migratory species, the European otter, the Atlantic salmon, the corncrake, the curlew, the lapwing and the golden plover, are precisely the fauna that Schedule 9 requires the applicant to have regard to preserving and conserving, and to mitigate effects upon.

The unprecedented scale of this development makes any theoretical assessment of its impact on these species and habitats inherently uncertain. With turbines of 338 metres, a 140 km² array, a five-year construction programme and a 35-year operational life, the cumulative effects on the wildlife of this coastline cannot be modelled with the precision that the Habitats Regulations and Schedule 9 together demand. The EIAR acknowledges uncertainty across multiple species assessments. Where that uncertainty exists, Schedule 9's requirement to have regard to the desirability of conserving flora and fauna demands a precautionary approach, yet the developer concludes repeatedly that 'no significant effect' is likely when they acknowledge in their application, that their own documents have baselines built on incomplete data.

THE SPLIT OF THE APPLICATION MAKES HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT IMPOSSIBLE AND PLACES ONSHORE DETERMINATION IN THE HANDS OF AN AUTHORITY WHOSE IMPARTIALITY IS COMPROMISED

The applicant will submit consent applications for the offshore and onshore elements of this project separately. The consequences of this split are particularly acute for the communities represented by this Grazings Committee and for the westside crofting communities more broadly.

The offshore element to be determined by Scottish Ministers on the basis of the environmental information currently before them is materially incomplete. The onshore element that will pass through and beside crofting land and common grazings, is yet to be submitted and will be determined by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar as the local planning authority.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is the same body that, in its response to the first Draft Sectoral Marine Plan in 2020, told the Marine Directorate without any supporting evidence that the community of Lewis strongly supported offshore wind development at this location. (Draft Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy, Response 279771074) It is the same body who, in this response, was motivated by its desire to secure the HVDC interconnector for Lewis. It made an assertion of community support during a Covid consultation when meaningful community engagement was effectively impossible and that the Marine Directorate accepted without question, and on the basis of which the N4 option was retained in the Sectoral Marine Plan and ultimately leased to Northland Power.

The shareholders of the North and New Shawbost Common Grazings, and the wider westside community, have no confidence that the Comhairle can act as an impartial planning authority in respect of the onshore works for a project whose inclusion in the Sectoral Marine Plan it actively and unilaterally promoted, without community mandate, for reasons that are on the public record. This means that the westside crofting communities face the prospect of having the most intrusive onshore elements of this development determined by the very body that told the Scottish Government, without asking them, that they supported it.

Scottish Ministers cannot properly discharge their responsibilities under the Electricity Act 1989, the Habitats Regulations, NPF4, or the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 on the basis of an offshore-only assessment, knowing that the onshore element will be determined separately by an authority whose position on this project is already a matter of public record. The split application creates a gap in democratic accountability.

CONCLUSION — CALL FOR A PUBLIC INQUIRY

The North and New Shawbost Common Grazings Committee respectfully urges Scottish Ministers to refuse this application.

We associate ourselves fully with the wider environmental, cultural and community objections submitted in relation to this application. We draw particular attention to the conduct of the developer toward this Grazings Committee and toward the westside crofting community more broadly, a conduct characterised from the outset by the systematic identification of ways to proceed without community engagement.

We draw further attention to the structural impossibility of assessing this project honestly while its onshore and offshore elements are divided between two separate consenting authorities, one of which has already publicly committed to a position on the project's desirability without community mandate.

The democratic deficit that underlies this entire process began with the inclusion of the N4 option in the first Draft Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy. It was a decision made on the assertion of community support that was never evidenced, and never put to the communities most directly affected. It continued with the award of the seabed lease to Northland Power. It was compounded by the approval of a 1.8 gigawatt interconnector; infrastructure sized on the presumption that a 900 megawatt offshore wind farm would receive planning consent, before any planning application had been submitted and before any community had been asked. And it has

culminated in a planning application submitted during the lambing season, with a Social Impact Assessment deferred until after consent, without a compliant Island Communities Impact Assessment, and with a developer that has twice used small parcels of private land to avoid its obligations to the crofting community on whose doorstep it proposes to build.

This sequence of decisions, from the Draft Sectoral Marine Plan to the seabed lease to the interconnector to the planning application, raises questions about the integrity of the process and how it came to be proposed at all. And about the role of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in asserting, without evidence, that a community supported a project it had never been asked about. There is the question of whether the Marine Directorate properly discharged its duties when it accepted that assertion without scrutiny. And whether the communities of the westside of Lewis were ever genuinely given a voice in decisions that will define the character of their coastline, their culture and their way of life.

The North and New Shawbost Common Grazings Committee therefore calls upon Scottish Ministers to order a full Public Inquiry into the process by which the N4 option was included in the Draft Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy, the basis on which the seabed lease was awarded, and the adequacy of community engagement at every stage of that process. Only a Public Inquiry, with the power to compel disclosure of documents and to hear evidence under oath, can establish the full facts of how this community came to be presented with a fait accompli of this magnitude, and whether those responsible for the decisions that led to it properly discharged their duties to the people most affected by them.

The communities of the westside of Lewis are crofters, Gaelic speakers, fishermen and stewards of one of the most extraordinary natural and cultural landscapes in Europe. They deserve to be treated as such. A Public Inquiry would be the first step in doing so.

[Redacted] **, On behalf of the North and New Shawbost Common Grazing's Committee 31 North Shawbost**

06/05/26

Northern Lighthouse Board

Northern Lighthouse Board

84 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 3DA

Tel: 0131 473 3100
Fax: 0131 220 2093

Website: www.nlb.org.uk
Email: enquiries@nlb.org.uk

Your Ref: Spiorad na Mara OWF – S36 Consent & ML Application
Our Ref: AL/OPS/ML/WIND_012_26

Licensing Operations Team – Marine Directorate
Scottish Government
Marine Laboratory
375 Victoria Road
Aberdeen
AB11 9DB

26 March 2026

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990

MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010
The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

Application for Consent Under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and Marine Licences Under Part 4 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 to Construct and Operate the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Approximately 3nM off the Northwest Coast of the Isle of Lewis.

Thank you for your e-mail correspondence dated 16th March 2026 relating to the application submitted by **Spiorad na Mara Ltd** for consent to develop the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, located approximately 3nM off the Northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis.

Northern Lighthouse Board note that the Spiorad na Mara OWF will consist of up to 60 fixed-bottom Wind Turbine Generators (WTG) with an approximate export capacity of up to 900MW.

It is noted that two design options are being considered for the transmission assets of the Offshore Project. The first consisting of a single Offshore Substation Platforms (OSP), connecting to the landfall location by a maximum of two offshore export cables. The second design utilises twelve array cables connecting the WTG directly to an Onshore Landfall Substation. Both design scenarios utilise a landfall site at Barvas on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis

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NLB have reviewed the documentation associated with the application, with particular reference to the navigational safety elements of the application contained within Chapter 16 (Shipping & Navigation), Chapter 20 (Other Sea Users & Recreation), Chapter 23 (Combined Effects Assessment) and Appendix 16.1 (Navigational Risk Assessment).

The inclusion of Outline Post-Consent Documentation such as the Outline Lighting & Marking Plan (LMP) and Outline Vessel Management and Navigational Safety Plan (VM&NSP) is welcomed. NLB note the hazards identified through the Navigational Risk Assessment (NRA) process, and the associated mitigations detailed within Table 17.1 of the NRA.

NLB request that Section 2.6.2.4 (Failure of Marine Lighting) of the Outline Lighting & Marking Plan is reworded to read as follows:

> "In the event of a significant AtoN outage, notification will be provided to the Northern Lighthouse Board (navigation@nlb.org.uk / 08000 326655) and AtoN Reporting Portal at http://nlb.org.uk/latonsonline/, UK Hydrographic Office (using form H102 via admiralty.co.uk/H-note) and the local HM Coastguard (zoneXXX@hmcg.gov.uk).
>
> Notifications to local marine stakeholders shall also be made by Notice to Mariners and the Kingfisher Safety Bulletin scheme. In the event of a failure which may lead to a significant risk to navigational safety, additional temporary risk mitigation measures will be considered following consultation with the NLB and MCA, including the use of a guard vessel, until such time as the AtoN has been repaired or replaced."

NLB also request that this section is renamed to 'Failure of Marine AtoN'.

Within Section 2.7.5 (Availability) of the Outline Lighting & Marking Plan, NLB request inclusion of the following text:

> "NLB will conduct regular audits of **Spiorad na Mara Ltd** for their provision of Aids to Navigation, as established by the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, and the Northern Lighthouse Board's position as the General Lighthouse Authority for Scotland and the Isle of Man. NLB request that a record of annual AtoN maintenance and testing is kept for auditing purposes."

NLB also request that Section 2.8.1 (Loss of Aids to Navigation) of the Outline Lighting & Marking Plan contains reference to Section 2.6 of the Spiorad na Mara OWF Vessel Management & Navigational Safety Plan, and the relevant procedures for the promulgation of Local Notices to Mariners and Radio Navigational Warnings in the event of an Aid to Navigation failure.

If the above recommendations are implemented, NLB consider the points identified within Section 2.8.1.2 to have been addressed sufficiently, and that this section could be removed.

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Within Section 2.6.8 of the Outline Navigational Safety & Vessel Management Plan, NLB request the inclusion of Stornoway Port Authority as a recipient of any local Notices to Mariners for the project.

Northern Lighthouse Board have agreed to continue to work with the applicant with regard to the Marine Aids to Navigation installed on the landward side of the array, and as mentioned within the application documentation, potential range reductions and or flash character alterations will be considered, subject to navigational safety requirements.

The establishment, alteration or discontinuation of any Aid to Navigation is subject to the Statutory Sanction of the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses. Further guidance and application forms can be obtained on request from the NLB Navigation Department (navigation@nlb.org.uk).

Northern Lighthouse Board operate vessels across the Scottish coastline as part of their statutory duties under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, incorporating maintenance and inspection of both NLB and third party Aids to Navigation. The inspection of AtoN associated with the Spiorad na Mara OWF would be incorporated in to these voyages, and NLB do not anticipate that the project will negatively impact on NLB's operations.

NLB's closest Aid to Navigation is the Butt of Lewis lighthouse, located approximately 11nM NE of the array area. The structure hosts both visual (Fl W 5s, 21nM) and electronic (AIS) Aids to Navigation. NLB do not consider that the Spiorad na Mara OWF will negatively impact the functionality or conspicuity of these AtoN.

Northern Lighthouse Board have no objection to the proposed Spiorad na Mara OWF, and will continue to engage with the applicant with regard to the development of post-consent navigational safety documentation.

Yours sincerely
[Redacted]

[Redacted]
Navigation Manager

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To find out more, please see our Privacy Notice at www.nlb.org.uk/legal-notices/

Outer Hebrides Surfing Association

From:	[Redacted]
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Subject:	OHSA: Spiorad Na Mara Planning objection
Date:	06 May 2026 21:30:26
Attachments:	OHSA SIA Feedback 23_10_24 Final.docx Draft Sectoral Marine Plan CnES Full Consultation Response Mar20 - Copy.docx.pdf

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – Section 36 Consent, Marine Licence Application, and Associated Onshore Development

I write on behalf of Outer Hebrides Surfing Association (OHSA) to formally object to the above application.

OHSA was established in 2009 by local surfers to promote, represent and protect the interests of surfers and other ocean users across the Outer Hebrides; to promote responsible use of the coastline; to protect surf breaks and access to them; and to liaise with voluntary organisations, local authorities, and Scottish and UK Government bodies in furtherance of these aims.

At the outset of this development process, it was indicated that local communities had been consulted and were supportive of the proposal. However, at no point were OHSA or the surfing community contacted or consulted. Given that surfers are a primary user group of the west coast and directly affected by the proposed development, this represents a significant gap in stakeholder engagement. We refer to the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar correspondence to Marine Scotland (see attached) which asserts community consultation, and note that this did not include OHSA.

Furthermore, as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, OHSA submitted a detailed response to Northland and their appointed consultants outlining concerns and specific action points relating to the proposed development. These concerns were not adequately addressed within the EIAR, and no clear evidence is provided demonstrating how these submissions influenced the assessment or project design. These concerns are submitted alongside this objection for consideration.

This objection is based on the failure of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and associated submissions to comply with:

- The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
- The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
- Marine Scotland consenting guidance
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Local Development Plan (Outer Hebrides LDP)

1. Failure to Identify Surf Breaks as Sensitive Receptors

The EIAR fails to identify key surf locations on the west coast of Lewis, including Barvas, Bragar, Shawbost/Dalbeg, and Arnol, as discrete receptors.

This is contrary to EIA requirements and conflicts with:

- Outer Hebrides LDP Policy EI 8 (Coastal Protection)
- NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places)

2. Failure to Assess Impacts on Wave Transformation and Coastal Processes

The EIAR acknowledges seabed disturbance but does not assess indirect effects on wave transformation and surf break quality.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements for indirect effects
- LDP Policy EI 8 (Coastal Protection)
- LDP Policy EI 1 (Natural Environment)
- NPF4 Policy 4

3. Landfall Impacts Not Adequately Assessed

Landfall areas along the west coast of Lewis are in proximity to sensitive coastal environments and surf breaks.

The EIAR does not adequately assess impacts of HDD, cable installation, or sediment disturbance.

This conflicts with:

- LDP Policy EI 8 (Coastal Protection)
- LDP Policy EI 9 (Waste Water and Drainage)
- NPF4 Policy 4

4. Excessive Design Uncertainty (Project Design Envelope)

Key parameters remain undefined, preventing meaningful assessment.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements for a reasoned conclusion
- LDP Policy PD1 (Placemaking and Design)
- NPF4 Policy 2 (Climate and Nature Crisis)

5. Segmentation of Offshore and Onshore Development

The project is split between offshore and onshore applications, preventing holistic assessment.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements
- LDP Policy EI 1 (Natural Environment)
- NPF4 Policy 3 and 4

6. Inadequate Assessment of Construction Impacts

Up to 5 years of 24-hour construction is proposed, with insufficient assessment of impacts on recreation and amenity.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements
- LDP Policy PD1
- NPF4 Policy 14

7. Failure to Assess Access Restrictions

Potential safety zones and access impacts are not properly assessed.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements
- LDP Policy EI 10 (Tourism)
- NPF4 Policy 13 and 14

8. Inadequate Consideration of Alternatives

Alternatives do not demonstrate minimisation of impacts on coastal receptors.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements
- LDP Policy EI 8
- NPF4 Policy 1

9. Failure to Assess Cultural and Community Impacts

Surfing is a key cultural and economic activity that is not adequately assessed.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements
- LDP Policy EI 10
- NPF4 Policy 25

10. Inadequate Cumulative Impact Assessment

Combined impacts from multiple developments are not sufficiently assessed.

This conflicts with:

- EIA requirements
- LDP Policy EI 1
- NPF4 Policy 4

11. Impacts on Peatland and Carbon-Rich Soils

Onshore infrastructure may impact peatlands and carbon stores.

This conflicts with:

- NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils)

LDP Policy EI 5 (Peatlands)

12. Landscape and Visual Impact

The development risks significant adverse landscape and seascape effects.

This conflicts with:

- NPF4 Policy 4 and 14
- LDP Policy PD2 (Landscape)

13. Impact on Tourism and Recreation

The development may negatively impact tourism and recreation.

This conflicts with:

- NPF4 Policy 10 (Sustainable Tourism)
- LDP Policy EI 10 (Tourism)

14. Infrastructure and Transport Impacts

Construction traffic and abnormal loads may impact local infrastructure.

This conflicts with:

- NPF4 Policy 13
- LDP Policy TA 1 (Transport Infrastructure)

15. Risk of Pollution and Environmental Damage

Pollution risks are not fully assessed or mitigated.

This conflicts with:

- NPF4 Policy 4
- LDP Policy EI 1

16. Precedent and Cumulative Industrialisation

The development contributes to wider industrialisation of the coastal environment.

This conflicts with:

- NPF4 Policy 1
- LDP Policy EI 1

17. Lack of Sufficient Detail to Enable Determination

Key details remain undefined or deferred.

This is contrary to:

- EIA Regulations
- Marine Scotland guidance

Conclusion

The application fails to comply with statutory EIA requirements and conflicts with national and local planning policy.

For OHSA members, this proposal represents a direct and significant risk to the surf breaks, coastal environments, and access points that we rely upon for recreation, wellbeing, and cultural identity. The west coast of Lewis is not only a place of natural importance but a vital resource for a long-established and active surfing community whose interests have not been adequately recognised or assessed within this application.

The lack of proper consultation, combined with the failure to meaningfully assess impacts on surf breaks and coastal processes, means that the concerns of OHSA members and the wider surfing community have not been incorporated into the decision-making process.

It does not provide sufficient information to allow a reasoned conclusion on environmental, social, and cultural impacts, particularly in relation to recreational sea users.

We therefore request that:

- The application be refused; or
- Further information be required, including specific assessment of surf breaks, coastal processes, and recreational impacts, to address these significant deficiencies

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

Secretary

OHSA - Outer Hebrides Surfing Association

[Redacted]

OHSA (Outer Hebrides Surfing Association)

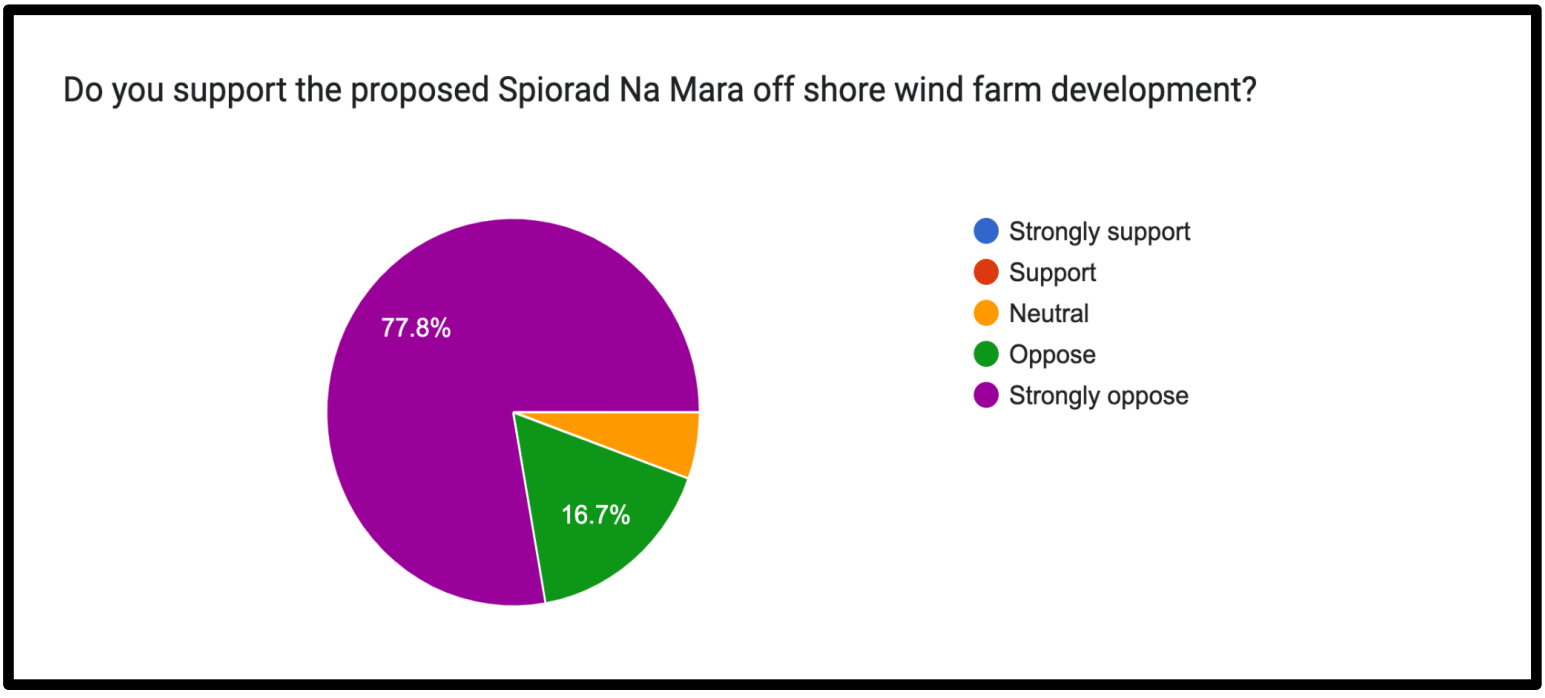
Initial response for SIA

OHSA was set up in 2009 by local surfers with the following aims and objectives:-

- To promote, represent and protect the interests of surfers and other ocean users in the Outer Hebrides.
- To protect and promote responsible use of the coastline we use.
- To protect surf breaks and the access to surf breaks.
- To liaise with other voluntary sector bodies, voluntary associations, local authorities, UK and or Scottish Government departments and agencies, and other bodies, all with a view to furthering the associations aims and objectives.
- To establish and/or support any other charitable body, and to make donations for any charitable purpose falling within the associations objectives.

The members of OHSA met up for an AGM on 9/10/24 to discuss their views on the proposed 'Spiorad Na Mara' offshore wind farm development. All present at the meeting were opposed to the development. To make sure all views were considered an online poll was sent out to the remaining members who were unable to attend the AGM. The results from the poll also indicated an overwhelming majority opposition to the development. A consistent response was that they are too big, there are too many and they are far too close to the coast. A disproportionately large development for such a small place.

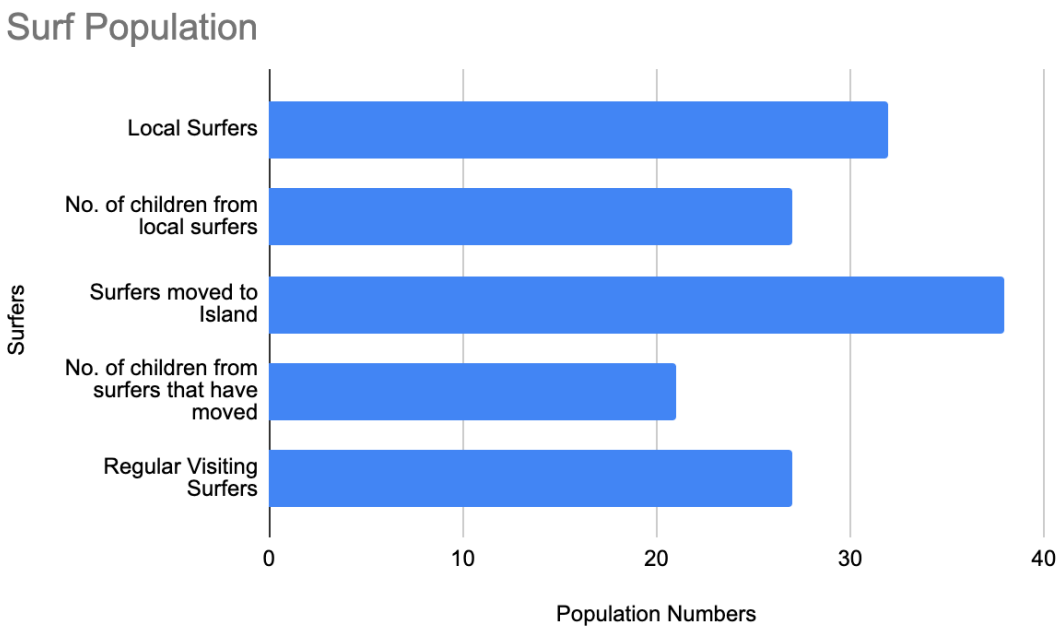
OHSA Poll Below:



OHSA Feedback for SIA

The information that follows is an initial response to the proposed development. The feedback:

- Cites concerns
- Identifies further information that Northland should provide
- Actions that Northland should take in response to OHSA's concerns/feedback.



Surfers	Population Numbers
Local Surfers	32
No. of children from local surfers	27
Surfers moved to Island	38
No. of children from surfers that have moved	21
Regular Visiting Surfers who visit annually	27
We are not able to quantify the number of surf tourists with official data. However, local surfers have estimated that there would be at least 200 surfers visiting over a year. The number of visiting surfers is also increasing year on year.	Approximate number 200 not official data.

Impact on Population

There are currently approximately 70 surfers who surf on a regular basis. The surf community however is more than just the surfers in the water but their children and partners who are also part of the community.

Concerns about Impact on Surfers population-

- The demographic of surfers who move to the island is generally in the younger age bracket 20-45. They often cite surfing and the remote Hebridean environment as one of the reasons for moving and or staying on the island. Could this development have a detrimental impact on attracting this younger demographic to live on the island?
- The demographic and average age of local and incoming surfers is in the 20-45 age bracket. This has a positive impact on the statistics of an ageing population.
- Many of the surfers who have moved to the island cite one of their main reasons for moving as the surf, the non-commercialised surf culture and the wild, pristine non-industrialised environment. Members are concerned about the loss of this environment and the knock on effects it will have on the surf culture.
- Many of the local surfers who have stayed rather than leave the island cite feeling a sense of place, a community and a belonging to the coast and beaches they have grown up in. They see surfing as part of their identity, island culture and heritage. Members are concerned about the loss of a sense of place and connection to the environment.
- Surfers who move to the island tend to stay long term and make their home and life on Lewis. Bringing up families, contributing to the community and bringing in skilled labour. Contrary to the stereotype of surfer bums, the surfers that move to the island have very high levels of skilled labour- to name but a few from the surf community- a high number of Doctors, mechanical engineers, builders, pharmacists, teachers , ecologists,etc. Retaining high skilled labour on the island can be challenging particularly in the health sector. Is this kind of long term in-migration not better than the short term gains from contractors who stay for a short period of time and then leave? The boom, bust effect?

- Many of the surfers who have moved to the island have chosen to move to the West side because of the surf. Would less people move to the West side because of the industrialised view? Would they feel that the surf experience no longer has the attraction of being out on the edge in an unspoilt, uncommercialised, wild environment?

Impact on the Quality of the Waves

The quality of Surf on the West coast of Lewis is recognised as being world class. The surf is consistent, high quality and surfed all year round. With the added attraction of being able to surf different breaks in different swell and wind conditions. This can be evidenced by:

- The Storm riders Surf Guide which is a well established book and online resource for world renowned breaks all over the world. (See evidence links in sources)
- Multiple publications in surf magazines, surf brands and surf films. (See evidence links in sources)
- Visited by world class internationally renowned surfers for the high quality surf. Skip Frye, Tom Curren, Derek Hynd, Kassia Meador, Hans Haggan.

Evidence for previous points

- https://lowpressure.co.uk/product/scotland-ebook/
- https://lowpressure.co.uk/surftravelplanner/region.aspx?region=97
- World class waves surfed by Internationally renowned surfers https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06frxqv
- Mark Lumsden film ‘Cold Rush’ 2001

Concerns about the impact that the turbines may have on the quality of the waves

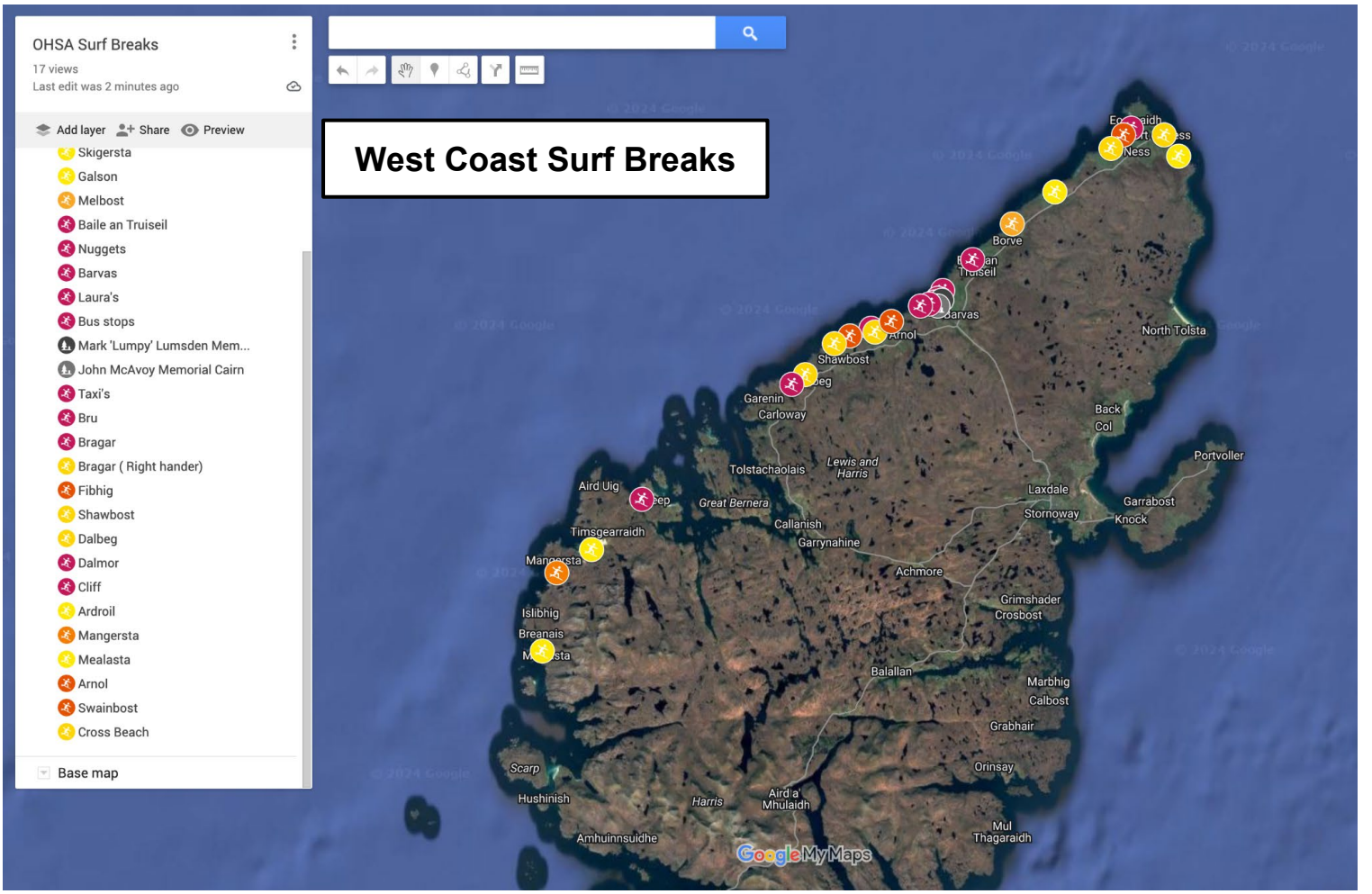
- Will the large-scale development of offshore turbines and underwater cabling impact on the quality of the waves. Is there the potential for breaks being lost or the standard of waves being reduced? How will Northland evidence this?
- Could the turbines impact the swell?
- Could sediment drift change due to the large numbers of underwater structures and affect the swell? Is it possible the effect would not be seen instantly on the swell but could take a long period of time before the effects are seen?

- Could the construction of offshore cables impact on the reef at Barvas and sea bed at nuggets- changing topography from drilling etc.- Could this damage the quality of the waves?
- Would the substations be on land or at sea? How many offshore substations and where would they be? Could this have an impact on swell and waves?

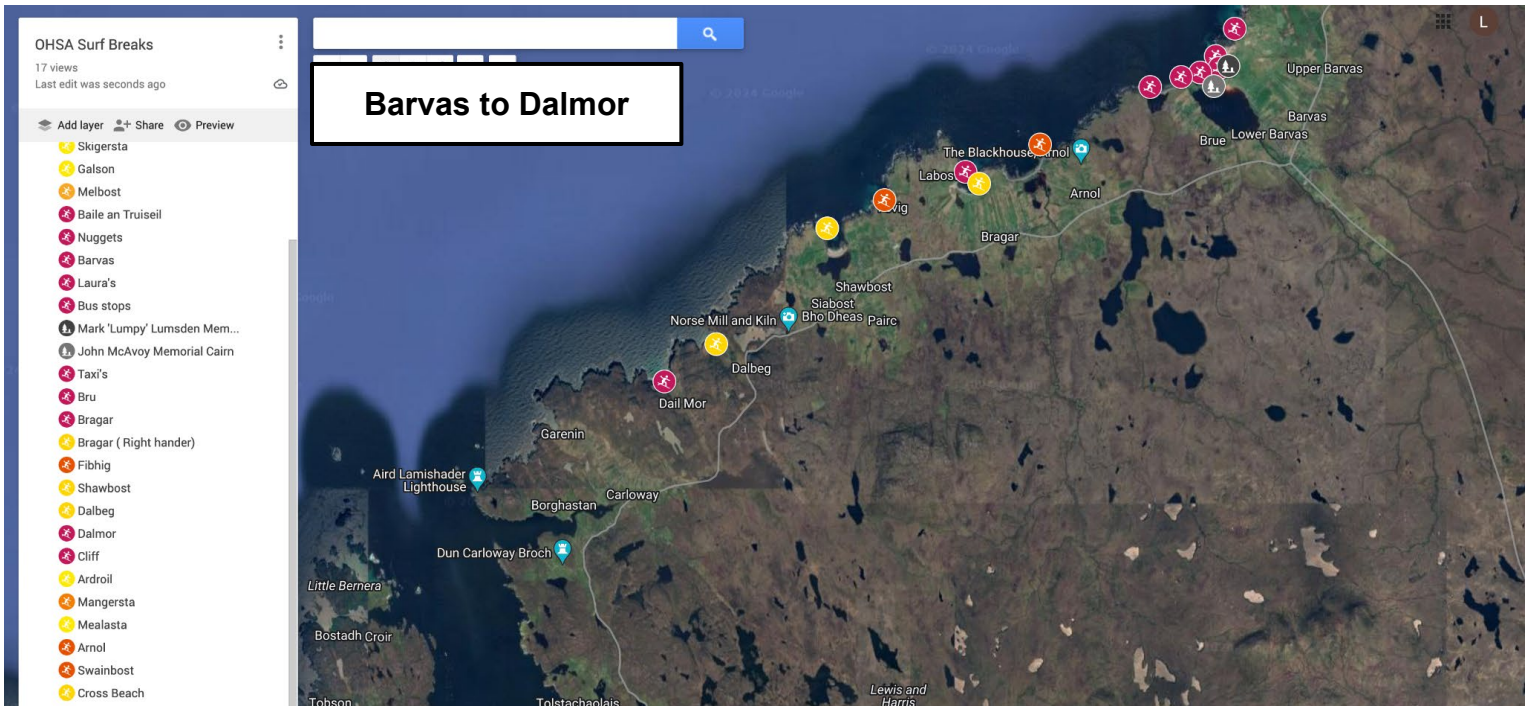
Action OHSA seeks in relation to the quality of the waves :

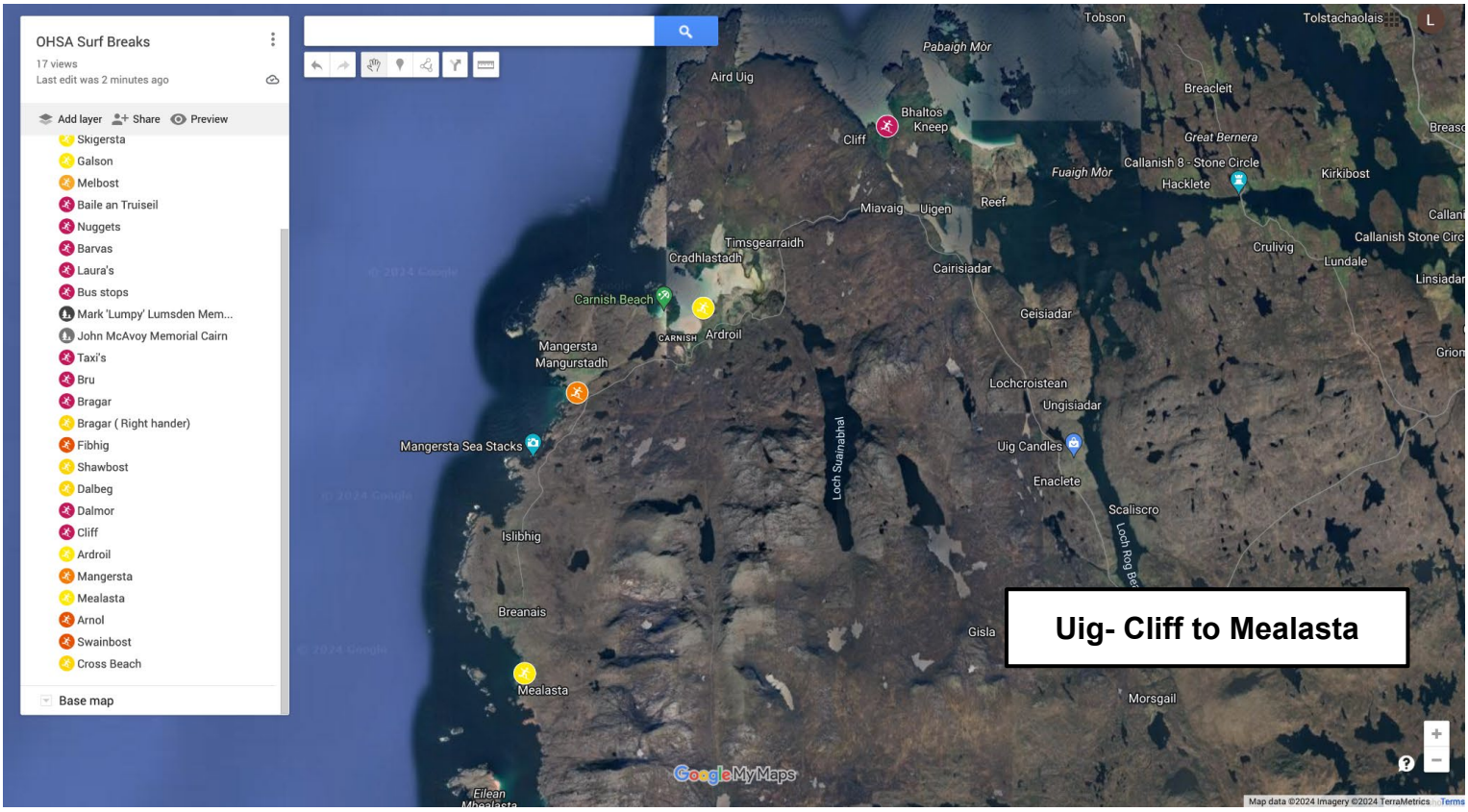
- OHSA requests that Northlands commission an independent specialist to complete extensive, in-depth modelling on the impact of the turbines and substations on all surf breaks on the West coast. This modelling should factor in all development options that are being considered with impacts for each option- taking into account changes of locations of the turbines, number of turbines, offshore and onshore substations and location of cabling.

Surf Breaks on the West Coast of the Isle of Lewis




OHSA Surf Breaks
17 views
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Nuggets
Barvas
Laura's
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Mark 'Lumpy' Lumsden Mem...
John McAvoy Memorial Cairn
Taxi's
Bru
Bragar
Bragar (Right hander)
Fibhig
Shawbost
Dalbeg
Dalmor
Cliff
Ardroil
Mangersta
Mealasta
Arnol
Swainbost
Cross Beach
Ness to Barvas
Butt of Lewis Lighthouse
Eoropaidh
Knockaird
Port of Ness
Lionel
Adabroc
Ness
Aird Dhail
Cross
Sgiogarstaigh
South Dell
Bho Thuath
North Galson
Melbost Borve
High Borve
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Lower Shader
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Upper Barvas
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Garry Beach
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Map data ©2024 Imagery ©2024 TerraM


OHSA Surf Breaks
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Bus stops
Mark 'Lumpy' Lumsden Mem...
John McAvoy Memorial Cairn
Taxi's
Bru
Bragar
Bragar (Right hander)
Fibhig
Shawbost
Dalbeg
Dalmor
Cliff
Ardroil
Mangersta
Mealasta
Arnol
Swainbost
Cross Beach
Barvas to Dalmor
Upper Barvas
Barvas
Brue
Lower Barvas
The Blackhouse
Arnol
Labost
Bragar
Shawbost
Siabost Bho Dheas
Pairc
Norse Mill and Kiln
Dalbeg
Dail Mor
Garenin
Aird Lamishader Lighthouse
Carloway
Borghastan
Dun Carloway Broch
Little Bernera
Bostadh Croir
Tobson
Tolstachaolais
Lewis and Harris



Surf breaks and Access

OHSA members have voiced major concerns about access to breaks, on all phases of the offshore wind farms life- construction, working life and decommissioning.

Concerns about access to surf breaks:

- Loss of access to breaks during all stages of the development- construction, working life and decommissioning
- The possible restriction or change in access would impact not only the access to the waves themselves but restrict surfers ability to be part of the wild pristine environment and with the people in their surf Community.

- There are particular concerns about the surf breaks, where the offshore cables will make landfall and onshore substations could be located- specifically relating to damage to the environment and access to surf breaks. These sites have been identified by Northland as Barvas, Bru/Arnol and Ballantrushal, with Barvas being Northland's most preferred site.



- There are concerns about the relationship between crofters and communities if the number of surfers/camper vans/ beach users increases at an unsustainable rate, due to a large increase in population in the construction phase. This could strain the already fragile relationships with crofters and communities regarding access to breaks- particularly at Eoropie, Barvas, Bragar, Dalmor. This could result in restricted access to local surfers and not

being able to use and spend time at the coast in the way that they do at present.

- Being able to access the beaches is not just about being able to surf. It is more than that. It is as much about the culture and way of life - time spent in a unique rugged wild environment, the view, nature, socialising and being part of a community, as it is about catching waves. Not having access to these places of cultural importance will impact this sense of community and surfers' sense of place and connection to an important cultural space.

Action OHSA seeks in relation to access to surf breaks:

- Detailed information on how Northland plans to mitigate OHSA's concerns about access to the surf breaks- during construction, working life and decommissioning, With particular focus on areas where the substations and the landfall of underwater cables may be situated.

Pollution

Concerns about the possible impact of pollution:

- Concern about pollution and the environmental impact on marine life, bird life, water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, shadow flicker
- Shadow flicker- impact of surfers experience on land and in the water. Visual disturbance impacting negatively on surfing experience. Damaging the view and experience of being in the wilderness and the feeling of being away from it all and being in nature. Could modelling be done for this to assess impact?
- Noise pollution- Concerns about the impact of this on surfers' experience in the waves. Especially as surfers will be out in the waves and not on land. Does this change the impact of noise pollution? Some people are more sensitive to sounds than others. Will this be factored into noise pollution modelling?
- Concerns about possible pollutants during construction of turbines- oil slicks from boats, pollutants from disturbing the sea bed and impacting the water quality. Possible impact on marine life, beaches, bird life and water quality for surfers?
- Noise pollution during construction of land based infrastructure- substations, access roads etc. This will negatively impact pristine wild lands and the cultural and surfing experience of being in a wild, remote area of exceptional scenic beauty.

- Pollutants from maintenance of wind turbines. It was discussed that the material that is used to protect/cover the tips of the wind turbines is highly toxic? How is this cleaned or disposed of if it flakes off or becomes damaged? Will this affect water quality for marine life? Will this affect surfers? Could this potentially harm surfers as they are immersed in water for long periods of time?
- Is there potential for oil leaks from turbines? If so, what volume? What would be considered the worst case scenario in terms of oil pollutants?
- Oil leaks- What happens if there is an oil leak from turbine(s)? Will there be robust contingencies to protect the environment? Potential of surfers being unable to surf due to pollutants for short or long periods of time depending on severity of incident?
- What happens if turbines are damaged and there is an oil leak in bad weather? How will they fix turbines in big seas and strong winds ? Can supply/maintenance boats access turbines to fix them in rough conditions? How will they mitigate this? Have they modelled this? Is there a precedence set on other offshore wind farms in dealing with turbines this size/scale and in sea conditions like the West coast of Lewis?
- Liability - who is liable for pollutants that will occur during maintenance? What will the impact of possible pollutants be on surfers and their ability to surf safely?

Pollution - Action OHSA seeks:

- Information on all possible pollutants and the risks associated with these pollutants.- at all stages of the development should be shared with OHSA
- Modelling of noise pollution
- Modelling of Shadow flicker - at all times of the year.

Culture, Community and Heritage

There are concerns about the impact the development could have on the surf culture, community and its heritage. This heritage and sense of place are not quantifiable or obvious to those out with the surf community but to those in it they are hugely important.

- The surf community and culture started in the early 1980's. There are now 3 generations of surfers and a steady increase of surfers moving to the island since the 1980's. A strong culture and sense of community has built up over this time.
- Examples of this sense of place and belonging can be shown in the memorial of John Mcavoy at Bus Stops break in Barvas. He was one of the original surfers on the island in the 1980's and named the surf break Bus stops

because of the bus that was parked on the shore in front of the break. This bus was used for the watcher and fisherman to shelter i when they were fishing the Barvas pool and Loch.

- A memorial cairn on Barvas Beach for surfer Mark 'Lumpy' Lumsden who was an integral, well loved member of the surfing community. He passed away in 2019 while surfing at Barvas. Mark's Ashes were scattered at Barvas in a paddle out (the paddle-out is a floating memorial held in the ocean, a tribute to the life and legacy of the surfers who have passed away).
- Several of the surf breaks have been named by the local surfers with stories behind each name that are known only by the surfers- Bus stops named by John Mcavoy, Taxi's named by Stevie Clelland, Nugget's names by Derek Macleod, Laura's name by Roy Davidson.

Concerns about impact on Culture, Community and Heritage-

- Many of the community feel the turbines would change their connection with the land and seascape in a profoundly negative way. They feel that this wild remote environment will be lost with this large scale, industrial development.
- Many of the surfers have raised their children with a lifestyle of being outdoors at the beach, in the water, surfing and or being in the wild open untouched landscape and sea of the West coast. They feel a sense of loss that they cannot pass on what they feel is their culture and heritage onto their children and future generations.
- A sense of loss at losing a place that provides surfers with an opportunity to be outdoors in the sea, in nature, in a wild, pristine environment. It was discussed by several members that they felt being in this kind of environment helped their mental health and that being in an industrialised environment will change their relationship with the coast and negatively impact how they feel about a place of sanctuary.
- There are cultural areas of significance and importance at Barvas. Memorials to John Mcavoy at the Bus stops break at Barvas and Mark Lumsden's memorial at Barvas break. Would these be protected?
- Impact on art and culture- Several of the surfers are artists, film-makers, designers and photographers. The surf culture and the environment is a huge influence on their work and part of their identity in the creative industry. Will the story and selling point of the wild waves, seascapes and coast be a marketable selling point if the environment becomes industrialised? A huge part of what creates interest in the stories and artwork of the Hebrides is the wild landscape, seascapes and the unique characteristics/culture that go along with living on an island. Will the story and character of the unique surf culture be an interesting story to tell if the culture and environment changes?

Will this negatively impact these artists' ability to sell and promote their work if it no longer has this unique story?

Evidence of link between the surf culture and the creative arts

- A film by local Surfer Jim Hope about local surfer John Murdo Macaulay's journey into surfing **https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06f5py1**
- Surfer Laura Maynard created 'Wave Migration' Exhibition **https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/in-pictures-hebridean-surf-culture-explored-as-swell-lovers-make-their-home-on-isle-of-lewis/**
- **Film by Finisterre.- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuQZlzSb19o&t=732s**

Tourism and Economy

Concerns about the impact of development on surf tourism

- Surf tourism is advertised and promoted as a remote, wild destination, with a unique 'Hebridean experience" . It is the crystal clear waters, golden beaches, moors, machair, wild rugged coastlines, vast horizons, waves and big skies that create this Hebridean experience. Surfing and being in this natural outdoor environment is the island's key selling point. The loss of this experience on the West side could impact Lewis as a surf destination and impact local surf businesses Surf Lewis and Hebsurf.
- Travelling and visiting Lewis for surf is often sold as being a more adventurous destination. The cold water, surf and hebridean coastline is promoted as being an 'escape', 'Wild', 'Remote' and 'On the edge'. The offshore development will change this experience, losing its sense of remoteness and wilderness. This could impact surf tourism and local businesses? It could decrease the number of surfers visiting and contributing to the local economy?

Links to evidence the promotion of surf tourism in the Outer Hebrides and the Isle of Lewis

Surf Lewis : https://www.surflewis.com/

Heb surf: https://www.hebrideansurf.co.uk/about

https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/?fbclid=IwY2xjawGGM1JleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHXZt1lL-JVzuW8wQk1KWfIP8gVaxMh8hr79FbAsCXLEexmDUhfar90ZpzQ_aem_iIMl7rl7mmMKAz9w6BsV9A

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4T3PrP814LnB4nyPHR4dvSC/why-the-completely-different-universe-of-the-isle-of-lewis-attracts-the-world-s-best-surfers-to-its-exotic-coastline

https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/hebrideanway/things-to-do/brue-shore-p531081

https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/outdoors/for-surfers-on-the-isle-of-lewis-very-good-things-come-to-those-who-wait-3332755

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji65vK_8SiU

https://www.surfsession.com/tag/hebrides-exterieures/

https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/see-and-do/adventure-relaxation/watersports

Recap of Actions that OHSA wish Northland to take:

Action OHSA seeks in relation to the quality of the waves :

- OHSA requests that Northlands commission an independent specialist to complete extensive, in-depth modelling on the impact of the turbines and substations on all surf breaks on the West coast. This modelling should factor in all development options that are being considered with impacts for each option- taking into account changes of locations of the turbines, number of turbines, offshore and onshore substations and location of cabling.

Action OHSA seeks in relation to access to surf breaks:

- Detailed information on how Northland plans to mitigate OHSA's concerns about access to the surf breaks- during construction, working life and decommissioning, With particular focus on areas where the substations and the landfall of underwater cables may be situated.

Pollution - Action OHSA seeks:

- Information on all possible pollutants and the risks associated with these pollutants.- at all stages of the development should be shared with OHSA
- Modelling of noise pollution
- Modelling of Shadow flicker - at all times of the year.

Please return any responses to:

Chairperson- [Redacted]

Secretary - [Redacted]

Prosper

Marine Scotland
Licensing Operations Team
375 Victoria Road
Aberdeen
AB11 9DB

7 May 2026

Marine Directorate - Licensing Operations Team

Spiorad na Mara

I am writing to express support from Prosper for the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm project and our view that the above application made to you should be consented.

Prosper is Scotland's economic alliance with members across industries, trade unions, educational institutions, local authorities, third sector organisations and public bodies.

Since our formation in 1931, we have been involved in the socio-economic development of the Highlands and Islands' economy through renewable and hydrocarbon energy. Our Outer Hebrides Forum 2025 brought together public and private sector leaders on the islands to discuss the scale and impact of local and regional economic transformation as a result of planned investments in clean power in the next 10 years.

These development also have a national signficance at Scottish and UK levels in terms of driving economic growth, strengthening energy security and tackling climate change. In our latest Blueprint for the Scottish economy, *The Art Of The Possible*, we recommended that fast-track delivery of clean power should be a priority for the Scottish and UK governments. Our *Scotland's Green Industrial Future* summit in Aviemore last year focused on the importance of planning, grid and investment in enabling infrastructures to make the most of Scotland's energy resources to deliver higher standards of living for people across our country and effective climate action.

Prosper, therefore, has a strong interest in the proposed Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm project. This will involve substantial new infrastructure investment off the west coast of the Isle of Lewis. We understand that between 750 and 1,000 new jobs will be created during the construction phase of the project, which will offer significant employment opportunities for people on the island, and that between 80 and 120 new, permanent and well-paid jobs will be created for the wind farm's operational life of at least the next 35 years. To meet their workforce requirements, the developer is planning to invest in training and skills development, including apprenticeships, in the local area. This will support labour market, skills and living standards improvements on the island.

prosper

Prosper is the trading name of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI).
Registered Office: Brunswick House, 51 Wilson Street Glasgow G1 1UZ 0141 243 2667 hello@prosper.scot
Registered in Scotland: 24724. Prosper is trademarked: UK00003884656, UK00003884741, UK00003884972.

Our Outer Hebridies Forum and Aviemore summit both highlighted the critical importance of certainty about investments in key projects to engagement with and investments in local, regional and national supply chain businesses, including ports. The Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm project is committed to a procurement process which will be designed to create partnership opportunities for local ports and businesses, including working with the project's main contractors, and which will stimulate local supply chain growth and potential for long-term partnerships. This will enable Scotland to capture a greater share of the economic benefits from clean power.

Prosper believes that clean power projects should create a long-term socio-economic legacy for communities. The 'four capitals' framework to improving human, social, financial and natural capitals is a useful way of thinking about how to capture the full value of investments. We understand that Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm project is exploring potential options for multi-million pound community investment and benefits over the lifetime of the project with communities, and welcome this approach.

In view of the major energy and economic benefits set out above, Prosper recommends that the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm project application should be consented.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]

Head of Policy

prosper

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Registered in Scotland: 24724. Prosper is trademarked: UK00003884656, UK00003884741, UK00003884972.

RSPB Scotland

Consenting and Licensing Casework Manager
Licensing Operations Team – Marine Directorate
Scottish Government
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

By email: MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

14 July 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

APPLICATION FOR CONSENT UNDER SECTION 36 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 AND MARINE LICENCES UNDER PART 4 OF THE MARINE AND COASTAL ACCESS ACT 2009 TO CONSTRUCT AND OPERATE SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WIND FARM, APPROXIMATELY 5-13KM FROM THE WEST COAST OF LEWIS

Thank you for consulting RSPB Scotland on the above application to construct and operate an offshore windfarm (of up to 900MW of generating capacity), off the northwest coast of the Isle of Lewis, between 9-15 kilometres from the coast. The application is part of a larger proposal including cross island transmission infrastructure, which is subject to a separate application. Our comments here relate to the offshore element while recognising that there is a significant interaction between the two and that the combined impacts must be considered.

RSPB Scotland recognises that climate change is the greatest long-term threat to nature and people, and we fully support the need to develop more renewable energy, including offshore wind. However, any development, including offshore wind, must be carefully sited, designed and deployed to ensure that it does not result in unacceptable impacts on nature.

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The RSPB is part of BirdLife International, a network of passionate organisations, working together to save nature across the world.

Patron: His Majesty The King **President:** Dr Amir Khan **Director, RSPB Scotland:** Anne McCall.
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654. Registered address: The Lodge, Potton Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL

Spiorad na Mara is a large and significant project and there are numerous seabird colonies in the area, many of which are designated as Special Protected Areas (SPA) due to supporting one or more rare, threatened, or vulnerable bird species as listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive or regularly occurring migratory species. Decision makers are subject to legal obligations under the Habitats Regulations before they determine any proposal which could have an impact on any European Site (SAC/SPA) or Ramsar site (as a matter of policy). The conservation objective for each SPA aims to protect these internationally important sites from a number of impacts, including disturbance to the qualifying species of the sites, and deterioration of those sites and their species.

RSPB Scotland agrees with Nature Scot's assessment that there are potential Adverse Effects on Site Integrity (AEoSI) for:

- Kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA, North Caithness Cliffs SPA, West Westray SPA and Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA;
- for Gannet at Forth Islands and Outer Firth of Forth SPAs; and,
- for Razorbill at St Kilda SPA and Seas off St Kilda SPA.

RSPB Scotland **objects** to the Application due to the predicted in-combination effects and the fact that we do not believe that sufficient and appropriate compensation exists for these effects, resulting in adverse effects on the site integrity of the following SPAs and qualifying species as set out below (more detail in Appendix 1).

Population Modelling

It must be recognised by MD-LOT in their recommendation to Ministers that models are simplified versions of reality. They do not fully capture the nuances of our dynamic natural environment, the complex behaviours of seabirds or the interlinkages between the two. Models are not complete evaluations of the possible risks that windfarms pose to seabirds. Seabirds are relatively long-lived, tend to breed later and have fewer young than other birds and, as a result, their populations are sensitive to even the smallest increases in adult mortality. This fact, combined with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, emphasises the requirement to take a precautionary approach when assessing all possible impacts of the proposed development.

The survival and productivity rates of seabirds can be impacted by offshore windfarms directly (i.e. through collision) and indirectly (e.g. displacement from foraging areas and additional energy expenditure required to avoid and due to additional flying distances to alternative foraging areas). They are also already under severe pressure. In Scotland, the number of breeding seabirds has declined by 49% since the 1980s, according to the Scottish biodiversity indicator[3]. Kittiwake and Puffin are red listed as Birds of Conservation Concern while Northern Gannet, Razorbill and Guillemot are amber listed. In addition, in 2019 they were assessed as moving away from the target to achieve Good Environmental Status[4].

RSPB Scotland has independently reviewed the Population Viability Analysis (PVA) results for the 34 species considered x SPA combinations taken to PVA-level assessment by the Applicant. This does not mean we agree that other species and sites will not have significant impacts; rather that we are unable to reach conclusions because the Applicant has not completed PVAs for those combinations.

These are presented in the Applicant's assessment in-combination with impacts from other consented wind farms, including Berwick Bank Offshore Wind Farm. However, the values presented for Kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA, Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA and North Caithness Cliffs SPA, and for Gannet at Forth Islands SPA and Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA, do not include Berwick Bank's mortality contribution on the Applicant's assumption that Berwick Bank's required compensation will be delivered and effective. RSPB Scotland does not consider that there is sufficient appropriate compensation available for Berwick Bank, and required compensation has not yet been agreed, let alone delivered. Given this situation, we do not believe there are sufficient grounds for discounting Berwick Bank's contribution from the in-combination assessment. The figures reported at these five SPAs therefore understate the impacts which we consider should be assessed. RSPB Scotland additionally notes an error in the Gannet PVA results for Ailsa Craig SPA. The Counterfactual of Population Size values are inconsistent with the scenarios and there are differences in the input mortality presented across tables. This limits our ability to come to any conclusion on impacts.

Habitat Regulations Tests

Due to the Proposed Development's predicted Adverse Effect on Site Integrity (AEoSI) on several SPAs, further tests apply after the appropriate assessment has been undertaken before a decision can be made. Under the Habitats Regulations, a project which cannot conclude that there would be no adverse impacts on the site integrity of European protected sites cannot be permitted unless it can be demonstrated there are no lesser damaging alternative solutions and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for the project to go ahead. In the event of there being no alternative solutions and the IROPI test being satisfied, the competent authority must secure the necessary compensation to ensure that the overall coherence of the UK Site Network is protected. European sites are amongst the most important sites for wildlife and as such it is right that maintaining them in favourable conservation status and protecting them from development carries a high weight in decision making.

It is important to highlight that any compensation proposed must be *additional* to the existing requirements set out in the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive (Regulations 9 and 10, Habitats Regulations). These existing commitments require the Competent Authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate to secure the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of a sufficient diversity and area of habitat for wild birds, having regard to the requirements of Article 2 of the Birds Directive. For offshore SPAs and SACs Regulation 26, Offshore Habitats Regulations requires Competent Authorities to exercise their functions as far as possible to secure steps to avoid the disturbance of species and the deterioration of habitats or habitats of species within those sites.

Overriding Public Interest

In the event that the Scottish Government accepts that there are no suitable alternative solutions, and that the development must be consented for Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, it is vital that the most rigorous assessment of the suitability and efficacy of the compensation measures proposed are carried out. This demands rigorous application of any agreed compensation in the interests of ensuring the overall coherence of the UK Sites Network remains protected. Nothing less than this would be acceptable.

If compensation measures have been required for a project, then that project has been identified as giving rise to potential adverse impacts on the integrity of a European protected site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Therefore, potential adverse effects of site integrity from other developments are also relevant.

We have serious concerns that in considering the in-combination effects for this proposal, the scenario presented in this application has assumed that there would be full and effective compensation for other projects (including Berwick Bank Offshore Windfarm). We do not believe that there is any evidence that this level of compensation is available.

Proposed Compensation under the Habitat Regulations

RSPB Scotland notes the proposed compensation put forward by the Applicant and submitted with the Application is long-listed, then shortlisted. The short list comprising:

(i) Strategic compensation measures
(ii) Collaborative measures

or, if those options are unavailable

(iii) Project based measures:
- Mammalian predator management
- Corvid Management
- Disturbance reduction management
- By-catch mitigation

Commentary on, and analysis of, these proposed compensation measures is attached to this letter as an appendix (Appendix 2). In summary, it is RSPB Scotland's clear opinion that these compensation measures are not appropriate. They are generic and based upon a roadmap rather than specific geographic locations with outlined projects based upon those locations.

We agree that the developer should utilise the strategic approach to compensation through the Marine Recovery Fund when this becomes available. If project-based measures continue to be pursued, then a much greater level of detail and certainty around exactly what the measures are and where they would be carried out is critically required to demonstrate their efficacy and quantitative suitability as compensation under the Habitat Regulation test, conditions have been used on a number of consents and compensation requirements are being compounded when there is no evidence to suggest that the amount of compensation required cumulatively is available. Consequently, any assessment of compensation should be caried out before any consent of the development.

We have very limited capacity to engage in project level measures given the number of proposals asking similar questions and seeking similar solutions at the same places. **The Applicant must improve the proposed compensation measures to ensure that they are as effective ecologically, financially and legally, and are as close as possible to the affected colonies, thus ensuring the coherence the UK Sites Network.**

Nearshore Ornithology

The proposed development is located within 13 km off the West coast of Lewis and this results in the potential for nearshore and onshore species to be affected by the proposal.

Red- throated diver area key species in the area that have been recorded at the site year round. As noted by the Applicant they exhibit a high level of site fidelity. Evidence is provided that Scottish red-throated divers exhibit a greater degree of flexibility than other populations. However, we do not believe that the results of a study based in Shetland are automatically comparable to the geography of Lewis. we cannot see reference to the Lewis Peatlands SPA as part of table 14.17.. The SPA when last assessed was in unfavourable- declining condition. We assume the calculation of a 6.59% decline relates to the Lewis Peatlands SPA but this is not clear and without a clear assessment of the implications of the proposal AEoSI cannot be ruled out for the Lewis Peatlands SPA and RSPB Scotland object on this basis.

At the screening stage we referred to a number of onshore and nearshore species such as Corncrake and White Tailed Eagle and would refer you to our screening opinion response dated 7 November 2024.

Combined impacts

We note that the onshore application is being considered separately and particularly with regard to nearshore ornithology have concerns about the combined impacts of both the off and on- shore proposals. Any assessment of the parts of the project in isolation should consider the implications of the Raeshaw Farms Ltd v Scottish Ministers ruling where a decision in favour of Wull Muir Wind Farm was quashed. The reason for the decision was that the permission for Wull Muir had not included the implications of the future grid connection in its EIA. The Court held to the view that the wind farm and its grid connection should be assessed as a single project for EIA purposes. In this case the decision is particularly relevant to Red-throated diver and the Lewis Peatland SPA and the combined impacts of the project (both elements) as a whole.

Summary

Given our analysis above we do not feel that the application is adequate in terms of reaching a full conclusion given that in relation to kittiwake the application does not include the mortality rates for Berwick Bank, assuming full compensation. We believe it is not possible to find an adequate degree of compensation, the in-combination effects of the Proposed Development, coupled with other North Sea offshore wind farms, would in our view be unacceptable. **We therefore object to the in-combination impacts of the Proposed Development.** This position has been informed by our opinion that the risk of adverse effects has been under-estimated. It appears that the scenario relies on the full compensation for other projects, and for the compensation from those projects to provide 'headroom' for this project – in our view that is a specious argument. The compensation measures as they stand are not sufficiently well developed and that too great a reliance is placed upon these issues being designed and detailed post-decision by using a condition on any consent. It is our expert opinion that significant further work is required on the compensation proposals before any consent could be issued in line with the Habitat Regulations.

Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

[Redacted]
Senior Conservation Planner, RSPB Scotland

Appendix 1 Ornithological assessment
Appendix 2 Commentary on compensation measures

Appendix 1
Spiorad na Mara Windfarm Application
Detailed Response by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

1. Legislative and policy background

Introduction

1.1 This appendix sets out the steps for the habitat regulations with the legal steps that must be taken, together with the wider legal context and the policy landscape for offshore wind development. This is followed by a summary of the most relevant seabird colonies and their current status.

The Habitats Regulations

1.2 The Habitats Regulations seek to conserve particular habitats and species across the UK. The overall aim of these Regulations is to ensure the long-term survival of viable populations of the UK's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, throughout their natural range and to maintain and promote biodiversity.

1.3 These Directives have been transposed into UK legislation and, relevant to this application are:

1.3.1 The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) ("the 1994 Regulations") - applies on land in Scotland, and in Scottish inshore waters (the area of sea adjacent to Scotland from 0 to 12 nautical miles);

1.3.2 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 -applies to specific reserved and devolved activities on land in Scotland, and in Scottish inshore waters, including for consents under sections 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989; and

1.3.3 The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 -applies to all UK offshore waters (the area of sea beyond 12 nautical miles).

1.4 These are referred to as "the Habitats Regulations" in this submission.

1.5 In Scotland, 162 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) have been classified. These have been specifically identified and protected due to supporting one or more rare, threatened, or vulnerable bird species as listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive or regularly occurring migratory species.

1.6 Although the UK has withdrawn from the EU, the aims and objectives (as set out in the Habitats and Birds Directives recitals/preambles) remains relevant and important as discussed below. SPAs are protected in Scotland and the rest of the UK, and the standard of protection and requirements has not changed.

1.7 There have however been some changes to terminology and process due to Brexit. Of relevance to this submission is that the EU-wide network of SPAs and SACs known as "Natura 2000" is now referred to as the "UK site network". In addition, references in the Habitats Regulations to the "coherence of Natura 2000" must now be read as references to the coherence of the UK/National site network.

1.8 Using *the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017* (since all Habitats Regulations have identical requirements), the Regulations set out the sequence of steps to be taken by the competent authority (here the Scottish Ministers) when considering authorisation for a project that may have an impact on a European site and its species before deciding to authorise that project. These are as follows:

- Step 1: consider whether the project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SPA and its species (regulation 63(1)). If not –
- Step 2: consider, on a precautionary basis, whether the project is likely to have a significant effect on the SPA and its species, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects (the Likely Significance Test) (regulation 63(1)).
- Step 3: make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the SPA and its species in view of its conservation objectives. There is no requirement or ability at this stage to consider extraneous (non-conservation e.g. economics, renewable targets, public safety etc) matters in the appropriate assessment (regulation 63(1)).
- Step 4: consider whether it can be ascertained that the project will not, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, adversely affect the integrity of the SPA and its species, having regard to the manner in which it is proposed to be carried out, and any conditions or restrictions subject to which that authorisation might be given (the Integrity Test) (regulation 63(6)).
- Step 5: In light of the conclusions of the assessment, the competent authority shall agree to the project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA, alone or in combination with other plans or projects (regulation 63(5)).
- Step 6: only if the competent authority is satisfied that, there being no alternative solutions and the plan or project must be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) which, subject to regulation 64(2), may be of a social or economic nature, they may agree to the plan or project notwithstanding a negative assessment of the implications for the European site (regulation 64(1)).
- Step 7: in the event of there being no alternative solutions and the IROPI test being satisfied, the Scottish Ministers must secure that any necessary compensatory measures are taken to ensure that the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network is protected (regulation 68).

It is vital that the precautionary approach required by the Habitats Regulations is taken. This means if scientific data is incomplete or hard to get and it is not possible to complete a full evaluation of all possible or potential risks an activity/development may cause, account should be taken of all possible harm. Potential harm should not be dismissed due to the lack of scientific data. Importantly, the precautionary principle requires the Applicant to demonstrate with scientific certainty that something would not be harmful. The concept of something being overly precautionary dismisses the inherent uncertainty in modelling and overlooks the simplistic version of reality that the modelling captures.

1.9 It is important to add that the compensatory requirements set out above, in relation to both inshore area and the offshore marine area, are additional and any competent authority must exercise its functions so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive; and in particular to take such steps as it considers appropriate to secure the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of a sufficient diversity and area of habitat for wild birds, having regard to the requirements of Article 2 of the Birds Directive.[7] And for offshore

SPAs regulation 26, Offshore Regulations requires competent authorities to exercise their functions (as far as possible) to secure steps to avoid the disturbance of species and the deterioration of habitats or habitats of species within those sites.

Appropriate assessment

1.10 As part of the assessment requirements, regulation 63, Habitats Regulations (regulation 28, Offshore Regulations) require the application of the precautionary principle, meaning that if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that it is likely to have a significant effect on a SPA and its species, an appropriate assessment will be required: see *Waddenzee*[1].

1.11 Following that appropriate assessment, a project may only be granted consent if the competent authority is convinced that it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the European site(s) and their species of concern, having applied the precautionary principle and taken account of the conservation objectives for those sites and their habitats and species. *Waddenzee* confirmed that where doubt remains as to the absence of adverse effects on the integrity of the site, approval should be refused (subject to the considerations of alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interest and the provision of compensatory measures as set out in regulations 64 & 68).

1.12 An appropriate assessment requires all aspects of the project which could affect the site, its species and its conservation objectives to be identified in the light of the best scientific knowledge in the field. The competent authority,

> *"taking account of the conclusions of the appropriate assessment of the implications…for the site concerned, in the light of the conservation objectives, are to authorise such activity only if they have made certain that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site. That is the case where no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects".*

1.13 Integrity of the SPA should be considered as the coherence of the site's ecological structure and function, across its whole area, or the habitats, complex of habitats and/or populations of species for which the site is classified. A site can be described as having a high degree of integrity where the inherent potential for meeting site conservation objectives is realised, the capacity for self-repair and self-renewal under dynamic conditions is maintained, and a minimum of external management support is required. When looking at the 'integrity of the site', it is therefore important to take into account a range of factors, including the possibility of effects manifesting themselves in the short, medium and long-term.

1.14 As is clear from the requirements of the Habitats and Offshore Regulations, the assessment of integrity is to be considered by reference to the impact of the project alone and in-combination with other plans and projects, taking account of the site(s) conservation objectives. As clearly set out in *Waddenzee*, para 61:

> *"**61** In view of the foregoing, the answer to the fourth question must be that, under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive,* ***an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site concerned of the plan or project implies that, prior to its approval, all the aspects of the plan or project which can, by themselves or in combination with other plans or projects, affect the site's conservation objectives must be identified in the light of the best scientific knowledge in the field.*** *The competent national authorities, taking account of the appropriate*

[1] CJEU Case-127/02; [2004] ECR-7405 at [45]

assessment of the implications of mechanical cockle fishing for the site concerned in the light of the site's conservation objectives, are to authorise such an activity only if they have made certain that it will not adversely affect the integrity of that site. That is the case where no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects." (emphasis added)

The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

1.15 These EIA requirements state that consent cannot be granted for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development unless the decision-maker has taken into account environmental information including an environmental statement which describes the significant effects, including cumulative effects, of the development on the environment. This will include effects on all wild bird species whether SPA species or not.

1.16 Offshore wind farms have the potential to impact on birds through collision with rotating blades, direct habitat loss, disturbance from construction activities, displacement during the operational phase (resulting in loss of foraging/roosting area) and impact on bird flight lines (i.e. barrier effect) and associated increased energy use by birds for commuting flights between roosting and foraging areas. These additional potential impacts must be taken into account.

The UK Marine Strategy Regulations and Good Environmental Status

1.17 Also of relevance to achieving sustainable development in our seas is the Marine Strategy Framework Directive[2]. This was developed in response to concerns that although existing legislation protected the sea from some specific impacts, it was sectoral and fragmented. To overcome this, the directive seeks to reduce impacts on marine waters regardless of where impacts occur by applying an ecosystem approach.

1.18 Applying an ecosystem approach is important. Our natural environment is complicated, and the outcome of an impact may manifest elsewhere. It also feeds into the concept of sustainable development and the vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive, and diverse seas; managed to meet the long-term needs of nature and people as set out Scotland's National Marine Plan.

1.19 The Marine Strategy Framework Directive was transposed into UK law by the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010. It requires the UK to put in place the necessary management measures to achieve 'Good Environmental Status' (GES) in UK seas by 2020. This involves protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration, and restoring it where practical alongside using marine resources sustainably. As with the Habitats Regulations, although the UK has withdrawn from the EU, the legislative requirement for GES remains in place.

1.20 Governments of the UK have collectively failed to meet 11 out of the 15 indicators of Good Environmental Status (GES) for our seas with the marine bird indicator moving away from target. For breeding seabirds, more species, especially surface feeders who depend on small fish at the surface (35% in the Greater North Sea), are now experiencing frequent, widespread breeding failures. The reduced availability of small fish is largely responsible for these declines and impacts on breeding success.

Section summary

1.21 Taken together, there is a clear legal and policy requirement to protect the marine environment and deliver sustainable development. The UK Marine Strategy is clear in its aims of improving the state of the marine environment through taking a large scale, holistic approach.

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[2] EU Council Directive 2008/56/EC

Therefore, proposals which further impact the ability of the UK to achieve GES should be considered carefully. The ability of an application to comply with the vital requirements of the Habitats Regulations which seek the long-term survival of viable populations of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, must also be scrutinised and considered in detail.

Policy position

1.22 In accordance with the requirements of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 when considering an application and making a recommendation to Ministers, MD-LOT must consider the extent to which the proposed activity accords with any marine plan for an area and the impact that it would have on the environment, human health, and other legitimate users of the sea as well as other matters considered relevant.

1.23 Scotland's National Marine Plan1 (NMP) (adopted 2015) sets out the strategic policies for sustainable development in both the Scotland inshore region (0 to 12 nautical miles) and within the Scottish Offshore region (12 to 200 nautical miles).

1.24 A core aim of marine planning, as set out by the NMP, is to manage human impact on the marine environment. The plan therefore seeks to put the marine environment at the heart of the planning process and adopt the principles of sustainable development. The environmental, social, and economic policies of the plan are intended to be complementary with one another as elements of sustainability.

1.25 Through policy GEN 9 (Natural Heritage), the NMP requires that development and use of the marine environment complies with legal requirements for protected areas and protected species, not result in significant impact on the national status of priority marine features and protect, and where appropriate, enhances the health of the marine area. It also encourages a strategic approach to mitigation of potential and cumulative impacts, stating these forms an integral part of marine planning and decision making.

1.26 Renewables specific policies within the NMP direct commercial scale development to the plan options areas (as identified in the Sectoral Marine Plan) and require applications to demonstrate compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA) legislative requirements.

1.27 Since the adoption of the NMP, Scottish Government has further recognised that net zero and energy goals will have impacts on the environment, specifically marine biodiversity, as well as other users of sea. In particular, the draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023), recognises the potential impacts on biodiversity arising from the major expansion in offshore wind. It contains a commitment to work in a way that recognises this reality and ensures appropriate protection of the natural environment as part of a joined-up approach to tacking the climate and nature crisis.

1.28 This follows the approach of the National Planning Framework 4 which, in policy 1, clearly sets the expectation that significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises when considering all development proposals. Although this document is not directly applicable to marine development, it is applicable to onshore elements and RSPB Scotland believe it is a relevant consideration, albeit one with limited weight, for development offshore.

2. Ornithological interest of the Application site

2.1 The UK is of outstanding international importance for its breeding seabirds and wintering marine birds. As with all Annex I and regularly migratory species, the UK has a particular responsibility under the Birds Directive to secure their conservation.

2.2 Seabirds are relatively long-lived, and as a result, their populations are sensitive to small increases in adult mortality. Their survival and productivity rates can be impacted by offshore windfarms directly (i.e. collision) and indirectly (e.g. displacement from foraging areas, additional energy expenditure, potential impacts on forage fish and wider ecosystem impacts such as changes in stratification).

2.3 The probability of seabirds being impacted by an application relates to whether they are likely to be in the area of the development, and their behaviour in the vicinity of the development. This will depend on a number of factors, including the application's proximity to seabird colonies, the species within those colonies, the species behaviours (including their foraging range, food preferences and flight behaviour), the attraction of the application array itself as a foraging area, and the attraction of areas beyond the application array for foraging (which would require birds to transition through the development array or detour around it).

Species of interest

2.4 The **key species of** interest **in relation to the application are** Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*), Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula artica*)

2.5 A summary of their population status within the Britain, Isle of Man and Channel Islands is provided in Table 1 below.

Species	% World Population	UK Colony Trends 1986 to 2021
Black-legged Kittiwake	5.3	Declining
Northern Gannet	59.1	Mostly increasing but a few declining colonies *(N.B. Gannets were badly impacted by HPAI in 2021-22)*
Guillemot	6.2	Some colonies increasing but many declining
Atlantic Puffin	3.3-3.9	Declining

Northern Gannet

2.6 Northern Gannet are endemic to the North Atlantic although the majority breed in Britain and Ireland. They tend to breed on offshore islands and stacks. Gannets are typically long-lived seabirds, living to an average age of 17 years and not breeding until the age of 5 years. During the breeding season, adults will take it in turn to incubate the single egg for approximately 42-46 days with the chick fledging unaccompanied by its parents after approximately 90 days. Some colonies, such as that on the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth – the largest Gannetry in the world - are particularly large and conspicuous. Gannet can catch fish at depths of 20 metres but also feed from the surface on small shoaling fish such as sandeel.

2.7 During the breeding season Gannets are central-place foragers meaning they are constrained to return to the nest after foraging to maintain territories and raise their young.

Foraging trip durations are dependent on colony size with birds from larger colonies making longer foraging trips (both in distance and duration).

2.8 Gannet were particularly badly impacted by Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) during the 2022 breeding season with large numbers of deaths reported. On the Bass Rock a catastrophic breeding failure was reported which is likely to vastly impact their future population numbers and the robustness of those populations to additional mortality.

2.9 They are amber listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern.

2.10 Northern Gannet have been assessed as having a high vulnerability to collisions with rotating turbine blades (Furness *et al.,* 2013, Wade *et al.,* 2016), partly due to their flight altitude and manoeuvrability. Breeding Gannets tracked with GPS from Helgoland in the eastern North Sea travelled around and through operational wind farms.

2.11 There is a need to assess the possible impacts to Gannets throughout the year as behavioural constraints change; starting when they arrive back at the colony for the breeding season until they leave on migration, and then throughout the winter. During autumn and winter potential interaction with turbines will not be limited to birds from the closest breeding colony but birds from across the breeding range as they disperse and travel south.

2.12 There is consistent evidence of wind farm avoidance by non-breeding Gannets and Gannets on migration. But little is known about the behavioural responses of breeding Gannets to offshore turbines resulting from a lack of operational turbines within foraging range of breeding colonies.

Black-legged Kittiwake

2.13 Black-legged Kittiwake are members of the gull family. They tend to nest on vertical rocky-sea cliffs and during the breeding season feed on energy rich pelagic shoaling fish, such as sandeel, sprat and juvenile herring. Kittiwakes are surface feeders and are highly dependent on sandeels in the breeding season, as such they are particularly vulnerable to food shortage. During the breeding season Kittiwakes are central-place foragers meaning they are constrained to return to the nest after foraging to maintain territories and raise their young. When not in attendance at the nest or away on a foraging trip, Kittiwakes use the sea below the cliffs for maintenance behaviours such as loafing (spending time on the water to preen or rest, not related to feeding), preening and bathing. During the breeding season the highest densities of Kittiwakes at sea are within 1km of the colony.

2.14 Kittiwake are red listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern and on the OSPAR list of threatened and/or declining species and have been assessed by the IUCN as vulnerable to global extinction. They are particularly susceptible to collision risk but are also vulnerable to distributional changes as a result of the presence of turbines.

Common Guillemot

2.15 Common Guillemot are members of the auk family along with Puffin and Razorbill. They typically form highly dense colonies and lay a single egg (without a nest) on a cliff, narrow ledges, or other inaccessible areas. They tend to eat fish and crustaceans. Guillemots are typically long-lived seabirds, living to an average age of 23 years and not breeding until the age of 5 years. Breeding success is highest where birds are most tightly packed. Adults will incubate the egg for 28-37 days, fledging then taking place when the chick is ~3 weeks old. The chick will then complete its growth at sea accompanied by its male parent.

2.16 The response of Guillemots to offshore wind farms is mixed although there is a paucity of data for breeding birds. Non-breeding birds have been shown to avoid offshore wind farms, as have breeding birds in the southern North Sea, whereas in the Irish Sea, Guillemots have shown no changes in abundance post construction and at another site, increased in abundance. More recent work has suggested that there may be some habituation over time to the presence of wind farms.

2.17 While details are still emerging, the 2024 breeding season for Guillemot appears to be extremely poor, with large number of nest sites vacant, birds present but not laying eggs and high degree of breeding asynchronicity. The causes of this are likely to be multifactorial, and may include HPAI, high water temperatures and resultant poor body conditions. The long term, population scale consequences are unclear, but may be severe. As a result, an extremely high level of precaution should be applied in considering the impacts arising from any offshore development on this species.

2.18 They are amber listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern.

Puffin

2.19 Puffin are one of the most iconic seabird species around Scotland with their brightly coloured beaks during the breeding season. They tend to nest in burrows and so are susceptible to mammalian predators. There is some evidence their diet changes seasonally but during the breeding season, they typically feed on shoaling fish such as sandeel, sprat and herring which they catch by underwater pursuit.

2.20 They are vulnerable to displacement which can lead to a loss of feeding grounds and excess energy expenditure as they take less direct routes to reach alternative prey sources.

2.21 Puffin are red listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern and have been assessed by the IUCN as vulnerable to global extinction.

Proximity of seabird colonies

2.22 The application array location is close to several SPAs with qualifying features within foraging range of the application array area. This includes the East Caithness Cliffs SPA, North Caithness Cliffs SPA, Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA, the Forth Islands SPA, Fowlsheugh SPA and St Abb's Head to Fast Castle SPA.

2.23 As SPAs, these sites are subject to general duties to protect, conserve and restore the designated features of the site to meet their conservation objectives, to prevent deterioration of the site's habitats and to prevent significant disturbance to the sites. If an application might impact a qualifying feature, as set out in Chapter 1, assessment in accordance with the Habitats Regulations is required.

3 RSPB Scotland Comments on RIAA

3.1 RSPB Scotland has reviewed the in-combination ornithological assessment presented in the Spiorad na Mara RIAA. The applicant's own assessment concludes that an adverse effect on site integrity (AEoSI) cannot be ruled out for qualifying features at eight Special Protection Areas (SPAs): kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA, Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA, North Caithness Cliffs SPA and West Westray SPA; gannet at Forth Islands SPA and Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA; and razorbill at St Kilda SPA and Seas off St Kilda SPA. At West Westray SPA, the applicant concludes that an AEoSI will occur under all scenarios assessed. RSPB Scotland reaches the same conclusions.

3.2 RSPB Scotland additionally cannot rule out AEoSI for red-throated diver at Lewis Peatlands SPA. The proposed development is located within 13 km off the West coast of Lewis and this results in the potential for nearshore and onshore species to be affected by the proposal. With regard to Red Throated diver we cannot see reference to the affects on the Lewis Peatlands SPA. The SPA when last assessed was in unfavourable- declining condition. We assume the calculation of a 6.59% decline relates to the Lewis Peatlands SPA but this is not clear and without a clear assessment of the implications of the proposal AEoSI cannot be ruled out for the Lewis Peatlands SPA, in particular in combination with the onshore application.

3.3 These predicted declines are of particular concern given the range of compounding pressures already facing these populations, including the ongoing impacts of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, the effects of climate change on prey availability and breeding success, the reduced availability of key prey species such as sandeel, and the unfavourable conservation status of many of the affected SPA features. A population already under pressure from these stressors has substantially reduced resilience to absorb additional mortality. This is especially acute for the kittiwake feature of West Westray SPA, where predicted population size after 35 years ranges from 55.4% to 65.8% of what it would have been in the absence of development. This is a predicted loss of between 35% and 45% of the population. For these populations in particular, the scale of predicted in-combination impact is such that RSPB Scotland considers the long-term integrity of the SPA features to be at serious risk, irrespective of the individual contribution of any single development.

3.4 We are further concerned that a number of these estimates assume full compensation of Berwick Bank Offshore Wind Farm's impact on seabird populations. Berwick Bank's compensation plan is yet to be agreed or implemented and, in our view, this cannot be treated as sufficient justification for excluding Berwick Bank's predicted mortality from in-combination calculations. Other developers, operating within the same in-combination assessment framework, elect to present both compensated and uncompensated Berwick Bank scenarios. This approach allows consideration of the full range of plausible in-combination impacts where the delivery of compensation measures cannot be treated as certain. The applicant's decision to present only the compensated scenario, and to exclude Berwick Bank from in-combination totals on that basis, makes appropriate assessment difficult. RSPB Scotland considers that the in-combination figures presented understate the likely impact on the qualifying features of those SPAs.

3.5 We also draw to the applicant's attention what appears to be a data presentation error in Appendix E Table 5-6. For gannet at the Ailsa Craig SPA, the CPS and CGR are more impacted by the lower scenario than the upper scenario. We request that the applicant review and confirm the correct figures.

Table 1. NatureScot guidance scenarios for high and low impact. Kittiwake and gannet values are for combined displacement and collision risk mortalities. Guillemot, razorbill and puffin values are for displacement response only.

Species	Scenario	NatureScot Guidance Parameters	Pathway
Kittiwake	High	30% displacement, 3% mortality	Combined
	Low	30% displacement, 1% mortality	Combined

Guillemot	High	60% displacement, 5% breeding / 3% non-breeding mortality	Displacement only
	Low	60% displacement, 3% breeding / 1% non-breeding mortality	Displacement only
Razorbill	High	60% displacement, 5% breeding / 3% non-breeding mortality	Displacement only
	Low	60% displacement, 3% breeding / 1% non-breeding mortality	Displacement only
Puffin	High	60% displacement, 5% breeding / 3% non-breeding mortality	Displacement only
	Low	60% displacement, 3% breeding / 1% non-breeding mortality	Displacement only
Gannet	High	70% displacement, 3% mortality	Combined
	Low	70% displacement, 1% mortality	Combined

Table 2. Selected summary of Population Viability Analysis results for Special Protection Areas and species features identified during scoping. Median Counterfactual of Growth Rate (CGR) and Median Counterfactual of Population Size (CPS) estimated using NatureScot "High" Impact Scenario in combination with consented developments over the 35-year operational lifetime of the project.

SPA	Species	CGR	CPS	Table
Ailsa Craig SPA	Gannet[1]	0.9998	0.9910	5-6
Cape Wrath SPA	Kittiwake[1]	0.9973	0.9071	5-1
	Guillemot	0.9996	0.9847	5-2
	Razorbill[1]	0.9984	0.9444	5-3
	Puffin[1]	0.9991	0.9683	5-4
East Caithness Cliffs	**Kittiwake[2]**	**0.9917**	**0.7397**	5-1
Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA	**Kittiwake[2]**	**0.9906**	**0.7123**	5-1
Flannan Isles SPA	Guillemot	0.9997	0.9883	5-2
	Razorbill[1]	0.9977	0.9208	5-3
	Puffin[1]	0.9995	0.9833	5-4
Forth Islands SPA	**Gannet[2]**	**0.9940**	**0.8050**	5-6
Grassholm SPA	Gannet	0.9991	0.9687	5-6
Handa SPA	Guillemot	0.9995	0.9838	5-2
	Razorbill[1]	0.9986	0.9491	5-3
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA	Gannet[2]	0.9980	0.9318	5-6
Lewis Peatlands SPA	**RT Diver[3]**	**0.9933**	**0.7857**	5-5
Mingulay and Berneray SPA	Razorbill[1]	0.9991	0.9687	5-3
North Caithness Cliffs SPA	**Kittiwake[2]**	**0.9969**	**0.8953**	5-1
North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA	Kittiwake[1]	0.9985	0.9473	5-1
North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA	Guillemot	0.9996	0.9873	5-2
	Gannet[1]	0.9991	0.9672	5-6
Noss SPA	Gannet[1]	0.9980	0.9295	5-6
Rathlin Island SPA	Kittiwake[1]	0.9995	0.9806	5-1

	Razorbill[1]	0.9990	0.9645	5-3
Shiant Isles SPA	Razorbill[1]	0.9988	0.9586	5-3
	Puffin[1]	0.9997	0.9884	5-4
Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas off Pembrokeshire	Razorbill[1]	0.9990	0.9662	5-3
St Kilda SPA	Razorbill[1]	0.9963	0.8719	5-3
	Puffin[1]	0.9997	0.9893	5-4
	Gannet[1]	0.9993	0.9737	5-6
Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA	Guillemot	0.9986	0.9498	5-2
	Puffin[1]	0.9987	0.9530	5-4
	Gannet[1]	0.9971	0.8996	5-6
West Westray SPA	**Kittiwake[1]**	**0.9838**	**0.5541**	5-1

Table 3. Selected summary of Population Viability Analysis results for Special Protection Areas and species features identified during scoping. Median Counterfactual of Growth Rate (CGR) and Median Counterfactual of Population Size (CPS) estimated using NatureScot "Low" Impact Scenario in combination with consented developments over the 35-year operational lifetime of the project.

SPA	Species	CGR	CPS	Table
Ailsa Craig SPA	Gannet[1]	0.9986	0.9524	5-6
Cape Wrath SPA	Kittiwake[1]	0.9973	0.9068	5-1
	Guillemot	NA	NA	5-2
	Razorbill[1]	0.9993	0.9755	5-3
	Puffin[1]	0.9995	0.9805	5-4
East Caithness Cliffs	**Kittiwake[2]**	**0.9939**	**0.8023**	5-1
Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA	**Kittiwake[2]**	**0.9931**	**0.7795**	5-1
Flannan Isles SPA	Guillemot	NA	NA	5-2
	Razorbill[1]	0.9991	0.9641	5-3
	Puffin[1]	0.9997	0.9900	5-4
Forth Islands SPA	**Gannet[2]**	**0.9957**	**0.8577**	5-6
Grassholm SPA	Gannet	0.9995	0.9808	5-6
Handa SPA	Guillemot	NA	NA	5-2
	Razorbill[1]	0.9994	0.9792	5-3
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA	Gannet[2]	0.9991	0.9662	5-6
Lewis Peatlands SPA	**RT Diver[3]**	**0.9933**	**0.7857**	5-5
Mingulay and Berneray SPA	Razorbill[1]	0.9997	0.9889	5-3
North Caithness Cliffs SPA	**Kittiwake[2]**	**0.9978**	**0.9235**	5-1
North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA	Kittiwake[1]	0.9988	0.9577	5-1
North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA	Guillemot	NA	NA	5-2
	Gannet[1]	0.9994	0.9784	5-6
Noss SPA	Gannet[1]	0.9989	0.9624	5-6
Rathlin Island SPA	Kittiwake[1]	0.9996	0.9840	5-1
	Razorbill[1]	0.9997	0.9879	5-3

Shiant Isles SPA	Razorbill[1]	0.9995	0.9837	5-3
	Puffin[1]	NA	NA	5-4
Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas off Pembrokeshire	Razorbill[1]	0.9996	0.9863	5-3
St Kilda SPA	Razorbill[1]	0.9987	0.9500	5-3
	Puffin[1]	NA	NA	5-4
	Gannet[1]	0.9995	0.9834	5-6
Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA	Guillemot	0.9995	0.9814	5-2
	Puffin[1]	0.9992	0.9716	5-4
	Gannet[1]	0.9979	0.9255	5-6
West Westray SPA	**Kittiwake[1]**	**0.9885**	**0.6581**	5-1

In both tables the subscripts represent: 1. Scenario includes Berwick Bank in the calculation of in-combination impacts; 2. Berwick Bank is assumed to be full compensated and so impact is not included; 3. Red-throated Diver (RT Diver) only one scenario presented

NB. Where values in Table 3 are NA this is due to the NatureScot low impact scenario not producing an impact large enough to qualify for PVA.

NB. The values presented for Ailsa Craig appear anomalous. The estimated impact is higher for the NatureScot low scenario than it is for the high scenario.

Summary of significant impacts – project in isolation

3.6 The Applicant has concluded that an Adverse Effect on Site Integrity (AEoSI) can be ruled out for all qualifying features of all Special Protection Areas (SPAs) as a result of impacts from the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm alone.

Summary of significant impacts – in combination with other offshore wind farms

3.7 The Applicant has been unable to rule out an Adverse Effect on Site Integrity (AEoSI) for qualifying features at eight Special Protection Areas (SPAs) when the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm is considered in-combination with other consented wind farms, including Berwick Bank Offshore Wind Farm. These are kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA, Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA, North Caithness Cliffs SPA and West Westray SPA; razorbill at St Kilda SPA, with the same conclusion extended derivatively to the razorbill feature of the marine Seas off St Kilda SPA; and gannet at Forth Islands SPA and Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA. The Applicant further concludes that an AEoSI is unavoidable at West Westray SPA for kittiwake from the combined effects of displacement and collision under both the NatureScot Lower/Applicant Approach and the NatureScot Upper Approach. The Applicant's conclusions for kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA and Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA, and for gannet at Forth Islands SPA and Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA, hold under both the NatureScot guidance scenarios and the Applicant's preferred lower mortality assumptions; the remaining conclusions are reached under the NatureScot Upper Approach only.

3.8 RSPB Scotland has independently reviewed the PVA results for the 34 species x SPA combinations taken to PVA-level assessment by the Applicant. Below we summarise the results of these assessments using the NatureScot approved guidance scenarios only. This does not mean we agree that other species and sites will not have significant impacts; rather that we are unable to

reach conclusions because the Applicant has not completed PVAs for those combinations. These in-combination impacts are presented including the impacts from other consented wind farms, including Berwick Bank Offshore Wind Farm. However, the values presented for kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA, Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA and North Caithness Cliffs SPA, and for gannet at Forth Islands SPA and Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA, do not include Berwick Bank's mortality contribution on the Applicant's assumption that Berwick Bank's required compensation will be delivered and effective. RSPB Scotland does not consider that Berwick Bank's IROPI consent and not-yet-delivered compensation constitute sufficient grounds for discounting Berwick Bank's contribution from the in-combination assessment, and the figures reported at these five SPAs therefore understate the impacts which we consider should be assessed. RSPB Scotland additionally notes an error in the gannet PVA results for Ailsa Craig SPA. The CPS values are inconsistent with the scenarios and there are differences in the input mortality presented across tables. This limits our ability to come to any conclusion on impacts. We only consider the NatureScot approved guidance scenarios in the text below.

Black-legged Kittiwake

3.9 Cape Wrath SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the Cape Wrath SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9973. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 90.68% and 90.71% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.10 East Caithness Cliffs SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms (and assuming Berwick Bank will be fully compensated) are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the East Caithness Cliffs SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9917 and 0.9939. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 73.97% and 80.23% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.11 Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms (and assuming Berwick Bank will be fully compensated) are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9906 and 0.9931. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 71.23% and 77.95% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.12 North Caithness Cliffs SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms (and assuming Berwick Bank will be

fully compensated) are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the North Caithness Cliffs SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9969 and 0.9978. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 89.53% and 92.35% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.13 North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the North Colonsay and Western Cliffs SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9985 and 0.9988. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 94.73% and 95.77% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.14 Rathlin Island SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the Rathlin Island SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9995 and 0.9996. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 98.06% and 98.40% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.15 West Westray SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of kittiwake at the West Westray SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9838 and 0.9885. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 55.41% and 65.81% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

Guillemot

3.16 Cape Wrath SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of guillemot at the Cape Wrath SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9996 under the NatureScot Upper scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 98.47% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.17 Flannan Isles SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of guillemot at the

Flannan Isles SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9997 under the NatureScot Upper scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 98.83% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.18 Handa SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of guillemot at the Handa SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9995 under the NatureScot Upper scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 98.38% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.19 North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of guillemot at the North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9996 under the NatureScot Upper scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 98.73% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.20 Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of guillemot at the Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9986 and 0.9995. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 94.98% and 98.14% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

Razorbill

3.21 Cape Wrath SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Cape Wrath SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9984 and 0.9993. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 94.44% and 97.55% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.22 Flannan Isles SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Flannan Isles SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9977 and 0.9991. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 92.08% and 96.41% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.23 Handa SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Handa SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9986 and 0.9994. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 94.91% and 97.92% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.24 Mingulay and Berneray SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Mingulay and Berneray SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9991 and 0.9997. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 96.87% and 98.89% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.25 Rathlin Island SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Rathlin Island SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9990 and 0.9997. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 96.45% and 98.79% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.26 Shiant Isles SPA. Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Shiant Isles SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9988 and 0.9995. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 95.86% and 98.37% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.27 Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas off Pembrokeshire SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of razorbill at the Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas off Pembrokeshire SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9990 and 0.9996. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 96.62% and 98.63% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.28 St Kilda SPA. Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth

rate of razorbill at the St Kilda SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9963 and 0.9987. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 87.19% and 95.00% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

Puffin

3.29 Cape Wrath SPA. Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of puffin at the Cape Wrath SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9991 and 0.9995. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 96.83% and 98.05% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.30 Flannan Isles SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of puffin at the Flannan Isles SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9995 and 0.9997. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 98.33% and 99.00% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.31 Shiant Isles SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of puffin at the Shiant Isles SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9997 under the NatureScot Upper scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 98.84% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.32 St Kilda SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of puffin at the St Kilda SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9997 under the NatureScot Upper scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 98.93% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.33 Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of puffin at the Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9987 and 0.9992. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA

feature is expected to be between 95.30% and 97.16% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

Red-throated diver

3.34 Lewis Peatlands SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of red-throated diver at the Lewis Peatlands SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of 0.9933 under the agreed NatureScot and Applicant (100/10) scenario. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be 78.57% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

Gannet

3.35 Ailsa Craig SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the Ailsa Craig SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9986 and 0.9998. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 95.24% and 99.10% of what it would have been in the absence of the development. However, RSPB Scotland notes a data anomaly in both the input mortality tables and the CPS values presented for “High” and “Low” impact scenarios. So these values cannot be relied upon and the true range of outcomes may therefore be materially worse than reported.

3.36 Forth Islands SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms (and assuming Berwick Bank will be fully compensated) are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the Forth Islands SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9940 and 0.9957. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 80.50% and 85.77% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.37 Grassholm SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the Grassholm SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9991 and 0.9995. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 96.87% and 98.08% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.38 Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms (and assuming Berwick Bank will be

fully compensated) are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9980 and 0.9991. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 93.18% and 96.62% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.39 North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9991 and 0.9994. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 96.72% and 97.84% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.40 Noss SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the Noss SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9980 and 0.9989. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 92.95% and 96.24% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.41 St Kilda SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the St Kilda SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9993 and 0.9995. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 97.37% and 98.34% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

3.43 Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA Within the range of likely mortalities derived using the methods advocated by NatureScot, Marine Directorate and RSPB Scotland during scoping, the impacts arising from distributional change and collision mortality associated with Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm in combination with other wind farms including Berwick Bank are predicted to result in the annual population growth rate of gannet at the Sule Skerry and Sule Stack SPA declining with a ratio of impacted to unimpacted population growth rate of between 0.9971 and 0.9979. This means that after the 35-year lifetime of Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, the population size of the SPA feature is expected to be between 89.96% and 92.55% of what it would have been in the absence of the development.

4. Assessment of the derogation case

4.1 The development is large and has the potential for significant impact and, both individually and in combination with other developments, it is predicted to result in AEoSI. This means the

magnitude and severity of impacts from the development is of such significance it could prevent the achievement of the conservation objectives and the preservation of the SPA for the conservation of its species is also in question. These international sites are the most important sites for wildlife and are legally required to be conserved and, if necessary, restored to favourable conservation status. There is also an obligation to assesses any applications which may harm them and ensure protection requirements are fully complied with in any application processes. As mentioned above part of those legal requirements are the Habitats Regulations, which only allows projects to be permitted if:

1. There are no feasible alternative solutions to the project which are less harmful;
2. There are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for the project to proceed; and
3. Any necessary compensatory measures are secured to ensure that the overall coherence of the UK/National Site Network is protected and to ensure the objectives for that Network are achieved

4.2 These requirements need to be considered individually but also together; the IROPI needs to be identified to be able to consider possible alternative solutions. If those tests can be passed i.e. there are no less harmful alternative solutions and there is IROPI, compensation will need to be identified and information provided to demonstrate that it is certain, ecologically, legally and financially, that compensation measures can be secured. All three must be satisfied before a project with potential adverse effects on site integrity may be consented.

4.3 As set out in the European Commission's updated guidance on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive ("the EC guidance"), compensation measures considered under the context of the habitat's regulations are independent of the project and are aimed to offset the residual negative effects of that project in order to maintain the overall coherence of the UK/National site network. They must provide continuity in the ecological processes essential to maintain the structure and functions that contribute to the European site network coherence.

4.4 Compensatory measures should be additional to actions considered as normal requirements under the Habitats Regulations and should go beyond those standard measures required for the designation, protection, and management of the protected sites. It is vital that details and evidence are provided to enable ecological, financial, and legal confidence in the compensation proposals. Information to do this must be available for review by all interested parties. As it stands, the generic nature of the proposed compensatory measures means that it is not possible to assess them (for further detail see Appendix 2). As a result, considerable uncertainty surrounds the ability of the various proposed compensation measures to deliver the claimed ecological benefits.

4.5 As such, the Minister cannot conclude that the coherence of the UK/National Site Network for the affected species will be protected. As the application can only be permitted through the derogation process, securing compensation goes to the heart of the acceptability. Leaving this detail to pre-commencement condition risks undermining the derogation process and could result in an unimplementable development consent.

Appendix 2
RSPB Scotland commentary on the Applicant's proposed compensation measures for Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

1. RSPB Scotland approach to evaluating compensation measures

Introduction

1.1. We note that the Applicant has shortlisted three options for compensation. There are:

a. Contribution to the strategic compensation fund

b. Collaborative measures

c. Project level measures

1.2. In short - it is vital that details and evidence are provided to enable confidence ecologically, financially and legally, in the compensation proposals and such information must be available for review by all Interested Parties. This section sets out RSPB Scotland's approach to evaluating compensation measures. It includes our general approach to assessing compensation proposals and the level of detail we consider is required in order to evaluate compensation proposals as part of the Application's determination, before drawing out some general issues raised by the Applicant's proposals. We have set it out under the following headings:

- RSPB Scotland's approach to assessing compensation proposals;
- Generic issues raised by the Applicant's compensation proposals:
  - Lack of specific proposals and locations for compensation measures
  - Scale of compensation
  - Lead-in times for compensation
  - Lifetime of compensation in relation to damage
  - Environmental assessment of the proposed compensation measures.

RSPB Scotland's approach to assessing compensation proposals

1.3. Set out below are the key criteria and requirements from the EC guidance[1] on compensatory measures, along with additional commentary based on RSPB Scotland's experience of the principles that should be applied when assessing compensatory measures.

[1] EC (2018) Managing Natura 2000 sites – The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (21/11/18) C(2018) 7621 final

EC criteria	EC guidance summary (emphasis added)	RSPB Scotland additional commentary
Targeted	Measures should be the **most appropriate to the impact predicted** and **focused on objectives and targets addressing the Natura 2000 elements affected**. Must **refer to structural and functional aspects of site integrity and habitats/species affected**. **Must consist of ecological measures**: payments to individuals/funds are not appropriate.	Clear objectives and success criteria must be established for the compensation measures. Must address the ecological functions and processes required by impacted species/habitat. Requires shared understanding and agreement on what the impacts are i.e. need to agree nature, magnitude including that they will continue for as long as the project's impacts. This includes the time likely to be required for the SPAs to recover from those impacts in the case of proposals that are in place for a specified time period. This is in order to define objectives for compensation measures and to set out the success criteria to determine whether those objectives have been/are being achieved.
Effective	**Based on best scientific knowledge available alongside specific investigations for the location where the measures will be implemented**. Must be **feasible and operational in reinstating the conditions needed to ensure the overall coherence** of the Natura 2000 network. **Measures where no reasonable guarantee of success should not be considered**. The likely success of the compensation scheme should influence final approval of the plan or project in line with the prevention principle. The **most effective option, with the greatest chance of success, must be chosen**. **Detailed monitoring required** to ensure long-term effectiveness with remediation provisions if shown to be less effective.	Scientific evaluation of proposed measures must be carried out before consent is granted to avoid agreeing to measures that is/are not effective or technically feasible. This should include appropriate baseline survey and assessment. Compensation must address the impacted SPAs features to ensure overall coherence of the network for that feature is maintained. Substitution is not acceptable. Must be clearly defined timescales for delivery and measuring success (See success criteria under Targeted above). Monitoring must directly relate to the target species and the relevant ecological functions and processes. The compensation measures should be provided in perpetuity in line with obligations to ensure the overall coherence of the UK Site Network is maintained. Where it is not possible to devise compensatory measures to offset the adverse effects on site integrity, the project should not proceed.
Technical feasibility	**Design must follow scientific criteria and evaluation** in line with best scientific knowledge and take into account the specific requirements of the ecological features to be reinstated.	See **Effective** above.
Extent	Extent required **directly related to**:	Based on an assessment of the necessary ecological requirements to restore species' populations and the related habitat structure and functions identified in the compensation objectives. Determining the minimum

EC criteria	EC guidance summary (emphasis added)	RSPB Scotland additional commentary
	- the **quantitative and qualitative aspects inherent to the elements of integrity likely to be impaired** - **estimated effectiveness of the measure(s)** Therefore, ratios best set on a case-by-case basis. Ratios should generally be well above 1:1. Ratios of 1:1 or below only considered when shown measures will be fully effective in reinstating structure and functionality in a short period of time.	appropriate quantity will require an understanding of the quality of the compensation measures and how effective they will be in reinstating the required structures and functions. Any identified uncertainty in success should be factored in to increased ratios. Ratios need to be used where they make ecological sense and will help secure a successful outcome by providing more of something. Simply multiplying capacity to address uncertainty risks giving a false level of confidence. If there is no reasonable guarantee of success that measure should not be considered (see **Effective** under EC criteria).
Location	**Located in areas where they will be most effective** in maintaining overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network. Pre-conditions to be met include: - **must be within same range/ migration route/wintering areas for bird species** and **provide functions comparable those justifying selection of original site esp. geographical distribution**; - **must have/be able to develop the ecological structure and functions required by the relevant species** (or habitat) - **must not jeopardise integrity of any other Natura 2000 site**. Spatial search hierarchy starting as close as possible to the impacted Natura 2000 site and working out from there.	While the preference is for compensation measures as geographically close to the location of the damage, it is important to consider whether or not the compensation measures will be subject to pressures impacting their efficacy in that location e.g. prey availability, disturbance, and/or other impacts from the same or similar developments such as collision risk or displacement due to offshore wind farms. Therefore, compensation measures should be located so as to maximise proximity while minimising external pressures that may reduce likelihood of success. Compensation measures proposed to benefit SPA features must not result in damage to the integrity of any other SPA, SAC or Ramsar site and their features.
Timing	Case by case approach but **must provide continuity in the ecological processes essential to maintain the structure and functions that contribute to the Natura 2000 network coherence**. Requires **tight co-ordination between implementation of the plan or project and the compensation measures**. Factors to consider include: - **no irreversible damage to the site before compensation in place**	Compensation measures should be fully functional before any damage occurs to ensure the overall coherence of the UK Site Network is protected. This requires careful alignment of the timelines for implementing the plan or project and the compensation measures. Suggested time lags in delivering fully functional compensation will need to be carefully considered and can only be accepted where this will not compromise the continuity of essential ecological processes, Any effect of delay should be factored into the design and additional compensation measures provided (see also **Extent** above).

EC criteria	EC guidance summary (emphasis added)	RSPB Scotland additional commentary
	- **compensation operational at the time damage occurs**. If not possible, over-compensation required - **time lags only admissible if will not compromise objective of "no net loss" to coherence of Natura 2000 network**; - May be possible to scale down in time depending on whether the negative effects are expected to arise in short, medium or long term. **All technical, legal or financial provisions must be completed before plan or project implementation starts** to prevent unforeseen delays that compromise effective compensation measures.	
Long-term implementation	**Legal and financial security required for long-term implementation** and **for protection, monitoring and maintenance of sites to be secured before impacts occur.**	Legal rights to secure and implement the compensation measures must be in place prior to consent being granted. And robust financial guarantees are required to fund implementation, monitoring and any necessary remediation measures.

Table 1: Criteria for designing compensatory measures

Commentary on measures proposed

We have considered the Compensation Road Map as part of the application package. The impacts identified from the RIAA indicate that AEOSI cannot be ruled out in relation to Gannet at Forth Islands SPA and Outer Firth of Forth and st Andrews Bay Complex. In addition, AEOSI cannot be ruled out for Kittiwake at East Caithness Cliffs SPA, Flamborough Head SPA and West Westray SPA.

While the developers' methodology does not indicate AEOSI on Razorbill, the use of the NatureScot model does. Consequently, compensation id offered on a 'without prejudice basis) for Razorbill at Seas off St Kilda SPA and St Kilda SPA.

The proposal is based upon a Roadmap that sets out a range of generic measures. A long list includes:

1.4. Predator eradication

1.5. Expansion of UK site network

1.6. Nesting provision and enhancement

1.7. Reducing human pressure

1.8. Food availability (fisheries based measures)

1.9. Avian predator management

1.10. Supplementary feeding

These measures were further analysed creating an actual shortlist of:

1.11. Mammalian predator management

1.12. Corvid Management

1.13. Disturbance reduction management

1.14. Bycatch mitigation

While we are supportive in principle of mink/rat control measures as the second short listed measure, RSPB Scotland requires further details to determine whether it is acceptable to be used as a compensation measure for seabirds. Results from a number of studies have shown varying effects of mink control on seabirds. In the Scottish West Coast, terns have shown higher breeding success at controlled sites, compared to uncontrolled sites (Ratcliffe et al., 2006[2]; Ratcliffe et al., 2008[3]). In the Archipelago National Park, Finland, Mink have been controlled since the 1990s. The effect it has had on biodiversity has been substantial, with many seabirds, land birds, and water birds having benefited from it (Nordstrom et al., 2003; Banks et al., 2008). Of the seabirds at this site, Great Black-backed Gulls have not shown signs of change since the control, Razorbills have recolonised the sites, and Arctic Skuas, Arctic Terns and Common Gulls have increased their breeding success.

Regarding bycatch mitigation we are aware that some efforts are being made to look at this issue elsewhere in Europe but would welcome approaches that engage directly with the Scottish fisheries fleet to ensure a clear connection and relationship between the sites and species impacted and the measures being proposed.

At this stage the measures appear largely based on a theoretical approach with no substantive measures investigated for at locations. Consequently, submission of, and consultation on additional information is required to ensure that full consideration of legally, ecologically and financially appropriate (and possible) compensation measures relating to the SPAs and their species that are predicted to be affected by the Application and only if these are not feasible should alternative solutions be considered. The current level of detail while referring to specific islands with potential for predator eradication is generic with the presence (or extent) of predators unconfirmed on some sites. At this point in time the nature of the generic nature of the compensation proposals means that it is not possible to make an informed response on their adequacy. Consequently, RSPB Scotland objects to the compensation proposals as they currently stand.

RSPB Scotland would welcome further detail on the measures proposed so that an assessment can be made of their efficacy and quantity as well as the geographic relation with the impacts that are predicted to occur. We would also recommend that the developer utilises strategic compensation through the Marine Recovery Fund, once available, particularly given the very early stage that the measure appear to be at.

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[2] Ratcliffe, N., Houghton, D., Mayo, A., Smith, T., Scott, M., 2006. The breeding biology of terns on the western isles in relation to mink eradication. Atlantic Seabirds 8, 127-135

[3] Ratcliffe, N., Craik, C., Helyar, A., Roy, S., Scott, M., 2008. Modelling the benefits of American Mink Mustela vison management options for terns in west Scotland. Ibis 150, 114-121

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

From: Planning.North <Planning.North@sepa.org.uk>
Sent: 16 March 2026 16:22
To: MD Marine Licensing <MD.MarineLicensing@gov.scot>
Subject: PCS-20008310 SEPA Response to MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

To Whom It May Concern,

Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
MD-00011742 & MD-00011743
Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm
Isle of Lewis

Based on the information provided, it appears that this application falls below the thresholds for which SEPA provide site specific advice. Please refer to our standing advice for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Marine Scotland on marine consultations available here.

Kind regards,
[Redacted]

Senior Planning Officer



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Dh'fhaodadh gum bi am fiosrachadh sa phost-d seo agus ceanglachan sam bith a tha na chois dìomhair, agus cha bu chòir am fiosrachadh a bhith air a chleachdadh le neach sam bith ach an luchd-faighinn a bha còir am fiosrachadh fhaighinn. Chan fhaod neach sam bith eile cothrom fhaighinn air an fhiosrachadh a tha sa phost-d no a tha an cois a' phuist-d, chan fhaod iad lethbhreac a dhèanamh dheth no a chleachdadh arithist. Mura h-ann dhuibhse a tha am post-d seo, feuch gun inns sibh dhuinn sa bhad le bhith cur post-d gu postmaster@sepa.org.uk. Togalach Aonghais Mhic a' Ghobhainn, 6 Craobhraid Parklands, Eurocentral, Baile a' Chuilinn, Siorrachd Lannraig a Tuath, ML1 4WQ. Faodar conaltradh còmhla ri SEPA a sgrùdadh no a chlàradh no a sgaoileadh gus obrachadh èifeachdach an t-siostaim a ghlèidheadh agus airson adhbharan laghail eile.

Shawbost Community Council

SHAWBOST COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Representing the Communities of Arnol to Dail Beag, Isle of Lewis

4 May 2026

Marine Licensing Operations Team (MS-LOT)
Marine Scotland
375 Victoria Road
Aberdeen AB11 9DB

RE: FORMAL OBJECTION — Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Northwest of Lewis - 00011742 & 00011743

Introduction and Standing of the Objecting Body

Shawbost Community Council ("the Community Council") is a community council established under Part IV of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and is the recognised statutory community representative body for the villages from Arnol to Dail Beag on the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides. The Community Council submits this formal objection to the above-referenced marine licence application on behalf of those communities.

This objection is submitted in relation to application reference 00011742 & 00011743, submitted by Spiorad na Mara Limited on 2 March 2026, concerning offshore transmission infrastructure for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Northwest of Lewis.

2. Summary of Objection

The Community Council objects to this application on the following principal grounds, each of which is developed in detail in the sections below:

(a) Inadequacy of the Pre-Application Consultation process as measured against the requirements of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, the Marine Licensing (Pre-Application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, and the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/115);

(b) Failure to satisfy the public participation and community engagement standards required by the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/101) and the Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/455) as applicable to the associated Section 36 consent process under the Electricity Act 1989;

(c) Failure to consult affected local communities or their community council representatives at the critical upstream stages of N4 site selection under the Sectoral Marine Plan (2020) and the subsequent ScotWind leasing round in 2022, which determined the location of this development and which should properly have engaged community councils before decisions were made;

(d) A materially false and unsupported assertion, made by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in its 2020 consultation response on the draft Sectoral Marine Plan, that the local population was supportive of large-scale offshore wind deployment at N4, a claim not based on any survey of affected community councils, directly contradicted by the Community Council's own experience and now further contradicted by the Scottish Government's own 2025 consultation analysis report;

(e) Demonstrable and strong opposition within the affected community, which has not been assessed or recorded by the applicant, and which constitutes a material consideration that Scottish Ministers are obliged to weigh in the determination of this application;

(f) Concern that the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted with this application cannot properly reflect community knowledge, concerns, and local environmental data where no engagement with community representatives has taken place.

Failure to Consult Community Councils at the N4 Site Selection Stage

The Community Council wishes to draw Scottish Ministers' attention to a fundamental democratic deficit that predates this application and which has shaped the entire trajectory of the Spiorad na Mara development: communities in the villages from Arnol to Dail Beag were never consulted, either by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar or by any other body, about whether the N4 plan option area, immediately adjacent to their coastline, should be selected for offshore wind development.

The Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy was adopted by the Scottish Government in October 2020. It identified N4 (now described as the area to the north-west of Lewis) as one of 15 Plan Options capable of supporting commercial-scale offshore wind development. The Sectoral Marine Plan was the document that placed N4 on the path to leasing and ultimately to the development now before Scottish Ministers as this application.

The Crown Estate Scotland ScotWind leasing round followed in January 2022, when Option Agreements for area N4 (described as west of Lewis, between Carloway and Barvas) were awarded to Northland Power. The lease was awarded without any consultation with the Community Council or with the communities it represents. Neither the Scottish Government's Sectoral Marine Plan process nor the Crown Estate Scotland leasing process sought or obtained the views of Shawbost Community Council on whether N4 was a suitable location for this scale of offshore wind development, or on how the development would affect the communities within sight of and adjacent to it.

The Community Council submits that this failure at the upstream planning and leasing stages is highly material to the present application. When communities have not been consulted about the fundamental question of whether a site should be developed, requiring them to object at the marine licence application stage, after leases have been sold, investment committed, and applications prepared, places an unfair and disproportionate burden on those communities. Scottish Ministers should give this context full weight in the determination of this application.

The Unsupported Assertion of Community Support for N4

The Community Council draws Scottish Ministers' attention to a specific and material inaccuracy in the public record that has been allowed to go unchallenged and which may have influenced decisions made about this development at the plan and leasing stages.

In the consultation on the draft Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (December 2019 to March 2020), Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submitted a consultation response which included the following assertion about N4: that the local population of Lewis had accepted the visual impact of onshore wind development and was therefore prepared for, and supportive of, large-scale deployment of offshore wind off Lewis.

This assertion was made by the Comhairle in its own voice, as a local authority body, without any evidence that it had surveyed, consulted, or sought the views of the

community councils representing the villages most directly affected by N4, including Shawbost Community Council. The Comhairle's response to the draft Sectoral Marine Plan consultation was submitted without asking our Community Council for its views. The claim that the local population was prepared for and supportive of this development was, in respect of the communities we represent, factually wrong and without evidential foundation.

This matters because the Sectoral Marine Plan itself acknowledged that N4 is located relatively close to shore and presents a higher potential visual impact than other plan options. The Comhairle's assertion of community support was therefore a significant and positive factor in the case for retaining N4 as a plan option. If that assertion had been tested against the actual views of community councils in the affected villages, a materially different picture would have emerged.

The Scottish Government's own evidence now confirms that community opposition to N4 is substantial. The Consultation Analysis Report for the draft updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy, published in November 2025, recorded that more than half of all respondents, primarily individuals, raised specific opposition to the N4 Option Area. It further recorded 121 individual responses opposing N4 from residents in the Isle of Lewis and Western Isles, along with concerns about impacts on fisheries, tourism, community cohesion, cultural identity, Gaelic language and traditions, and mental health. The report also noted a widespread perception of inadequate consultation with island communities.

The Community Council submits that the 2025 consultation analysis confirms what the Community Council has known throughout: the communities of the west side of Lewis are not, and have never been, supportive of the N4 development in the manner asserted by the Comhairle in 2020. Scottish Ministers should take this into account both in weighing the history of this application and in assessing the reliability of any assertions of community support made in the documentation submitted with this application.

Strength and Extent of Community Opposition

The Community Council holds formal meetings every two months. These meetings are open to the public, and members of the public are welcome to attend. The normal pattern of public attendance at Community Council meetings is modest, reflecting the low-key nature of most routine business. However, there is a clear and consistent exception to this pattern: on every occasion that the agenda has included any item relating to the Spiorad na Mara wind farm proposals, the meeting has been attended by approximately up to 50 members of the public.

A public attendance of this scale, representing a significant proportion of the adult population of the communities served by the Community Council is, in the Community Council's experience, exceptional, and is a direct and reliable indicator of the depth of feeling that exists within the community on this issue. The Community Council can confirm unequivocally that the clear and consistent view expressed at these meetings by community members is one of opposition to the Spiorad na Mara proposals, including the offshore transmission infrastructure the subject of this application.

Under the Electricity Act 1989, Schedule 8, Scottish Ministers have the power to direct that a public local inquiry be held where material objections are raised. The Community Council respectfully submits that the level of community opposition to this development is such that, should the application proceed, Scottish Ministers should give serious consideration to whether a public local inquiry is warranted, to allow the community a proper opportunity to present its concerns and to test the applicant's case.

Adequacy of the Environmental Impact Assessment

The application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment comprising three volumes, submitted on 11 March 2026. Members of the Community Council have spend hours upon hours reviewing these documents. The Community Council submits, as a matter of principle, that an EIA which has been prepared in the absence of any engagement with local community representatives cannot properly capture local environmental knowledge, the cumulative concerns of communities living adjacent to the development area, or the full range of environmental sensitivities that local residents would be in a position to identify.

The requirement under the Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 and the Marine Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 for public participation to form part of the EIA process is not merely procedural: it is substantive. Environmental information gathered from communities, relating to marine ecology, traditional land use, fishing patterns, seabird movements, coastal erosion, and community reliance on the marine environment, may be material to the conclusions reached by Scottish Ministers on the significant effects of the development.

Views received from community members in response to the Community Council making public they were going to put in an objection to the proposal.

“I wish for my comments to be included in the local community response to the offshore windfarm planning application.

The scale in area and height of the proposed turbines is completely detrimental to the view from our house in [Redacted], Shawbost. In addition, the impact on the seabed and wildlife appears to have been ignored by the developers.

I am in favour of alternative forms of energy and a move away from fossil fuels but this developmental is far too large and close to the shoreline.

I propose that a smaller scale windfarm is developed halfway across the Barvas Moor. This could be developed to include walking and bike trails plus a visitor centre. A real benefit to the community and a tourist attraction.

regards,
[Redacted]

“I would like to say that I object to this windfarm too .i won’t say why as i feel the same as those reasons of those who also object and i will just be repeating everything.

[Redacted]

Requests and Conclusions

In light of the above, Shawbost Community Council formally requests that Scottish Ministers:

(a) Record this objection formally against this application and give it such weight as is appropriate in the determination of the application;

(c) Satisfy themselves that the Pre-Application Consultation Report submitted with this application adequately demonstrates compliance with the Marine Licensing (Pre-Application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, having regard to the absence of engagement with the Community Council;

(d) Satisfy themselves that the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted with this application meets the requirements of the Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 and the Marine Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, in particular as regards public participation;

(e) Have regard to the failure to consult community councils at the N4 site selection stage under the Sectoral Marine Plan process and the ScotWind leasing round, and to the absence of any genuine evidential foundation for the assertion of community support for N4 made in the 2020 Sectoral Marine Plan consultation;

(f) Consider whether, in light of the level of community opposition and the history of inadequate community engagement throughout this process, a Public Local Inquiry should be convened under Schedule 8 of the Electricity Act 1989 before any decision is made;

(g) Keep the Community Council informed of all stages of this application, including all consultation responses, representations, and any hearings or procedural steps in connection with the application.

We would be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

Chair, Shawbost Community Council
On behalf of Shawbost Community Council
Representing the communities of Arnol to Dail Beag, Isle of Lewis

Contact email: shawbostcc@gmail.com

Address: [Redacted]

South Bragar Grazings Committee

SOUTH BRAGAR GRAZINGS COMMITTEE

Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides

[Redacted]

FORMAL OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION

Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

TO: Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations Team

Scottish Government, 375 Victoria Road, Aberdeen, AB11 9DB

MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

FROM: South Bragar Grazings Committee, Isle of Lewis

DATE: 6th May 2026

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis.

South Bragar Grazings Committee (hereafter 'the Committee') submits this formal objection to the application by Spiorad na Mara Limited (a subsidiary of Southland Power (75.5%) and ESB (24.5%)) for consent to construct and operate an offshore wind farm located approximately 5–13 kilometres off the west coast of the Isle of Lewis.

LEGISLATIVE & POLICY FRAMEWORK

The application is made under the following legislative framework:

• Electricity Act 1989 (sections 36 and 36A): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/29/contents

• The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/101): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/101/contents

• The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/455): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1990/455/contents/made

• Marine (Scotland) Act 2010: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents

• The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (SSI 2017/115): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/115/contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The Committee acts for the shareholders of common grazing land associated with crofts within the village of South Bragar. It has statutory responsibility for the regulation and management of the grazings, including maintaining appropriate grazing regimes and habitat condition in accordance with crofting law and environmental designations.

The grazings comprise coastal machair, heathland, and areas within the Lewis Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) and are managed under an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) agreement with NatureScot and the Scottish Government. They form part of the functional ecological system supporting SPA qualifying species.

The Committee has reviewed the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and registers objection based on concerns regarding both the Habitats Regulations Appraisal and the adequacy of the EIA.

2. HABITATS REGULATIONS, PROTECTED SPECIES & INTEGRITY OF THE SPA

Statutory Framework
Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, consent may only be granted where it has been established, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a European site. This is a precautionary legal test.

Functional Linkages, Supporting Habitat and AECS Management
A substantial proportion of the South Bragar grazing lies within the Lewis Peatlands SPA and is actively managed under an AECS agreement to support qualifying species and wider biodiversity. There is a clear ecological linkage between inland breeding areas within the SPA and marine feeding areas within the proposed development site. Impacts on these feeding grounds are therefore capable of affecting SPA populations and may also conflict with existing AECS management obligations. The compatibility of the proposal with these obligations has not been clearly demonstrated.

Potential for Adverse Effects on Protected Species
Key qualifying and protected species—including red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), corncrake (*Crex crex*), white-tailed sea eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), breeding waders, seabirds, migratory species, and marine mammals (European Protected Species)—may be affected.

The red-throated diver is especially sensitive to offshore wind projects. Potential impacts include:

- Displacement from feeding areas
- Disturbance during foraging
- Increased energetic costs

These effects may reduce foraging efficiency and, in turn, affect breeding success. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) does not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that impacts on these receptors have been fully assessed.

Conclusion on Integrity Test and Core Concerns
The developer asserts no significant harm; however, the application presents a fundamental contradiction. It claims “no impact” while simultaneously advancing a Derogation Case—a mechanism only invoked where significant adverse effects are anticipated. This inconsistency undermines the reliability of the assessment.

The Committee considers that it has not been demonstrated, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the Lewis Peatlands SPA.

3. SCALE, SEASCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT

The proposed turbines, at heights of up to 338 metres, would replace the natural horizon with a massive industrial presence. Because the turbines are so big and located so close to the shore, they would dominate the views from croft land, common grazings and family homes, destroying the sense of remoteness that has existed for generations.

The Committee considers that the EIA does not adequately assess:

- Effects on seascape character
- Visibility from crofting townships and working land
- The impact of aviation warning lighting on dark skies and night-time amenity

The scale of the visual change cannot be mitigated; it represents a permanent and unacceptable transformation of a sensitive seascape. These matters are relevant to national planning policy and landscape protection.

4. ADEQUACY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The South Bragar grazings include coastal machair and heathland which are used for grazing livestock, growing crops and for recreational activities. While adverse mental and physical health impacts on residents from Garenin to Ballantrushal due to noise and visual impacts during construction, from operational turbines, and during decommissioning are considered in the EIA, we wish to raise a significant concern regarding the failure to adequately assess the effects of the development on the health and wellbeing of individuals working outside on coastal land, and on livestock on the common grazings. We also wish to raise concerns that damage to cultural heritage has not been adequately assessed.

Human Health and Working Conditions

The grazings are a year-round working environment. The EIA does not adequately assess exposure to the combined noise and visual impacts on those working outside on the grazings. The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) carried out by Northland Power has not been published, although preliminary data

contained within Appendix 6.2 of the EIA identifies existing adverse impacts on mental health and wellbeing due to the unprecedented scale and proximity of the development to west side communities. This lack of transparency is a major gap and undermines the ability of competent authorities to perform a robust socio-economic and health evaluation as required under EIA regulations.

Livestock and Grazings

The EIA does not provide an assessment of noise impacts on livestock behaviour, welfare and management.

Cultural Heritage and Landscape Setting

This stretch of coastline is the heart of a living Gaelic culture. The current assessment treats sacred sites—such as the ancient cemetery in Bragar - as if they were static buildings rather than places of active community use and burial. Furthermore, the fact that this is a Gaelic-speaking community with an ancestral bond to the sea has been largely ignored. The Gaelic-speaking population meets the recognised definition of an Indigenous People, yet no "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" has been sought. Failing to assess the "cultural cost" ignores the rights of the community and the laws meant to protect island life. Some core issues:

- Ignoring Living Heritage: Sites like Bragar cemetery are treated as "static assets" rather than active places of burial and spiritual practice.
- Erasure of Gaelic Culture: There is no assessment of "intangible heritage". The language and traditions tied to this seascape have been overlooked.
- Failure to Seek Consent: No Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) has been sought from the community.
- Breach of Statutory Duty: No compliant Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) has been submitted, which is a legal requirement under the 2018 Act.

Fisheries

The developer assumes that local fishermen can simply move to other grounds but provides no evidence that those areas are available or can support the extra pressure. The EIA fails to demonstrate compliance with NPF4 Policy 11 and National Marine Plan Policy GEN 4.

5. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The cumulative visual and environmental impact of Spiorad na Mara in combination with other offshore and onshore wind energy developments proposed or consented in the Isle of Lewis has not been adequately assessed. The combined effect on the landscape, seascape, ecology, and communities of Lewis and Harris must be considered in totality by the Scottish Ministers.

6. CONCLUSION AND FORMAL REQUEST

South Bragar Grazings Committee objects to the granting of consent for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm. The development as proposed would cause severe, permanent, and irreversible harm to the natural beauty of this coastline; to Schedule 1 protected species dependent on the South Bragar grazings; to the AECS contract obligations of the Committee; to the marine environment; and to the cultural heritage of the west side of Lewis.

The Committee formally requests that the Scottish Ministers refuse consent for the application.

The Committee reserves the right to submit further representations as the application progresses, and requests to be notified of all future submissions, consultee responses, and procedural steps including any Public Local Inquiry.

Signed on behalf of South Bragar Grazings Committee

Name (Print): [Redacted]

Signature:

Position: **Chairman**

Date: 6th May 2026

Contact Address: [Redacted]

Scottish Fishermen's Federation

Our Ref: OB MD-00011742 and MD-00011743 Spiorad na Mara OWF EIA/0026/001

Your Ref: MD-00011742 and MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation

Scottish Fishermen's Federation
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E: sff@sff.co.uk

www.sff.co.uk

21st May 2026

Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations Team
Scottish Government
E-mail: MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

SFF Response to MD-00011742 and MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the statutory consultation on the applications submitted by Spiorad na Mara Limited for Section 36 consent and associated Marine Licences to construct and operate the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm.

The SFF represents the 450 plus fishing vessels through its constituent associations, including the Anglo Scottish Fishermen's Association (ASFA), Fife Fishermen's Association, Fishing Vessel Agents and Owners Association, Mallaig & North West Fishermen's Association (MNWFA), Orkney Fisheries Association (OFA), Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association (SPFA), the Scottish White Fish Producer's Association (SWFPA) and Shetland Fishermen's Association (SFA).
SFF recognises the role of offshore renewable energy in contributing to Scotland's climate and energy objectives. However, SFF emphasises that such development must proceed in a manner consistent with statutory marine planning duties, including the safeguarding of existing and legitimate marine uses, particularly commercial fishing.

Summary Position
Having reviewed the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and supporting documentation, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) considers that the impacts on commercial fisheries have not yet been sufficiently avoided, reduced or secured at application stage to support conclusions of no significant residual effect.

While the EIAR identifies commercial fisheries as a sensitive receptor and acknowledges material impacts across the construction, operation and decommissioning phases, SFF's assessment is that these impacts are consistently under-represented in significance conclusions. This arises primarily from reliance on retained design flexibility, assumptions regarding recovery and adaptation and the deferral of fisheries-critical decisions and mitigation to post-consent plans and management frameworks.

In particular, SFF considers that the EIAR does not yet provide sufficient certainty regarding long-term access to fishing grounds, seabed functionality or the cumulative and enduring effects of displacement over the Project lifetime. The assessment framework places substantial reliance on future liaison and adaptive management, rather than on defined, outcome-based mitigation embedded within the project design and assessed prior to determination.

Accordingly, SFF does not consider that the EIAR, as submitted, provides a sufficiently robust or precautionary evidence base to enable the requirements of the EIA Regulations to be met in respect of commercial fisheries. SFF therefore requests further clarification, reduced design uncertainty and strengthened, enforceable mitigation to address long-term and cumulative fisheries impacts before determining the applications.

Policy and Legal Context[1]

SFF notes that Chapter 2 provides an extensive catalogue of energy and climate policy but affords noticeably less weight to policies relevant to commercial fishing and safeguarding existing marine uses. While climate and renewable energy policy is presented as shaping the context and scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment, EIA requirements are driven by the identification and assessment of likely significant effects rather than policy need alone.

While reference is made to the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy and Plan Option N4, the chapter does not adequately acknowledge that Plan Options are not allocations and do not imply consentability. The Sectoral Marine Plan[2] explicitly requires detailed project level scrutiny of impacts on commercial fishing activity and recognises that coexistence with existing users is conditional on design-stage decisions and effective mitigation. This conditionality and the extent to which residual risk to fisheries is managed through project-specific assessment rather than strategic plan identification is not sufficiently reflected in Chapter 2.

Fisheries specific policies within the National Marine Plan[3] are referenced only at a high level and are largely presented descriptively. These policies are not actively applied to inform the assessment logic, policy weighting or impact conclusions within the EIAR. As a result, the chapter does not explain how competing policy objectives, including the safeguarding of existing uses and the promotion of renewable energy are to be balanced at project level. This creates an imbalanced policy framing that risks pre-empting impact acceptability through strategic renewable energy policy emphasis rather than through lawful project-level assessment.

SFF further notes that Chapter 2 frames international obligations almost exclusively through climate and renewable energy policy with no reference to the wider international legal framework governing marine space use and the protection of existing activities. In particular, there is no acknowledgement of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)[4] which establishes principles of sustainable use, environmental protection and the management of living marine resources, nor of international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity[5] to conserve marine biodiversity and ecosystem services that support fisheries.

While these instruments are not directly determinative of consent decisions, they provide important context for domestic legislation and marine policy and reinforce the requirement for balanced, ecosystem-based decision-making. The omission of this broader international context contributes to the overall policy

[1] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 1a, Chapter 2: Policy and Legislative Context. WSP, February 2026

[2] Scottish Government (2020) Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy

[3] Scottish Government (2015) Scotland's National Marine Plan: A Single Framework for Managing Our Seas.

[4] United Nations (1982) United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), adopted 10 December 1982, entered into force 16 November 1994

[5] United Nations (1992) Convention on Biological Diversity, adopted 5 June 1992, entered into force 29 December 1993

imbalance identified by SFF, whereby climate and energy objectives are emphasised without equivalent consideration of international principles relating to the safeguarding of fisheries, marine ecosystems and livelihoods.

Under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, National Marine Plan (2015) and Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy, decision making must:

- apply the principles of sustainable development
- safeguard existing uses of the sea where possible
- ensure co existence between sectors
- assess project level impacts independently of strategic plan identification.

While SFF acknowledges that the Project lies within a Sectoral Marine Plan option area, it is essential reiterate that Plan Options do not confer consentability and explicitly rely on detailed project-level assessment and effective mitigation to address impacts on commercial fisheries.

SFF further notes that, in determining the Section 36 application, the decision-maker must be satisfied that the duties under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 have been discharged, including having regard to the desirability of preserving fisheries interests and mitigating effects. SFF considers that the current EIAR does not yet provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that these duties have been discharged.

Project Description[6]

Chapter 3 confirms a very large spatial and temporal project footprint, including:

- an Array Area of approximately 161 km² and an overall Offshore Project Boundary of approximately 208 km²
- up to 350 km of array cabling
- extensive seabed preparation including boulder clearance, jack-up vessel interactions and anchoring
- construction over up to five years and operation for up to 35 years.

The Project Design Envelope allows for substantial and in several respects durable seabed intervention, including large-scale boulder clearance, repeated anchoring activities and extensive use of surface-laid and externally protected cable. The design envelope explicitly allows for up to 100% of offshore cables to be surface laid and up to 100% of those cables to require external protection with permanent placement of rock, mattresses and cable stabilisation at close intervals. While subsea cables are known to emit electromagnetic fields (EMF), the magnitude and ecological implications of EMF exposure remain subject to scientific uncertainty and are often derived from laboratory-based studies. However, reduced burial or the presence of surface-laid cables has the potential to increase EMF exposure relative to buried cables. In this context, and noting that Chapter 3 itself recognises EMF as a relevant pathway and that the Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan (FMMCP) acknowledges fisheries concerns regarding both EMF effects and snagging risks, the EIAR does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude with confidence that EMF related effects would be negligible, particularly for species associated with seabed habitats such as herring. Furthermore, irrespective of ecological significance thresholds, the presence of surface-laid or protected cables may contribute to increased risk perception and behavioural avoidance by fishers, reinforcing functional displacement over the operational life of the Project.

Chapter 3 also confirms that many fisheries-critical design decisions, including final cable routing, burial depth, installation technique, extent of external protection, anchoring arrangements and aspects of decommissioning, are deferred to post-consent plans and future assessment processes.

SFF considers that the scale of design flexibility retained within Chapter 3 introduces substantial uncertainty for commercial fishing activity across the construction, operational and decommissioning phases. This approach transfers long term spatial, operational and safety related risk from the Developer to the fishing

[6] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 1a, Chapter 3: Project Description. WSP, February 2026

sector over the lifetime of the Project and does not provide sufficient certainty at application stage to support robust conclusions regarding residual effects.

Consideration of Alternatives[7]

SFF notes that the consideration of alternatives presented in Chapter 4 has been driven primarily by engineering feasibility, landscape and visual considerations, ecological sensitivities, grid connection requirements and generation objectives.

While commercial fishing is repeatedly identified within constraints mapping and appraisal processes, there is no evidence that the avoidance of fishing grounds materially influenced array location, turbine layout, foundation placement or offshore and nearshore cable routing at an early stage of project development. Commercial fishing is treated predominantly as a constraint to be accommodated rather than a receptor to be avoided through site or design selection.

The Project objectives that frame the alternatives assessment place strong emphasis on maximising generation, efficient use of seabed within the N4 Plan Option and delivery of fixed-bottom offshore wind, with no equivalent objective relating to safeguarding existing fishing activity or minimising displacement. As a result, alternatives are tested against objectives that are already weighted towards project delivery rather than genuine coexistence.

Where refinements have been undertaken that relate to fishing activity, including the reduction of the Offshore Cable Area of Search, these are incremental and retain routing through recognized fishing grounds. No realistic lower-impact alternatives such as reduced development extent, exclusion of high-intensity fishing areas or alternative cable strategies designed to minimise long-term spatial exclusion are meaningfully examined.

The outcome is an approach in which impacts on commercial fishing are managed at the mitigation stage, through post-consent refinement and future plans, rather than avoided or minimised through robust site and design selection. This approach reflects the Project Design Envelope described in Chapter 3, which retains wide flexibility over layout, cable routing, burial depth, protection measures and installation methods. In SFF's view, the retention of such flexibility limits the extent to which reasonable alternatives can be meaningfully assessed at application stage and serves to transfer design and spatial risk from the Applicant to the fishing sector over the lifetime of the Project and is contrary to mitigation hierarchy principles that require avoidance and minimisation to be embedded within site and design selection.

SFF notes that the purpose of an alternatives assessment within EIA process is to inform decision-making by presenting reasonable options and their environmental implications prior to consent and that reliance on post-consent refinement and future plans cannot substitute for the examination of reasonable alternatives at application stage.

Approach to Environmental Impact Assessment[8]

Chapter 5 places strong emphasis on delivery of a "proportionate EIA", reliance on professional judgement, scoping decisions and screening processes to exclude effects considered not likely to be significant. While proportionality is an established principle of EIA, SFF notes that the way it is applied in Chapter 5 goes beyond proportionate reporting and materially influences the scope of impacts taken forward for assessment.

SFF is concerned that these methodological choices disproportionately affect commercial fisheries, where impacts are typically diffuse, cumulative, socio-economic and long-term rather than acute, localised or biophysical. The EIA approach, including the reliance on a source-pathway-receptor model is well suited to

[7] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 1a, Chapter 4: Consideration of Alternatives. WSP, February 2026

[8] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 1a, Chapter 5: Approach to Environmental Impact Assessment. WSP, February 2026

assessing discrete physical and ecological effects but is less effective at capturing displacement, loss of access, operational constraint and cumulative economic effects experienced by fishing activity.

Chapter 5 also places significant reliance on professional judgement in the evaluation and downgrading of effects, particularly where effects are identified as "potentially significant". SFF notes that, within the EIAR, effects of moderate significance are defined as "potentially significant" with professional judgement subsequently applied to determine whether such effects are ultimately considered significant or not. This approach introduces an additional layer of judgement beyond the significance matrix set out in Chapter 5 and applied within the Commercial Fisheries assessment. While definitions of significance can vary between assessments, SFF considers that the classification of moderate effects as only "potentially significant", combined with reliance on professional judgement to determine whether such effects are significant or not, risks effectively limiting the identification of significant effects to those assessed as major. This approach has the effect of reducing the number of impacts identified as significant and may understate the overall significance of effects, particularly for receptors such as commercial fisheries where impacts are diffuse, cumulative and long-term. For commercial fisheries, this judgement is frequently exercised following the assumption of future plan based measures, liaison mechanisms or adaptive management approaches, which are not embedded within the Project design at application stage.

Embedded mitigation for fisheries is minimal within the Project Design Envelope and is largely limited to commitments to future plans rather than spatial avoidance or design-stage measures. However, these future mechanisms are subsequently relied upon within the assessment framework to reduce magnitude and assign conclusions of non-significant residual effect. This approach sits uneasily with earlier chapters of the EIAR, which make clear that key project parameters including layout, cable routing, installation methods and protection measures remain subject to substantial post-consent refinement.

SFF notes that, taken together, the confidence expressed in Chapter 5 regarding the adequacy of the assessment relies on assumptions about design outcomes and mitigation effectiveness that are not resolved within the Project Description or the consideration of alternatives. As a result, the EIA methodology risks under-representing the true scale, duration and cumulative nature of impacts on commercial fisheries when informing the determination of the application and does not provide a sufficiently precautionary or transparent basis for decision-making at application stage.

Socio economics[9]

SFF notes that Chapter 6 treats commercial fishing largely as a secondary or downstream socio-economic effect with its conclusions heavily reliant on the findings of Chapter 21 (Commercial Fisheries). This approach risks under-representing fishing as a primary, place-based industry with high spatial dependency, limited adaptive capacity and long-term socio-cultural importance, particularly in west coast and island communities.

While headline employment and Gross Value Added (GVA) statistics are presented, these are largely derived from regional or national data and do not adequately reflect the concentration of fishing income, vessel dependency or the lack of alternative livelihoods available to affected fishing communities. The assessment does not include independent consideration of income loss, vessel viability or the resilience of fishing-dependent communities to sustained spatial displacement.

Displacement of fishing activity is implicitly treated as adaptive and economically neutral, without detailed assessment of how displacement may redistribute effort, increase operating costs or undermine the long-term sustainability of fishing businesses and associated onshore processing and supply chains. This contrasts with the detailed quantification of short-term construction and operational employment benefits presented elsewhere in the chapter.

[9] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 2a, Chapter 6: Socio-economics. ERM/A58, February 2026

Chapter 6 sets out sensitivity criteria which would objectively classify many fishing-dependent communities and sectors as highly sensitive, reflecting their reliance on natural resources, limited economic diversification, and constrained capacity to absorb change. However, this high sensitivity is not reflected in the conclusions on residual effects, which are consistently assessed as minor adverse and not significant in EIA terms. The chapter does not clearly explain how these conclusions reconcile with the sensitivity criteria applied.

SFF considers that, taken together, Chapter 6 does not fully reflect the socio-economic vulnerability of fishing communities identified elsewhere in the EIAR and contributes to an overall under-weighting of fisheries impacts in socio-economic terms. These matters should be given careful consideration when determining the applications and assessing whether the socio-economic effects of the Project on commercial fishing communities have been adequately characterised and mitigated.

The proximity of the Project to the coast (approximately 5–6 km offshore) means that the development will form a prominent and long-term feature within the nearshore environment experienced by west coast communities. These communities have strong cultural and economic ties to the marine and coastal environment and the EIAR recognises that changes to the visual and seascape setting have the potential to affect sense of place, tourism activity and community identity. SFF considers that this pathway is not fully reflected or carried through in the assessment of community-level and wider socio-economic effects.

SFF notes that the socio-economic conclusions in Chapter 6 rely on assumptions regarding adaptation, mitigation and impact duration that remain unresolved within the Project Design Envelope and fisheries assessment, limiting confidence that the socio-economic effects on fishing communities have been fully characterised at application stage.

Physical and Coastal Processes[10]

Chapter 9 concludes that sediment disturbance, seabed change and alterations to physical and coastal processes associated with the Project are localised, temporary and reversible and largely within the range of natural variability due to frequent remobilisation by tides and storm events. SFF does not dispute these conclusions in relation to physical process receptors or ecological recovery pathways. However, SFF notes that physical remobilisation and sediment recovery do not equate to restoration of fishing functionality. The repeated disturbance of sediments, storm-driven reworking of seabed material, and the long-term presence of seabed infrastructure may continue to inhibit safe gear deployment, constrain fishing access, and discourage fishing activity from returning to affected areas.

While Chapter 9 appropriately treats physical and coastal processes as impact pathways informing other topic assessments, the conclusions regarding reversibility and recovery are framed solely in physical and geomorphological terms. These conclusions do not fully account for the functional requirements of commercial fishing, where safety of gear deployment, predictability of seabed conditions and confidence in access are critical and may be affected long after physical recovery has occurred.

SFF notes that these longer-term functional constraints are recognised in Chapter 21 (Commercial Fisheries), but this distinction is not clearly reflected within Chapter 9. As a result, the conclusions of this chapter, while valid for physical processes, should not be relied upon as a proxy for recovery or acceptability of impacts on commercial fishing activity.

Marine Sediment and Water Quality[11]

SFF has reviewed Chapter 10 to assess consistency with the conclusions reached for commercial fisheries impacts in Chapter 21. SFF does not dispute the findings of Chapter 10 in relation to regulatory compliance

[10] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 2a, Chapter 9: Physical and Coastal Processes. WSP, February 2026

[11] Spiorad na Mara Ltd (2026) Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Volume 2a, Chapter 10: Marine Sediment and Water Quality. WSP, February 2026

with water and sediment quality standards including compliance with Environmental Quality Standards and Water Framework Directive objectives. However, it is important to distinguish between compliance with ecological thresholds and the functional sensitivity of commercial fishing activity.

Chapter 10 relies heavily on the temporary, localised and below-threshold nature of sediment disturbance to conclude that effects are not significant in EIA terms. For commercial fisheries, particularly inshore and static gear fleets, impacts arising from sediment disturbance are not defined by EQS compliance. Repeated low-level sediment mobilisation, substrate change and increased unpredictability of seabed conditions can materially affect gear deployment, fishing confidence and long-term access even where ecological recovery and regulatory compliance are achieved.

The assessment framework in Chapter 10 appropriately focuses on biophysical pathways and regulatory thresholds for marine sediment and water quality receptors. However, conclusions based on the absence of EQS exceedance or rapid physical recovery should not be interpreted as indicating the absence of functional impacts on fisheries, which operate on different temporal, spatial and risk-based sensitivities.

In addition, while sediment disturbance during operation and maintenance is assessed as negligible in Chapter 10 on the basis that individual events are of lower intensity than construction, Chapter 21 identifies that recurrent maintenance activities over a 35-year operational life, including cable repair, reburial and anchoring, can result in ongoing constraints on fishing activity. These cumulative and functional implications are not captured by event-based sediment assessments or regulatory compliance testing.

SFF therefore considers that conclusions reached in Chapter 10 should not be relied upon to infer that impacts on commercial fisheries are minor, temporary or fully reversible. The acceptability of effects on commercial fishing must be assessed on the basis of functional access, safety, confidence and long-term viability, as addressed in Chapter 21.

Benthic and Intertidal Ecology[12]

Chapter 11 assesses benthic and intertidal disturbance and recovery primarily in biological and ecological terms, based on habitat tolerance, resilience and natural recolonisation. SFF notes that the assessment does not rely on long-term exclusion of fishing activity as a recovery mechanism and appropriately evaluates recovery in relation to ecological structure and function.

However, the recovery timelines and conclusions presented in Chapter 11 do not account for the longer-term functional constraints on fishing activity identified in Chapter 21, including seabed obstruction, snag risk, altered substrate composition and behavioural avoidance by fishing vessels. These functional constraints are not intrinsic to ecological recovery metrics and fall outside the scope of the benthic ecology assessment.

SFF therefore notes that ecological recovery, as assessed in Chapter 11, should not be conflated with the restoration of fishing opportunity or the return of fishing functionality. While Chapter 11 conclusions are valid for benthic and intertidal ecology receptors, they cannot be relied upon to infer the acceptability or reversibility of impacts on commercial fishing activity which must be assessed separately.

Fish Ecology[13]

Chapter 12 assesses fish ecology in terms of biological response, population resilience, recovery and redistribution including behavioural avoidance, mobility and recolonisation. SFF does not dispute the ecological conclusions reached in this chapter, which appropriately consider fish responses across construction, operation and decommissioning phases. However, assumptions regarding fish mobility, behavioural recovery and redistribution should not be conflated with recovery of commercial fishing activity.

[12] Spiorad na Mara Limited (2026). Environmental Impact Assessment Report: Chapter 11 – Benthic and Intertidal Ecology, Volume 2a. prepared by WSP, February 2026

[13] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Chapter 12: Fish Ecology, Volume 2a, prepared by WSP, February 2026

Ecological recovery of fish populations does not equate to restoration of fishing access, operational viability or safety for fishing vessels, particularly where long-term seabed infrastructure remains in place.

SFF has reviewed Chapter 12 for consistency with the assessment of commercial fisheries impacts presented in Chapter 21. The endpoints assessed in these chapters are fundamentally different: Chapter 12 evaluates biological and population-level effects on fish, whereas Chapter 21 assesses access to fishing grounds, gear compatibility, vessel safety and economic viability. These functional considerations are not resolved by ecological recovery alone.

Chapter 12 characterises fish responses to the Project in terms of displacement, avoidance, redistribution and recovery, with many effects concluded to be localised, temporary and reversible once disturbance ceases. For migratory and highly mobile species, route flexibility and behavioural adaptation are emphasised, and population-level effects are assessed as not significant. While SFF does not dispute these ecological findings, Chapter 21 identifies that long-term constraints on fishing activity may arise independent of fish population recovery. These include the presence of surface-laid and externally protected cables, snag risk, altered seabed conditions and behavioural avoidance by fishers, which may persist throughout the operational life of the Project.

SFF further notes that conclusions within Chapter 12 regarding the limited and non-significant nature of effects are derived from an assessment framework focused on spatial extent, duration and ecological recovery of fish populations. While this approach is appropriate for ecological receptors, it does not capture the functional and operational characteristics of commercial fishing activity. In particular, the classification of effects as localised, temporary and reversible reflects biological processes rather than the persistence of infrastructure and associated changes in seabed characteristics. As such, these conclusions should not be relied upon to infer that effects on fishing activity will be similarly limited in extent or duration.

In this context, conclusions in Chapter 12 regarding fish resilience and recovery should not be relied upon, implicitly or explicitly, to infer that impacts on commercial fisheries are short-term, minor or fully reversible. The acceptability of impacts on commercial fishing must be assessed on the basis of functional access, safety and long-term viability as addressed in Chapter 21 and Chapter 6.

Commercial Fisheries[14]

Chapter 21 identifies a number of highly sensitive commercial fisheries receptors, particularly <12 m static gear fleets with strong spatial dependency, limited operational range and few viable alternative grounds. The baseline evidence confirms that fishing activity within and adjacent to the Project area is economically and operationally important, place-based, and not marginal or easily displaced.

The Chapter acknowledges a range of impacts that are material to these fleets, including:

- displacement and loss of access to established fishing grounds
- gear snagging risk and associated safety concerns
- increased steaming distances, crowding and interaction with other fleets
- repeated safety zone exclusion during construction and ongoing maintenance activities.

SFF notes, however, that despite the sensitivity of affected receptors and the scale and duration of impacts identified, significance conclusions are repeatedly downgraded to Minor Adverse and Not Significant through assumptions relating to temporariness, behavioural adaptation and the effectiveness of future mitigation. This is evidenced within the assessment itself, where impacts on high-sensitivity receptors such as <12 m static gear fleets are identified as Moderate Adverse (Significant) prior to the application of additional mitigation but are subsequently reduced to Minor Adverse (Not Significant) on the basis of assumed mitigation effectiveness.

[14] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Chapter 21: Commercial Fisheries, Volume 2a, prepared by NiMa Consultants Limited, February 2026

Baseline and importance of the fishery

SFF notes that Chapter 21 demonstrates that the Project area supports economically and operationally important fishing activity, particularly:

- <12 m static gear fleets with strong spatial dependency and limited alternative grounds
- landings values that are demonstrably material at local and regional scales
- reliance on functionally continuous fishing grounds rather than discrete locations.

SFF agrees that the baseline evidence confirms fishing activity within and adjacent to the Project area is neither marginal nor readily flexible.

SFF also wishes to draw attention to evidence provided through consultation with its constituent associations regarding the West of Scotland herring stock. While no active commercial fishery has taken place in recent years, reflecting stock management measures, including TAC constraints [15], industry representatives emphasise that this should not be interpreted as an absence of resource value or future activity. Given the Project's anticipated operational life of up to 35 years the potential for recovery or reactivation of this fishery cannot reasonably be discounted. As such, reliance on recent fisheries activity datasets used within the EIAR, which draw on recent patterns of activity alongside historic spatial datasets, risks under-representing future fisheries sensitivity and value within the Project area.

Industry evidence[16] further indicates that recent genetic analysis has demonstrated that West of Scotland and North Sea herring are not distinguishable as separate stocks, implying a shared and connected population. On this basis, it is reasonably inferred that migratory movements occur around the north of Lewis, including transit past the Butt of Lewis towards established spawning grounds to the south-west near Gallan Head. While the EIAR considers fish mobility and general behavioural response, it does not specifically assess the potential for large-scale array development to influence migratory connectivity for herring, including through behavioural avoidance or barrier effects. Given the scale and location of the array within a potentially important migratory route, SFF considers that this represents a gap in the assessment.

Construction phase impacts and displacement

SFF is concerned that the scale, duration and spatial dispersion of construction-phase exclusion, including rolling 500 m safety zones over a construction period of up to five years, is not fully reflected in impact magnitude or significance conclusions. While displacement of static gear fleets is acknowledged, it is repeatedly characterised as temporary without sufficient evidence that access or functionality will recover within meaningful timescales for highly place-dependent fleets. In particular, no time–area analysis is provided to demonstrate the cumulative effect of rolling exclusions across seasons and locations. Instead, significance is downgraded through reliance on professional judgement and assumptions of adaptation, an approach which underestimates practical consequences for inshore fleets with limited spatial resilience.

Operation and maintenance impacts

SFF is particularly concerned by the assumption that post-construction re-opening of navigational access equates to restoration of fishing activity. In practice, fishing access may remain constrained by:

- ongoing snag risk and risk perception associated with subsea infrastructure
- surface-laid and externally protected cables
- turbine spacing and gear geometry constraints
- recurring maintenance activities over a 35-year operational life.

Although Chapter 21 recognises the persistent presence of infrastructure, the assessment does not sufficiently account for behavioural avoidance or functional loss of fishing grounds. Ecological or physical recovery does not equate to restoration of fishing opportunity, particularly for static gear fleets.

Subsea cables and seabed infrastructure

[15] International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), Advice on West of Scotland herring stock (various years)

[16] Marine Scotland Science / ICES work on herring stock structure (genetic connectivity between North Sea and West of Scotland herring)

SFF highlights a fundamental disconnect between:

- the Project Design Envelope (Chapter 3), which allows extensive surface-laid and rock-protected cabling
- the fisheries assessment in Chapter 21, which repeatedly assumes effective burial and widespread resumption of fishing.

No minimum burial depths, protection limits or spatial constraints are secured at application stage. This creates ongoing uncertainty regarding long-term snagging risk and de facto exclusion from fishing grounds, yet this uncertainty is not reflected in residual significance conclusions.

SFF also highlights evidence from local fishing experience provided through consultation with constituent associations indicating that seabed conditions within parts of the Project area are characterised by hard ground which may significantly constrain the feasibility of achieving effective cable burial. Where burial is not technically achievable, greater reliance on surface-laid or externally protected cables would be required. This has direct implications for snag risk, gear interaction and long-term access to fishing grounds. While the EIAR recognises that cable installation methods, including burial or surface lay, will be determined by seabed conditions and informed by a Cable Burial Risk Assessment, it does not clearly define the likely extent or spatial distribution of areas where effective burial cannot be achieved within the Project area.
Furthermore, the Project Design Envelope allows for up to 100% of offshore cables to be surface-laid where seabed conditions are unsuitable for burial. However, this realistic worst-case scenario is not consistently reflected in the commercial fisheries assessment, which assumes that fishing activity will resume across substantial parts of the array following construction.
In the absence of secured burial parameters or explicit assessment of realistic worst-case outcomes reflecting seabed constraints, SFF considers that impacts associated with subsea infrastructure, including increased snag risk and the potential for long-term functional exclusion or constraint on fishing activity, are likely to be underestimated.

Overall significance

SFF considers that the significance conclusions presented in Chapter 21 do not logically follow from the sensitivity, scale and duration of impacts identified. In particular, the consistent reliance on future mitigation and liaison processes to reduce effects below significance threshold does not provide a sufficiently robust basis for concluding that impacts on highly sensitive fishing receptors are Minor Adverse or Not Significant at application stage.

These matters should be given careful consideration in determining whether the residual impacts on commercial fisheries have been adequately characterised and whether reliance on post-consent mitigation is appropriate to support consent. SFF notes that the conclusions of Chapter 21 are consistent with the limitations identified in Chapters 3 to 6 regarding design certainty, alternatives and reliance on post-consent mitigation and further demonstrate that retained uncertainty disproportionately affects highly sensitive fishing receptors.

Combined Effects Assessment[17]

SFF notes that Chapter 23 considers combined effects only within the Offshore Project itself and explicitly excludes consideration of in-combination effects with other offshore developments. In addition, the combined effects assessment is heavily constrained by methodologies that focus on spatial overlap and concurrent impacts, rather than sequential, long-term or spatially cumulative pressures.

SFF considers that this approach does not adequately reflect the way in which impacts on commercial fisheries are experienced in practice. Fishing impacts are typically cumulative, place-based and progressive, arising from repeated displacement, loss of access and spatial squeeze over time, rather than from concurrent or coincident impact pathways alone.

[17] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Chapter 23: Combined Effects Assessment, Volume 2a, prepared by WSP, February 2026

Within Chapter 23, combined effects on fisheries are screened out on the basis that individual residual impacts identified in Chapter 21 are assessed as Minor Adverse and Not Significant. However, these residual conclusions are themselves contingent on assumptions regarding temporariness, adaptation and the effectiveness of future mitigation. The combined effects assessment does not independently test whether these impacts interact or compound across the full 45-year project lifecycle, including construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning.
In particular:

- cumulative loss of access and progressive spatial squeeze resulting from sequential project phases are not assessed
- assumptions of recovery between project phases are applied, despite the continuous presence of infrastructure and recurring maintenance activities
- no time-area or temporal intensity analysis is provided to examine how rolling exclusions and displacement affect fisheries across seasons and years.

As a result, the conclusion that there are no significant combined effects on commercial fisheries at project lifetime scale is not supported by commensurate analysis. Chapter 23 relies entirely on the conclusions of Chapter 21 and does not provide an independent assessment of whether fisheries impacts, when considered cumulatively and over time, may exceed the significance identified for individual phases. SFF considers that this methodological approach under-represents the real-world cumulative displacement and constraint experienced by fishing fleets and does not provide a sufficiently robust basis for determining the acceptability of combined effects on commercial fisheries.

Summary of Likely Significant Residual Effects[18]

SFF notes that Chapter 24 concludes that there are no likely significant residual effects on commercial fisheries following the implementation of mitigation. While this reflects the post-mitigation significance classifications presented in the topic chapters, the summary does not convey the sensitivity of affected fishing receptors, the scale and duration of impacts identified, or the reliance on future, predominantly procedural mitigation set out elsewhere in the EIAR. In particular, the summary position does not reflect the detailed assessments in Chapters 21, 23 and 6, which identify highly sensitive fishing fleets, long-term operational constraints, potential cumulative displacement over the Project lifetime, and residual uncertainty associated with design flexibility and post-consent management. These underlying conditions are not apparent from the tabulated summary presented in Chapter 24.

SFF therefore considers that Chapter 24 understates residual risk and uncertainty in relation to commercial fisheries and should not be relied upon as a standalone summary when informing determination of the application. Any assessment of the acceptability of impacts on commercial fishing must be informed by the detailed analysis and assumptions set out in Chapters 21 and 23, rather than by the summary conclusions alone.

Summary of Offshore Mitigation[19]

SFF notes that Chapter 25 is relied upon heavily within the EIAR to support conclusions of no significant residual effects on commercial fisheries. While SFF welcomes commitments to early engagement, ongoing liaison and information sharing, including through the Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan (FMMCP), there is concern that the mitigation framework presented is predominantly procedural in nature. For commercial fisheries, the majority of measures set out in Chapter 25 relate to engagement, monitoring, plan development and adaptive management, rather than to the delivery of secured, outcome-based mitigation. Key project design elements with direct implications for fishing activity including cable burial depth, extent and location of external cable protection, protection methods and long-term

[18] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Chapter 24: Summary of Likely Significant Residual Effects, Volume 2a, prepared by WSP, February 2026
[19] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Chapter 25: Summary of Offshore Mitigation / Statement of Offshore EIA Commitments, Volume 2a, prepared by WSP, February 2026

access arrangements remain subject to post-consent refinement and are not fixed or constrained at application stage.
As a result, displacement and loss of access are not avoided or minimised through design-stage decision-making but are instead managed reactively through liaison and future plan-based mechanisms. SFF notes that plans and engagement processes, while important, cannot in themselves constitute mitigation capable of reducing impact magnitude or duration in EIA terms.

In addition, compensation and disruption arrangements for fisheries are expressly contingent on impacts being identified as significant within the EIA. Given that the EIAR concludes that residual impacts on commercial fisheries are not significant, this creates uncertainty as to whether such measures would be triggered in practice, despite the likelihood of ongoing displacement and operational constraint identified in Chapter 21.

SFF considers that the repeated deferral of fisheries-critical decisions to post-consent plans represent an approach that is procedural rather than precautionary and is inconsistent with the requirement for front-loaded assessment and mitigation within EIA. Reliance on the measures set out in Chapter 25 does not therefore provide a sufficiently robust basis for concluding that impacts on highly sensitive fishing receptors have been effectively mitigated at application stage.

Consultation and Scoping (Appendices 5.2 and 5.4)
SFF acknowledges the engagement activity undertaken to date with the fishing industry and statutory consultees. However, concerns raised at scoping and during consultation, including those relating to boulder clearance, the likelihood and effectiveness of cable burial and cumulative displacement of fishing activity, have not translated into secured design outcomes or embedded mitigation within the Project Design Envelope.
SFF notes that consultation processes, while an essential component of EIA, cannot substitute for substantive mitigation or design constraint where material impacts are identified. Engagement alone does not reduce impact magnitude or resolve uncertainty at application stage.
Scoping opinion commitments (Appendix 5.2)[20]
Appendix 5.2 demonstrates that several fisheries-related issues raised by Scottish Ministers and by the fishing industry at scoping stage remain unresolved within the submitted EIAR. In particular, matters relating to:

- the scale and location of boulder clearance
- the likelihood, effectiveness and durability of cable burial

- The potential for cumulative displacement of fishing activity has not been translated into sufficient design certainty or secured mitigation

These issues are carried through the assessment as matters to be addressed through future plans and post-consent refinement, rather than being resolved through front-loaded design decisions.
Consultation and engagement (Appendix 5.4)[21]
SFF acknowledges that engagement with the fishing industry has taken place and that this engagement has been participated in constructively. However, Appendix 5.4 primarily documents consultation processes rather than outcomes. It does not demonstrate how concerns raised by representative fisheries organisations have materially constrained, amended or fixed Project design parameters, nor does it clearly identify which issues remain unresolved at application stage.
SFF therefore considers that evidence of engagement should not be relied upon to infer acceptability of impacts on commercial fisheries in the absence of secured mitigation or design commitments capable of addressing the scale and duration of impacts identified elsewhere in the EIAR.

[20] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Appendix 5.2: Response to Scoping Opinion, Volume 1c, prepared by WSP, February 2026
[21] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Appendix 5.4: Offshore Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement, Volume 1c, prepared by ERM, February 2026

Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan (FMMCP)[22]

The SFF has reviewed the Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan (FMMCP) submitted in support of the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm application. The FMMCP is repeatedly relied upon within the EIAR to support conclusions of Minor Adverse or Not Significant residual effects on commercial fisheries.

SFF recognises the importance of effective liaison, communication and engagement with the fishing industry. However, the FMMCP, as submitted, is explicitly an outline and post consent framework. It is described as a "live" document, to be updated as project design evolves and following further agreement with stakeholders and the consenting authority including through ongoing monitoring, stakeholder engagement and approval by the consenting authority. As such, the FMMCP does not constitute mitigation capable of reducing impact magnitude within the EIA or being relied upon to inform conclusions of effect significance for the purposes of the EIA.

The measures set out within the FMMCP are predominantly procedural and process based. They do not constrain the project's design envelope or physical footprint which are the primary drivers of fisheries impacts, including displacement, loss of access and gear interaction risk. Key fisheries critical matters, including cable installation methodology, depth of burial, the use and extent of external cable protection, and mechanisms for resolving conflicts between fisheries interests and engineering or programme requirements are deferred to future plans to be developed post consent. SFF is therefore concerned that the FMMCP is treated within the EIAR as an embedded mitigation measure supporting conclusions of no significant residual effect. Plans to prepare future documents, undertake ongoing liaison or establish management frameworks cannot, in themselves, be relied upon as mitigation under the EIA Regulations. Reliance on post consent processes to address unresolved design and spatial uncertainties is premature and inconsistent with the requirement to demonstrate avoidance and minimisation of impacts prior to consent being granted.

The FMMCP also makes reference to guidance produced by the Fishing Liaison with Offshore Wind and Wet Renewables Group (FLOWW). SFF notes that FLOWW guidance does not form part of the statutory or policy framework for determination of applications under the Electricity Act 1989 or the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and does not constitute a material consideration in the consenting process. Assessment of mitigation adequacy must instead be undertaken against the relevant legislative and policy requirements endorsed by the Scottish Government, including the EIA Regulations and the duties arising under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act.

SFF also notes that the FMMCP refers to the potential development of disruption arrangements or fisheries related funds post consent noting that such measures are conditional and only proposed where significant impacts are identified within the EIAR. SFF emphasises that such agreements or funds, where they may be progressed, are commercial in nature and do not constitute mitigation under the EIA Regulations. Financial measures or compensation mechanisms do not avoid, reduce or manage the physical impacts of development on fishing activity, nor can they be relied upon to offset displacement, loss of access or seabed risk. Accordingly, the potential for future disruption arrangements or funds cannot be taken into account in determining the significance or acceptability of environmental effects on commercial fisheries.

SFF further notes that many of the concerns outlined above were raised during pre-application engagement on the Outline FMMCP in January 2026, including concerns regarding governance, cable installation methodology, reliance on post consent plans and reference to non-statutory guidance. The continued deferral of these matters reinforces SFF's view that the reliance placed on the FMMCP within the EIAR does not provide a robust basis for conclusions of no significant residual effect.

[22] Spiorad na Mara Limited, Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan, Volume 3, prepared by ERM, February 2026

Accordingly, reliance on non-statutory, industry led guidance or management frameworks cannot compensate for deficiencies or uncertainty within the EIAR, nor can it substitute for defined, outcome based and enforceable mitigation measures assessed prior to determination. In the absence of such measures, SFF considers that the reliance placed on the FMMCP to justify the EIAR's conclusions on impact acceptability for commercial fisheries is not robust.

Decommissioning and Financial Security

SFF also considers it important to highlight, at this early stage, the need for robust, ring-fenced and inflation-linked financial securities for decommissioning. Recent offshore wind experience elsewhere in the UK has demonstrated that decommissioning liabilities can be underestimated, particularly for early-generation projects and for floating infrastructure, where removal costs are likely to be significantly higher than for fixed-bottom foundations. This includes the potential need to remediate scour pits, anchor footprints and seabed depressions associated with mooring systems, which, if left unaddressed, could result in long-term constraints on fishing activity. SFF also notes that the retention of infrastructure elements in situ (including scour protection and cable protection measures has the potential to create long-term seabed obstructions and associated safety and snagging risks for fishing vessels where full removal is not secured at decommissioning.

While full Decommissioning Programmes are submitted post-consent under the Energy Act 2004, SFF considers that the EIA stage provides an appropriate opportunity to signal the sector wide need for stronger financial safeguards. Given Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations Team's existing powers to require financial guarantees under both the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Energy Act 2004, SFF considers that clear, adequately secured and inflation tracked financial provisions should be expected at consent stage, to ensure that full removal obligations are realistically deliverable and that future liabilities are not transferred to the public or to other users of the marine environment.

Habitats Regulations Assessment – Compensation

SFF notes that the Applicant's Habitats Regulations Assessment and Derogation Case refer to the potential consideration of compensatory measures should adverse effects on site integrity be identified and should the tests of no alternatives and Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest be met. SFF records that compensatory measures under the Habitats Regulations are intended solely to maintain the coherence of the National (and UK) Site Network and should not impact commercial fisheries.

Such measures do not address impacts on commercial fisheries, including displacement, loss of access, seabed risk or operational safety. Accordingly, HRA compensation cannot be relied upon to remedy any deficiencies in the EIAR, nor can post consent development of compensatory measures be used to justify conclusions of no significant residual effect for commercial fisheries. Any references to "fisheries" within the context of HRA compensation must not be misconstrued as mitigation for fisheries impacts arising from the project footprint.

Conclusion

Based on the information currently provided, SFF considers that the EIAR does not demonstrate that impacts on commercial fisheries have been avoided or reduced to an acceptably low level through project design, nor that appropriate and enforceable mitigation has been secured at application stage, and therefore does not provide a sufficient evidential basis for the EIA to support determination of the applications

The assessment of commercial fisheries relies heavily on retained design flexibility, assumptions regarding recovery and adaptation, and the prospective effectiveness of post-consent plans and liaison. In SFF's view, this approach introduces unresolved uncertainty and does not provide a sufficiently robust or precautionary basis for determining long-term and cumulative effects on highly sensitive fishing receptors.

SFF therefore considers that, in determining the applications, careful consideration should be given to whether the statutory duties relating to environmental assessment, marine planning and the safeguarding

of fisheries interests can be satisfied on the basis of the EIAR as submitted, or whether further clarity, reduced uncertainty and strengthened, outcome-based mitigation should be sought prior to determination.

In conclusion, SFF stresses that our primary concern is protecting the rights of fishermen to safely undertake their trade, and this is the cornerstone of our response. Our position is that fishing activities should continue unaffected and unharmed post-development. If fishermen impacted are to be denied the right to earn their living, we could not support the development of any proposal for a windfarm.

For and on behalf of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation

[Redacted]

Offshore Consents Assessments Manager
Scottish Fishermen's Federation

The Royal Yachting Association Scotland

RYA SCOTLAND

People, Places and Communities

OPENNESS EXCELLENCE INTEGRITY RESPONSIBILITY

admin@ryascotland.org.uk [Redacted]

20 March 2026

Licensing Operations Team
Marine Directorate
Marine Laboratory,
375 Victoria Road,
Aberdeen,
AB11 9DB
MD.MarineRenewables@gov.scot

Dear [Redacted],

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm

RYA Scotland has no objection to the granting of the section 36 consent and marine licence for the above project provided that the embedded mitigations for shipping and navigation are adopted.

I note that M012 states that 'Physical notices will be placed at marinas and harbours in the vicinity of the Offshore Project and final locations of installed infrastructure will be charted and distributed to recreational clubs.' For the avoidance of any doubt, it should be clarified that the key recreational club to contact is the Clyde Cruising Club (sailingdirections@clyde.org) so that an update can be issued for the Outer Hebrides volume of their Sailing Directions and Anchorages.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]

Planning and Environment Officer, RYA Scotland

Transport Scotland

Development Management and Strategic Road Safety
Roads Delivery and Operations

Floor 5, 177 Bothwell Street, Glasgow, G2 7ER
[Redacted]

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND
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Authority ref:
MD-00011742 & MD-00011743

Date: 08 May 2026

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989

The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

The Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990

MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 – Spiorad na Mara Limited – Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – Isle of Lewis

Introduction

The consultation request dated 16 March 2026 has been passed to Jacobs for review in their role as Development Management Advisor and Auditor to Transport Scotland.

The consultation request refers to the application for section 36 consent and marine licence applications for the proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm, and is primarily informed by the following documents:

- Offshore Planning Statement, Version 1.0, Revision A, dated February 2026
- Offshore Project Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), Version 1.0, Revision A, dated February 2026

From our review of the Planning Statement and supporting EIAR information, this response focusses on chapters addressing some transport-relevant considerations including navigation, aviation, and vessel activity.

OBSERVATION 1: It is not apparent form the information submitted that any onshore trunk road impacts of the offshore works have been considered.

Planning Statement

Introduction

As noted in paragraph 1.1.1.6 of the Planning Statement, this application is for the Offshore Project covering works in the sea, i.e., everything seaward of the Mean High-Water Springs

(MHWS), which is the focus of the Planning Statement and supporting EIAR. The Planning Statement confirms that a further consent application will be sought for the onshore works, i.e., everything landward of the MLWS.

The Requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment

Paragraph 1.4.1.3 of the Planning Statement confirms that the accompanying EIAR "provides an assessment of the likely significant effects associated with the Offshore Project during its construction, operation & maintenance (O&M), and decommissioning phases."

Offshore Project

The Planning Statement confirms in paragraph 2.5.1.3 that a 5-year construction period is anticipated, with work programmed between April and October, and construction working hours expected to be up to 24-hours, 7-days a week.

OBSERVATION 2: From Table 3-18 of the EIAR, vessel activity during construction is estimated to comprise up to 35 vessels on site at once, with up to 871 return trips per year during peak construction.

Operation and Maintenance

As highlighted in Table 2-3 of the Planning Statement, vessel movements during operation and maintenance activities are estimated to comprise over 32,000 across the project lifetime (expected to be 35 years).

Safety Zones

Section 2.5.6 of the Planning Statement confirms that, given the Offshore Project will generate significant marine activity during construction (up to 35 vessels on site at any one time, with up to 871 vessel return trips per year), that "safety zones of 500 m radius will be sought for the installation/construction of all offshore infrastructure during the construction phase." Further, a 50 m safety zone will be established during pre-commissioning. These safety zones will temporarily displace marine users and alter vessel routes.

OBSERVATION 3: As noted throughout the Planning Statement, embedded mitigation is to include a Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan, marine coordination, Notices to Mariners, Kingfisher bulletins, and compliance with international navigation requirements.

Socio-economics

Impact Assessment

Transport and Storage

Paragraph 5.3.2.39 of the Planning Statement references Chapter 20, Volume 2a of the EIAR which notes the temporary disturbance to ports and harbours due to increased demand for port services and marine maintenance, with construction and maintenance activity placing additional pressure on Stornoway Port and ferry services particularly on the Ullapool-Stornoway route.

The Planning Statement notes that, despite the expected increased demand for ferry capacity, port services and workforce movement, the EIAR identifies these impacts as negligible to minor adverse and not significant, taking account of the new Stornoway Deep Water Terminal (operational 2024).

Also, paragraph 5.3.2.46 notes that Chapter 20 of the EIAR highlights the potential increase in port usage during the operation and maintenance activities, but again impacts are assessed as negligible, with some potential beneficial effects from increased economic activity.

OBSERVATION 4: No significant impacts on major ports or ferry operations are predicted, subject to the implementation of appropriate coordination, scheduling, and mitigation measures. Transport Scotland supports conditions requiring the submission and approval of a Construction Method Statement and Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan to ensure effective port interface management, vessel coordination, and protection of lifeline ferry services and harbour operations.

Military and Civil Aviation

Impact Assessment

Given that the project introduces tall offshore structures (up to 338.4 m tip height) in airspace used by civil and Search and Rescue (SAR) aviation, Section 5.14 of the Planning Statement references that Stornoway Airport's Instrument Flight Procedures (IFPs) intersect the site. Initial assessment identifies moderate adverse impacts, but these are reduced to minor adverse (not significant) with mitigation including aviation lighting, obstacle marking, and IFP redesign. In terms of SAR, low-flying military activity and helicopter access, these are assessed as minor adverse, not significant after mitigation.

OBSERVATION 5: Aviation safeguarding will require a final Lighting and Marking Plan, provision of positions and heights of structures to the Civil Aviation Authority, Ministry of Defence, and Defence Geographic Centre.

EIAR

Chapter 3: Project Description, Volume 1a

Offshore Infrastructure and Installation

Wind Turbine Generators

Separately, in paragraph 3.5.8.12, it is confirmed that "towers, nacelles, and blades will be transported from a suitable port to the Turbine Area on a wind turbine installation vessel (WTIV) or on a separate transport vessel. Turbine components will not be transported overland on Lewis."

OBSERVATION 6: Confirmation is required that large components are not proposed to travel via the mainland trunk road network.

OBSERVATION 7: Should large components be required to travel via the mainland trunk road network, Transport Scotland would highlight the requirement for the Trunk Roads Operating Company to review various aspects of any proposed works on the trunk road, including (but not limited to): Overrun areas; pinch points; and the moving of street lighting, street furniture, and traffic signals etc. where required. Proposals will be subject to DMRB review, which include Road Safety Audit (RSA) submissions, and will require a Letter of Undertaking (LOU), Minute of Agreement (MOA), and Road Bond. The procedure and steps needed to achieve the necessary approvals is available on Transport Scotland's website at: https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/industry-guidance/work-on-the-scottish-trunk-road-network/.

Construction on the trunk road can only commence after:

1. The Operating Company's review of the Abnormal Loads Assessment Report.
2. The Operating Company's DMRB review of the proposed civils works.
3. The Stage 1 and 2 RSAs are completed, and all findings are suitable addressed.
4. Submission of MOA and Road Bond in place.

Only when the developer has constructed the required amendments on the trunk road, to the satisfaction of Transport Scotland, can any abnormal loads movements on the trunk road commence. The Operating Company cannot commence any formal review until Transport Scotland receives the LOU. The LOU template will be provided by Transport Scotland on request.

OBSERVATION 8: It is noted that any temporary signage and traffic management proposals (for all road users) require approval from Transport Scotland where these relate to the trunk road network.

OBSERVATION 9: A trial-run of the delivery of the largest abnormal loads should be undertaken, with the involvement of Police Scotland, prior to the commencement of abnormal loads deliveries. This should ensure that delivery is possible, and that any disruption is minimised. Any anticipated requirements for the temporary closure or restriction of the trunk road should be considered in consultation with the trunk road Operating Company and Transport Scotland's Area Manager.

OBSERVATION 10: A review of axle loading on structures along the entire access route with the various road agencies.

OBSERVATION 11: A review of clear heights with utility providers and the transport agencies.

OBSERVATION 12: A weight review should be undertaken via the ESDAL (Electronic Service Delivery for Abnormal Loads) contacts database.

Installation Vessels and Helicopters

As summarised in Section 3.5.12 and Table 3-18, the project will require significant offshore vessel activity during construction with up to 35 vessels on site at once, with up to 871 return trips per year during peak construction. These vessel movements will interact with existing navigation routes and will require coordinated marine traffic management. Helicopter trips may occur during construction and O&M for technician access (up to 50 construction-phase movements).

As noted above, the developer intends to establish 500 m construction safety zones around active turbine and substation works, and 50 m pre-commissioning zones around completed structures. An Outline Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan has been submitted and will be updated post-consent.

Paragraph 3.5.12.2 notes that the components of the Offshore Project "are assumed to be mainly fabricated off-site, stored at a suitable port facility, and transported directly to the Offshore Project Boundary as required during construction." Port operations, e.g., Stornoway, will therefore play a central role during construction and O&M.

OBSERVATION 13: As noted above, it is not apparent form the information submitted that any onshore trunk road impacts of the offshore works have been considered. On this basis, it is assumed there are none.

Construction Programme and Sequencing

As noted in paragraph 3.7.2.3, a 5-year construction period is anticipated for the offshore infrastructure, "with work programmed within the Turbine Area between April and October to allow for optimal weather conditions." It is anticipated that construction would commence in 2028 / 2029, 24-hours / 7-days a week.

Paragraph 3.7.2.4 notes that "The total number of construction employees required for the Project has been estimated at an average of approximately 750 to 1,000 personnel. Estimated workforce for the Offshore Project is approximately 400 personnel."

Chapter 6: Socio-economics, Volume 2a

Assessment of Effects: Construction Phase

Wider Socio-economic Effects

As highlighted in paragraph 6.8.2.3, during construction, effects on tourism could arise as a result of temporary changes in the availability of air and ferry travel for tourists, and in port capacity for cruise ships. Paragraph 6.8.2.12 highlights that the "use of offshore accommodation for the majority of the construction workforce (M041) reduces the likely impact on the availability of air and ferry services for visitors to Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh, although again there is likely to be some intermittent increase in demand around crew change overs and non-working days etc. Data presented in the baseline shows that there can be little capacity on existing ferry services, particularly at peak times."

Paragraph 6.8.2.14 notes that Chapter 20, Volume 2a "reports a negligible effect on the port of Stornoway/Steòrnabhagh arising from increased demand for port services during construction." As stated in Table 6-15, embedded mitigation (ID M042), there is a commitment "to work with key stakeholders and service providers to understand pressure points on existing services and on storage / port facilities on Lewis, and charter vessels and/or flights to transport crew and materials where required to avoid creating excess pressure, and potentially provide additional capacity." This same commitment also states that "Large construction components to be transported by specialist vessels via private charter."

OBSERVATION 14: It is anticipated that this embedded mitigation would reduce pressure on ferry services, and would also reduce the likely magnitude of impacts on port capacity affecting cruise vessels. Given the combination of this and the offshore construction workforce being accommodated primarily on vessels (embedded mitigation ID M041), it is not anticipated that there would be an increased demand for port or ferry services at Stornoway Port except on an intermittent and short-term basis within the overall construction period.

Paragraph 6.8.2.30 also recognises that the main Ullapool-Stornoway ferry service is used by freight as well as by passenger traffic, "and so increased demand for ferry services has the potential to impact on the capacity for freight." Again, Chapter 20, Volume 2a "reports that there would be a minor adverse effect on small ports on Lewis/Eilean Leòdhais that would not be significant and a negligible effect on the port of Stornoway/Steòrnabhagh that would also not be significant."

Transport Scotland Overall Summary

While the onshore transmission works are assessed separately, the offshore project requires:

- Movement of construction and operation and maintenance workers to and from ports.
- Some interaction with local roads during landfall works.

The Planning Statement notes:

- The workforce may put temporary pressure on island accommodation and ferry / air services, but road-related impacts are minimal and not significant.
- Most personnel for offshore works will be transferred via Crew Transfer Vessel, Service Operational Vessels or helicopters, limiting reliance on the island's road network.

OBSERVATION 15: The reference to port and ferry services throughout the supporting documentation demonstrates the reliance on local infrastructure. Existing ferries provide a lifeline function and the developer must ensure that existing essential traffic is not displaced by construction related traffic. Also, port and ferry availability for maintenance / offshore transfers may coincide with ferry peak periods.

OBSERVATION 16: No consideration of the impact on the mainland trunk road network have been considered, and no consideration or reference has been made to the logistics associated with the movement of construction related traffic on ferry services between Ullapool and Stornoway. While the route is primarily served by roll-on/roll-off ferries, these have specific capacity limits for commercial vehicles, and sailings can vary seasonally. Therefore, the use of ferries should be carefully considered and could be considered in a supporting Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). Reliance on these services can also mean that any technical issue or weather disruption can significantly impact the transport schedule. For construction related traffic, particularly commercial vehicles, specific procedures and considerations will likely apply, i.e.:

- Advance Booking: It is essential to book ferry space for commercial vehicles well in advance. Demand can be high, especially during peak seasons or for specific sailings. Commercial vehicle bookings are typically handled directly by the port offices rather than the standard online passenger booking system. Contacting the Ullapool or Stornoway port office is necessary for these reservations.
- Commercial Vehicle Rates and Categories: CalMac has specific charging structures for commercial vehicles based on length, height, width, and weight. Vehicles exceeding standard car/van dimensions or weight limits will be charged at commercial rates. It is crucial to accurately declare vehicle dimensions and weight at the time of booking to ensure the correct fare is applied and that the vehicle can be safely accommodated.
- Check-in Times: Commercial vehicles usually have a specific check-in time prior to departure, which is typically earlier than for standard passenger vehicles. Adhering to these times is vital to avoid being refused shipment.
- Vehicle Requirements: Vehicles over 3.5 tonnes plated weight are generally charged as commercial vehicles. They may require fitted lashing points for securing to the deck during the voyage. A written declaration of the gross vehicle weight and a description of the load might be required at the point of shipment.
- Abnormal Loads: For vehicles exceeding standard abnormal load dimensions (e.g., over 44 tonnes, over 18 metres long, over 2.9 metres wide, over 4.57 metres high, or with axle weights over 10.5 tonnes), additional notifications to relevant authorities (including potentially the ferry operator and local councils) and potentially special permits are required before transport can be arranged. These movements need significant advance planning and coordination.

OBSERVATION 17: Transport Scotland would advise that a CTMP, or other such supporting document, should consider all traffic and transport impacts including those on the mainland should there be any, e.g., on the A893(T) and A835(T) in Ullapool, the A87(T) in Skye, if construction related vehicles are to utilise the trunk road network. Therefore, should any utilisation of the trunk road be required to facilitate construction related traffic, once the volumes are known these should be incorporated in a CTMP and communicated with Transport Scotland. Any associated traffic management details must also be provided for approval by Transport Scotland. Transport Scotland must be a consultee on the final CTMP. Any expanded study area that may be considered in the CTMP should extend to other impacted ports and ferry services, e.g., Ullapool, Tarbert (Harris), and Uig (Skye).

OBSERVATION 18: Any CTMP, or similar supporting document, should incorporate a comprehensive logistics plan that integrates ferry schedules, vehicle bookings, road movements, and site access requirements. This plan should detail the types and quantities of materials / equipment to be transported, the required vehicle types, and the planned ferry sailings. Existing ferries may be able to accommodate a small proportion of construction related traffic, but consideration of additional vessels to accommodate construction traffic is

likely to be required. Further, the impact of the temporary workforce, likely resulting in weekly movements to and from the mainland need to be quantified and assessed.

OBSERVATION 19: The sequencing of deliveries to align with ferry availability and site requirements should be considered to avoid unnecessary accumulation of vehicles at the ports and surrounding road network.

OBSERVATION 20: Communication with stakeholders shall include clear and regular communication with CalMac Ferries, the Stornoway Port Authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and potentially Police Scotland regarding abnormal loads.

OBSERVATION 21: Any monitoring of a CTMP must also be in consultation with Transport Scotland, CalMac Ferries, the Stornoway Port Authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and Police Scotland.

Recommendations

Noting the observations set out in this response, based on the information provided, Transport Scotland would offer no objection to MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 subject to the application of the following conditions to any consent awarded:

1. Prior to commencement of the development, a Construction Method Statement (CMS) shall be submitted to Scottish Ministers for their written approval. Such approval may only be granted following consultation by the Scottish Minsters with Transport Scotland, CalMac Ferries, the Stornoway Port Authority, Police Scotland, and any such other advisors as may be required at the discretion of the Scottish Minsters.

   The CMS must include but not be limited to details regarding:

   - Port Interface Management
     - identification of all construction and operational ports;
     - details of berthing scheduling arrangements and coordination arrangements with ferry operators, including alignment with published ferry timetables;
     - measures to avoid construction vessel activity during peak ferry arrival and departure periods;
     - protocols for berthing priority in emergency situations;
     - procedures for monitoring and reporting unexpected port congestion.
   - Construction Logistics and Personnel Movements
     - details of crew transfer arrangements, including scheduling and frequency;
     - helicopter flight scheduling associated with construction activities;
     - measures to manage peak crew change periods;
     - demonstration of how construction activities will avoid adverse impacts on ferry capacity and lifeline services;
     - details of vessel and transport charter arrangements, including implementation of mitigation measures.
   - Impact Mitigation and Coordination
     - measures to minimise disruption to ferry services, port operations and the wider transport network;
     - procedures for ongoing liaison with ferry operators, harbour authorities and transport stakeholders;

- monitoring, reporting and adaptive management measures in the event of disruption.

The Development must be constructed in accordance with the approved CMS (as updated from time to time with the written approval of the Scottish Ministers).

- Reason: To protect lifeline ferry services at Stornoway, avoid berth conflicts and ensure harbour operational resilience. To prevent undue pressure on island transport networks, particularly at ferry terminals and airport.

2. Prior to commencement of the development, a Navigational Safety and Vessel Management Plan (NSVMP) shall be submitted to Scottish Ministers for their written approval. Such approval may only be granted following consultation by the Scottish Minsters with Transport Scotland, CalMac Ferries, the Stornoway Port Authority, Police Scotland, and any such other advisors as may be required at the discretion of the Scottish Minsters.

   The NSVMP must include but not be limited to details regarding:

   - The number, types and specification of vessels required.
   - How vessel management will be coordinated, particularly during construction but also during operation.
   - Location of working port(s), the routes of passage, how often vessels will be required to transit between port(s) and the site and indicative vessel transit corridors proposed to be used during construction and operation of the Development.

   Thereafter, all vessel traffic associated with the development shall conform to the requirements of the agreed NSVMP.

   - Reason: To mitigate the adverse impact on the safe and efficient operation of ferry ports and CalMac ferry services.

3. Prior to commencement of the development, a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) shall be submitted to Scottish Ministers for their written approval. Such approval may only be granted following consultation by the Scottish Minsters with Transport Scotland, The Highland Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, CalMac Ferries, the Stornoway Port Authority, Police Scotland, and any such other advisors as may be required at the discretion of the Scottish Minsters.

   The CTMP must include but not be limited to:

   - An assessment detailing all proposed construction trips on the trunk road network.
   - An assessment of the potential for abnormal load movements on the trunk road network, including (where required) swept path analysis and mitigation measures, to ensure the safe passage of abnormal loads on the trunk road network.
   - A mitigation strategy for any abnormal loads on the trunk road network including any accommodation measures required, incorporating the removal of street furniture, junction widening, or traffic management of road based traffic and transportation associated with the construction of the Development. All construction traffic associated with the Development must conform to the approved CTMP.
   - Any additional signing or temporary traffic control measures deemed necessary due to the size or length of loads being delivered as a result of the Development, which must be undertaken by a recognised QA traffic management consultant, to be approved.
   - Any traffic control measures to be used to manage any direct construction related traffic access onto the trunk road network.

- Sheeting of any construction vehicles transporting dry / loose construction material to and from the proposed development via the trunk road network.
- Arrangements for monitoring and updating the CTMP.

Thereafter, all construction traffic associated with the development shall conform to the requirements of the agreed CTMP.

- Reason: To mitigate the adverse impact of construction traffic on the safe and efficient operation of the trunk road network, ferry ports, and CalMac ferry services. To ensure that material from the site is not deposited on the trunk road to the detriment of road safety.

4. Prior to the movement of any abnormal load on the trunk road network, the developer shall submit proposals for an abnormal load delivery trial-run to be undertaken with the involvement of Police Scotland and prior to the commencement of abnormal loads deliveries. Trial-run proposals shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Scottish Ministers in consultation with Transport Scotland and any such other advisors as may be required at the discretion of the Scottish Minsters.
   - Reason: To ensure that the transportation of abnormal loads will not have any detrimental effect on the trunk road network.
5. Prior to any decommissioning of the development, a Decommissioning Plan shall be prepared and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland.
   - Reason: To mitigate the adverse impact of construction traffic on the safe and efficient operation of the trunk road network.

In addition to the above Conditions, the applicant should also be informed of the following advisory notes setting out requirements relating to works within the trunk road boundary:

i. The applicant should be informed that the granting of planning consent does not carry with it the right to carry out works within the trunk round boundary and that permission must be granted by Transport Scotland Roads Directorate.

ii. Trunk road modification works shall, in all respects, comply with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and the Specification for Highway Works published by HMSO. The developer shall issue a certificate to that effect, signed by the design organisation.

iii. Trunk road modifications shall, in all respects, be designed and constructed to arrangements that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act: Good Practice Guide for Roads published by Transport Scotland. The developer shall provide written confirmation of this, signed by the design organisation.

iv. The road works which are required due to the above Conditions will require a Road Safety Audit as specified by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

v. Any trunk road works will necessitate a Minute of Agreement with the Trunk Roads Authority prior to commencement.

vi. To obtain permission to work within the trunk road boundary the developer should contact the Area Manager through the general contact number 0141 272 7100.

vii. The Operating Company has responsibility for co-ordination and supervision of works and after permission has been granted it is the developer's contractor's responsibility to liaise with the Operating Company during the construction period to ensure all necessary permissions are obtained.

We trust the above is sufficient. However, should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely
[Redacted]

Transport Scotland
Development Management and Strategic Road Safety

Cc [Redacted] Transport Scotland

Uig Community Council

MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 – Spiorad na Mara Limited – Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm – Isle of Lewis

UCC submit a Formal and Comprehensive Objection to the above application as it contravenes the following planning policies and guidance.

Comprehensive objection to the Spiorad na Mara (N4) offshore wind project, citing concerns regarding systemic planning failures, environmental risks, and the profound socio-economic impact on the Outer Hebrides.

Firstly: an official Call for A Moratorium.

Designation of a Nautical Protection Zone (associated directly with the siting of The Shipping Lane at 12 miles distant from the westside shores of Lewis - to protect us from potential pollution incidents) becomes ineffective without supervision and enforcement. CnES input, regarding N4 site location, has resulted in an inappropriate application for industrial activity, the Spiorad na Mara Application, which fully contradicts the specific conservation objectives of the astute and effective protection the island has enjoyed for over 40 years. Until now.

We call for the Requirement for a Moratorium.

The ongoing exploitation of the seabed for private profit necessitates an immediate strategic pause. We call for a Moratorium on all offshore renewable infrastructure to allow for a comprehensive and knowledgeable assessment of the state of our marine environment. The Scottish government must stop the practice of 'rushed chances' and prioritise the conservation of the vital marine systems that regulate our climate and sustain our coastal communities.

A reassessment is now fundamental to the sustainability of the Isle of Lewis. The current trajectory of RE industrialisation is fundamentally inappropriate for the Isle of Lewis. This application fails to align with ecological, social and cultural requirements for long term sustainability. To prevent irreversible harm, it is imperative that the existing sustainability appraisal be subjected to a rigorous and independent reassessment.

A meaningful reassessment cannot take place while development continues at its current pace.

We therefore call for an **immediate Moratorium on all RE infrastructure to facilitate the following:**

- **Damage Assessment**: a comprehensive audit of environmental and social impacts caused by this existing application and for future proposals.
- **Strategic Stock-taking:** a pause to evaluate national energy strategy and ensure it aligns with actual domestic needs rather than external commercial interests.
- **Evidence-based Planning:** A transition from reactive, target-driven approach to one based on established ecological limits and cumulative impact data.

Community-Led Governance and Inclusion

Sustainability is inextricably linked to democratic participation. Future planning must transition away from top-down technocratic mandates towards a model of Scotland/Lewis-wide inclusion. Communities possess an intimate, longitudinal knowledge of their specific environments; their involvement is essential to ensure the industry functions with:

- **Fairness**: Ensuring that rural communities are not exploited to subsidise urban or corporate energy needs.
- **Transparency**: providing clear, accessible information regarding the true costs, benefits and disbenefits of industrial proposals.
- **Democratic Accountability:** Restoring agency of local populations to determine the future of their own lands and seas.

Optimising Community Benefit

True sustainability is achieved when developments provide the 'greatest and richest' benefits to the communities that host them. By involving local residents as primary stakeholders from the outset, the industry can move away from coercive practices and toward a model that respects the 'Sense of Place' while fostering socio-economic resilience.

Conclusion

The rushed process is leading to 'grotesque errors of judgement'. A planned, democratic, and community-inclusive way forward is the only means of ensuring that the Isle of Lewis-a unique and sacred island of pastoral communities- is preserved for future generations.

We must prioritise the protection of our natural assets over unplanned industrial expansion.

A Call for Cumulative Mapping covering All Island Renewables Energy developments at all stages.

UCC, and other Island Community Councils have been calling for Cumulative Island-wide mapping demonstrating the totality of all potential and actual RE developments at all/any/every stage of the development and planning processes. Communities have the right to be made aware of any industrialisations that might be proposed for our island. This right has been denied us. CnES have failed to allow us any meaningful assistance. Communities seem always to be 'on the back-foot'.

Failure of the Planning System

The current planning framework is failing local communities by prioritizing rapid industrialization over democratic engagement. While developers have had years to coordinate with government ministers and advisors to shape their proposals, the affected communities have been granted as little as six weeks to review and respond to complex technical documents.

This imbalance is exacerbated by the new "Planning and Infrastructure Bill." Even high-level parliamentary experts have admitted they cannot make sense of the "Energy Delivery Plan," concluding that it is better to avoid building entirely if there is a likelihood of permanent and significant damage. Once these industrial changes occur, they are irreversible.

Environmental and Ecological Risks

The project is described as an unplanned "renewable tsunami" that threatens to cause permanent damage to a unique natural environment. Specific environmental concerns include:

- **Marine Pollution:** The reality is that turbine blade erosion will release toxic 'forever chemicals' bonded with micro and nano-plastics into the sea. The impacted sea area is officially recognized as 'Particularly Sensitive' due to an 'Excessively High Degree of Naturalness', and is too vulnerable to be transformed from a Protected Zone into a toxic chemically polluted industrial zone. Up to 6500 kgs of toxic pollutants spread through this pristine protected land and sea scape, per year, for 35 years (projected N4 lifespan.)
- **Visual and Light Impact:** A 50-square-mile array positioned too close to the shore would permanently fracture the natural horizons, obstructing views of sunsets, moonlight, and the Aurora Borealis. Our natural dark skies are a rapidly growing tourist draw.
- **Inadequate Assessment:** The project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is considered legally insufficient because it fails to account for the cumulative damage and emissions associated with the hundreds of kilometres of subsea and overland cabling required to export power to England. They are using a 'design-envelope' which means they have omitted 'exact' details which makes it difficult to know 'exact' damage. This creates deficiencies in the EIA because it lacks specific details and therefore fails to assess a realistic worst-case scenario. There is a lack of baseline data regarding local species: (National marine Plan; NPF4 Policy 1.); (Electricity Works (EIA)(Scotland) Regulations 2017); (NPF4 Policy 4: Marine Scotland Guidance)
- The 'Social Impact Assessment' has been omitted, in its' entirety from this application. Too damning to be honest about.

Infrastructure, Transport, and Public Safety

The industrialization of the island poses severe risks to local infrastructure and daily life:

- **Road Safety and Liability:** This application depends on heavy island-wide industrial activity. There are unanswered questions over whether the necessary safety conditions will be or can be adopted.
- **Logistical Strain:** The island's single-track roads and small dual roads are unsuitable for thundering, 200-tonne industrial loads. This activity delays essential services such as school buses and healthcare workers and emergency vehicles.
- **Economic Disruption:** The loss of tranquility and "dark skies" threatens the local tourism industry. Visitors who seek a bolthole for rest and recuperation are highly likely to be deterred by the noise, light, and particulate pollution of heavy industry.

  These industrial disturbances will occur over many long disturbing years.

Socio-Economic Inequity and Cultural Heritage

Despite the scale of the project, it fails to address the "fuel poverty" experienced by the local population. The power is generated for export, and entities like SSEN have restricted local homeowners, from producing their own, local, community-led small renewables, to reserve and prioritise cable capacity for industrial exports. Corporate Industry is favoured over community.

Furthermore, the project is viewed as a threat to the island's "Sense of Place" and cultural way of life. While Scotland has a relatively small coastline, the developer, Northland Power, is based in Canada—a country with the longest coastline in the world. Opponents argue that such industrial projects should be sited in more appropriate locations rather than destroying the ancient and noble landscape of the Hebrides for private profit. There are excessive disbenefits to communities.

Ultimately, the community objects to what is described as a "modern-day Clearance"—a forced industrialization that shatters a sustainable, nature-based way of life in favour of corporate interests.

Conclusion: Formal Objection Statement

For the reasons detailed throughout this document we maintain a formal and total objection to the Spiorad na Mara (N4) offshore wind application. The project presents a fundamental conflict with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), specifically concerning the preservation of "Sense of Place" and the protection of rural character. The scale of industrialisation is incompatible with the region's established sustainable, nature-based land use.

The application fails to align with NPF4 spatial principles, constituting development in an inappropriate location - the "Wrong Place" - due to its proximity to the shore and impact on a "Particularly Sensitive Sea" area. The application lacks sufficient provisions for safeguarding cultural heritage and environmental integrity. Consequently, the development prioritises commercial energy export over established environmental protections, representing an unacceptable deviation from strategic planning objectives. It disallows local community renewables for local communities: energy produced where energy is needed. Natural local sustainability is being forfeited for the profits of the affluent minority.

Our excessive electricity bills are the cost to us for reimbursing Government for their: '**developer-incentive scheme' (Contracts for Difference)** which guarantee developers an income stream for 20 years; and **Constraint payments** (when too many rushed windfarm developments have resulted in nowhere for energy to go) for which gov. again **pays the developer NOT** to Produce wind power.

Developers face profits: communities face poverty. This is no place for Corporate overreach.

A Summary of Further Economic Damage Specifically to Lewis (we bear all the costs)

Community wealth-building is violated. This project creates socio-economic imbalance with wealth being exported away from the island: (NPF4 Policy 25; National Marine Plan Policy GEN 2)

EIAR fails to model 'high magnitude of change' to seascape will reduce Tourist Gross Value Added(GVA) (NPF4 Policy 30; LDP Policy ED1)

The lack of compliant Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) means the vulnerability of the vital tourism sector has not been legally evaluated (Islands (Scotland) Act 2018; NPF4 Policy 4)

The development fails the NPF4 Policy 25 mandate for Community Wealth Building.

Community opinion survey in April 2026 found that 88% of residents from Ness to Uig opposed the N4 development. Approving this application over such overwhelming local consensus directly contravenes the National Islands Plan commitment to Community Empowerment: 'to be empowered to shape their own priorities, build their futures and protect what makes their communities unique.'

Uig Community Council Address: Uig Community Centre, Timsgarry, Uig, Isle of Lewis

Postcode: HS2 9JE

Email: uigcclewis@gmail.com

Date: 4 May 2026

UCC Committee member: [Redacted] signature: [Redacted]

UCC Chairman [Redacted] signature: [Redacted]

UK Chamber of Shipping

From:	[Redacted]
To:	MD Marine Renewables
Cc:	UK Chamber of Shipping Query
Subject:	RE: MD-00011742 & MD-00011743 - Spiorad na Mara Limited - Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application - Consultation - Response Required by 07 May 2026
Date:	08 June 2026 10:41:57
Attachments:	image001.png

Dear Marine Directorate,

Thank you for the email and clarification.

The Chamber of Shipping confirms a nil return for the Spiorad na Mara windfarm.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

Policy Director, Shipping Industry & Research
UK Chamber of Shipping
30 Park Street, London, SE1 9EQ

DD: +44 (0)20 7417 2843
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
www.ukchamberofshipping.com

Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board

Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board

Telephone: 01851 703419
Mobile: [Redacted]
Email: clerk@widsfb.com
Alternative email (OHFT Biologist): biologist@ohft.org.uk

6th May 2026

Dear Marine Directorate - Licensing Operations Team,

This is an objection to the proposed Spiorad Na Mara offshore wind development linked to the Grimersta River and its potential impacts on the Langavat Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for Atlantic salmon (Salmo Salar) [Species code S1106]. Langavat SAC's Atlantic salmon population is currently classified as "unfavourable due to low juvenile population densities" (Nature.Scot, 2020)with marine mortality and predation pressures acknowledged as key drivers.

The key risk is that nearshore offshore structures would alter local trophic dynamics and predator distributions, increasing predation risk for post-smolts during transition as well as returning adults. Neither the EIA, HRA nor RIAA provides site-specific, robust, quantitative assessments of potential adverse effects on the Langavat SAC, nor do they demonstrate "no adverse effect on site integrity" (AESI). That means that the consenting officer should refuse or, at minimum, defer until a targeted knowledge-gap study package is completed and independent assessment must confirm no adverse effect on the SAC integrity through all phases of the proposed development.

Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board (WIDSFB) is governed by the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003. WIDSFB is a statutory body responsible for the protection and enhancement of salmon and sea trout fisheries in the Western Isles District (the Isle of Lewis, Isle of Harris, Isle of North Uist, Isle of South Uist, Isle of Benbecula and Barra).

Under the statutory duties WIDSFB must protect and improve salmon and sea trout fisheries. In assessing marine renewable energy developments (wind, wave or tidal), it is important that WIDSFB can be assured that all potential negative impacts have been assessed in full and mitigations put in place. Given the uncertainty surrounding how wild Atlantic salmon navigate and are affected by offshore wind farms, developers must address this significant knowledge gap within their EIA reports as a condition of their operational consent under the Town and Country Planning(THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2017 Ircular PLANNING SERIES, n.d.), SSI 2017/102, Regulation 5(2), Schedule 4.

In addition, and in the light of the nature crisis, we believe that all developers should contribute to projects designed to conserve and restore important habitat at a catchment scale.

Of note here, the SACs that we consider relevant to the proposed development are Langavat (NatureScot site code 8269) and North Harris (NatureScot site code 8339), with many other important Salmon populations in rivers not designated as SACs in the zone of influence.

Migratory salmonids points of note in relation to the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):

The EIA presented has concluded that the magnitude of impact to anadromous fish is low across all potential effects except for underwater noise and vibration which is considered "medium".

It is unclear to WIDSFB what methodology of assessment was used to arrive at the "Low impact" conclusion. We ask that the developer define the term "*Low impact*" with specific qualitative and importantly, quantitative evidence to support this. Any lack of evidence presented further supports the need for the knowledge gap study mentioned in paragraph 2.

Given the significant decline in wild Atlantic salmon populations in recent years, we are strongly of the view that a precautionary approach to assessments is required as set out in regulations 48 of (The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, n.d.), as amended (the "Habitats Regulations"). In the context of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and the Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA) as required by both the Langavat and North Harris SACs for Atlantic salmon, the developer must provide sufficient information to prove that their project will not have a significant effect on a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Furthermore, WIDSFB have raised concerns about the methodology employed by Northland Power since early stakeholder engagement. For example, a schematic diagram was presented by Northland Power imagining a route for salmonid migration corridors that neatly bypassed the proposed development extent. Without any evidence base the figure (Figure 1.) was misleading and simply served as a tool to attempt to dismiss common sense concerns. This knowledge gap was filled by study, which emphasises the need for data rather than speculation. Smolts are now known to go through the proposed site of Spiorad na Mara.

Figure 1.

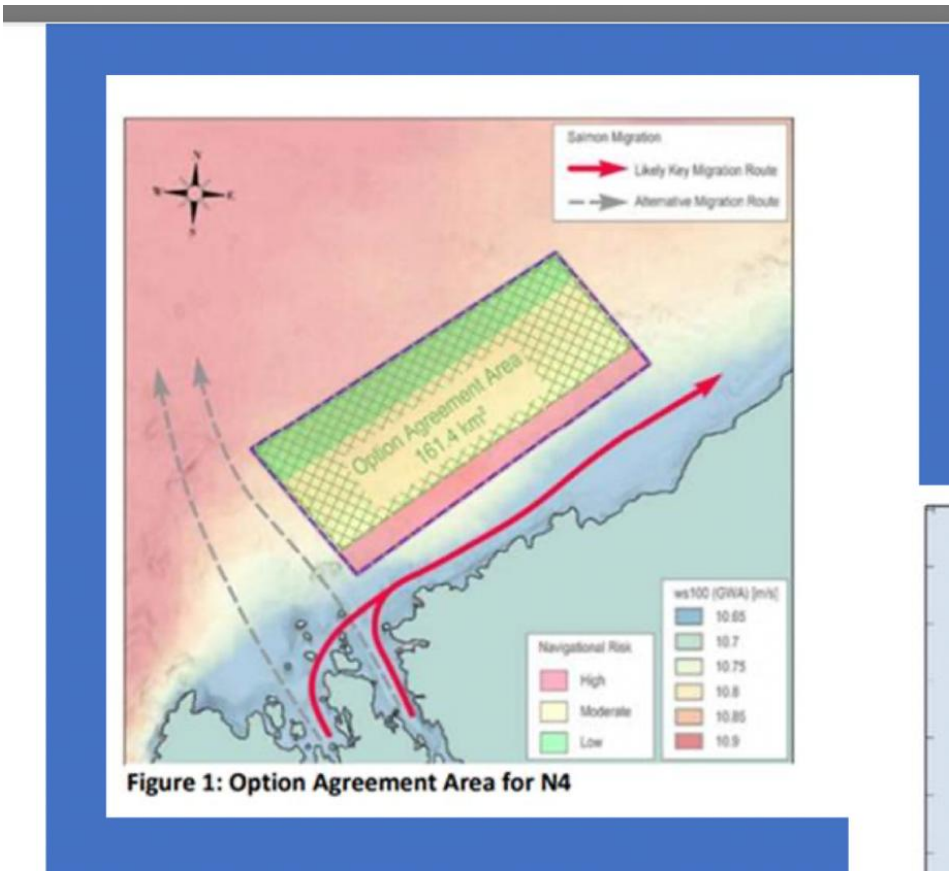


Figure 1: Option Agreement Area for N4

Background Scenario for wild Atlantic Salmon:

Across Scotland, wild salmon populations are in crisis and face a range of pressures. According to the **International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** Red List, update in December 2023, wild Atlantic salmon are officially classified as endangered in Great Britain('Salmo Salar: Darwall, W.R.T.', 2022). Populations have declined by 30-50% since 2006, with projections suggesting a 50-80% drop between 2010 and 2025 due to climate change, pollution, and habitat barriers.

In general, there is considerable uncertainty around the potential for impacts of offshore wind farms on Atlantic salmon, with no evidence to support claims of lack of impact. Indeed, the decline in stocks on the East Coast of Scotland since the beginning of construction of many large offshore renewable sites may or may not be coincidental.

The Scottish Government have published a wild salmon strategy (Scottish Government, 2022)and implementation plan, (Scottish Government, 2023)which sets out the actions to be taken over a five-year period to 2028. The implementation plan includes a number of actions under the heading of "understanding and mitigating pressures in the marine and coastal environment".

Where salmon populations are below their conservation limits, any additional pressure, including from marine renewables, cannot be considered sustainable and therefore must be mitigated fully. Scottish salmon rivers are categorised by the Scottish Government under The

Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016, according to the likelihood of them meeting their conservation limits. The most recent river gradings have been published for 2026 (*The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025*, n.d.). There are now 117 rivers across Scotland graded as Category 3, meaning there is a less than 60% probability of meeting their conservation limit. Several that do not meet conservation limits lie within the impact area of the development, including the North Harris SAC.

Within the developers EIA, HRA and RIAA documents there are multiple references to the Langavat SAC and North Harris SAC as well as baseline conditions. It should be noted that the Langavat SAC, although designated for Atlantic Salmon has not been surveyed since 2011 despite the fact the Nature.Scot guidance document was produced in 2020, a nine-year potential for baseline shifting. The Grimersta estate, who co-manage the Langavat system, hold detailed records of rod catch (Atlantic Salmon) which confirm its status as the most productive salmon fishery in the Western Isles. Grimersta has been category 1 since the conservation regulations were introduced. However, Grimersta catches form only part of the wider Langavat catches which include four other estates. The National Electrofishing Programme Scotland (NEPS) was developed in response to the declining salmon numbers to provide a more detailed understanding of the salmon populations and the pressures acting on them. Although NEPS was not designed to assess the status of the SACs, an assessment was possible of the larger SACs that were surveyed in the 2021 sampling programme. Only half of those SACs were considered to be in favourable condition (Malcolm et al., 2023).

Since there is a well-documented decline of Atlantic Salmon and status of designated sites shifting in a negative direction it is not clear how the developer, Nature.Scot or Scottish Government will assess negative impacts resulting from the Spiorad na Mara development. Therefore, any consent should include conditions requiring the status of SAC to be assessed so there are up to date baselines. This is necessary to ensure obligations under Article 6 of the Habitats directive are met.

Whilst there is often a focus on rivers designated at Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), it is important to recognise that the drivers behind declines in wild salmon and sea trout, and other species of migratory fish, affect **all** rivers to a greater or lesser extent. In recognition that the marine phases of both Atlantic salmon and sea trout are included on the list of Priority Marine Features((Government, 2014). Chapter 8)) - the habitats and species of *greatest conservation importance* in inshore waters – we consider that **all** relevant rivers should be fully considered in the consenting and assessment process – those with SAC designation and all others.

Nature.Scot's own Conservation advice package (Nature.Scot, 2020)regarding the "Langhabhat" SAC states "In Scotland Atlantic Salmon SACs extend to the tidal limit of rivers only. Marine mortality is however one of the key issues facing Atlantic salmon in Scotland and elsewhere. Environmental factors, climate change, **marine developments**, enhanced sea lice burdens associated with aquaculture, by-catch in pelagic fisheries, over-exploitation, prey availability, pollution and **predation** are all key factors that could affect this species. However, the exact nature of these interactions is not fully understood."

The developer has proposed the following embedded mitigation measures for fish ecology(WSP, 2026b). (WSP, 2026c)https://marine.gov.scot/?q=node/27428. https://marine.gov.scot/sites/default/files/che9241.pdf):

"M001: The outputs of the project-specific site investigation surveys will be reviewed to ensure that the final design and location of key project infrastructure takes full account of the physical environment and considers the potential for long-term changes. The mitigation hierarchy will be applied to avoid any sensitive areas identified, as far as is possible, by micrositing wind turbine generators (WTG) and cables."

To avoid ambiguity can the developer clarify exactly how the mitigation hierarchy will be implemented in practice? Specifically, what measurable criteria will define "sensitive areas," and what minimum micrositing offsets or distance thresholds are proposed to avoid them for Loch Langavat SAC salmon smolts? Finally, will there be a committed, time-bound monitoring plan and decision triggers if post-construction monitoring shows residual risk to smolts on their migration route?

"M006: A final Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Management Plan will be developed prior to commencement of construction (building on the INNS Management Plan, Volume 3) in compliance with legislative requirements and/or best practice standards and guidance and adhered to."

We request the developer specify how the INNS Management Plan will be implemented on the Langavat SAC catchment area, and what explicit evidence will be used to justify its relevance to wild salmon smolt migration? Specifically, what constitutes "invasive non-native species" in this SAC catchment in specific relation to Atlantic salmon, what monitoring will be conducted to detect them, and what measurable actions will trigger adaptive changes if any INNS are found? Finally, please provide the expected timelines, responsibilities, and targets so this measure is not just rhetoric but a bound, auditable mitigation. Once the details are established, a planning condition must be specified by the consenting authority in the consenting document that is clearly linked to this work.

"M023: Offshore construction within the Turbine Area will only be undertaken during the April–October period, except for offshore Landfall construction works located within the HDD Exit Pit Area."

Rather than being an effective mitigation strategy, M023 will in fact increase negative effects on salmon, as it proposes construction be allowed during the sensitive period for smolt migration (Middle of April – End of May). The proposed construction window, April–October, clearly does not meaningfully mitigate impacts on Langavat salmon smolts or adults returning from mid-June to mid-August. The timing overlaps with peak migration and is tokenistic rather than protective of migratory routes. We expect the timing is due to logistical and weather constraints for construction and nothing to do with salmon migration.

We note in addition to the above M023 mitigation in the applicant's RIAA(Niras, 2026), page 7-231 where it is stated:

“7.3.2.14 The secondary mitigation measures seek to further manage the timing of percussive piling, enabling sufficient time for fish to undergo migration unimpeded and or reducing the daily exposure and exposure risk, and are included in the assessment below for Langavat SAC with respect to conservation objective 2a. These measures are as follows:

• Temporal mitigation – in addition to the piling window committed to as embedded mitigation (April to October inclusive), a further limitation on percussive piling is included for 1 April - 25 May inclusive (Percussive Piling Programme). The Applicant may choose to undertake a dedicated study (prior to construction commencing) to understand if the Percussive Piling Programme could be extended into April/May. The purpose of this study would be to provide further information on the timing of smolt emigration through Loch Roag/Loch Ròg. Should the dedicated study indicate that smolt migrate in a shorter temporal window, the Applicant would seek to revise the Percussive Piling Programme accordingly. This revision would involve adjusting the duration of the Percussive Piling Programme to cover the period between 1 April to 25 May where smolt migration does not occur. Any changes to the Percussive Piling Programme would only be implemented following agreement with MD-LOT, based on the outcomes of the smolt monitoring study. The piling window assessed within the Offshore RIAA for Langavat SAC with respect to conservation objective 2a is therefore 26 May - 31 October inclusive, for 2 years;”

In addition to the above, page 11 (WSP, 2026a)states that construction during the sensitive period and in particular regarding piling is:

“Any changes to the Percussive Piling Programme would only be implemented following agreement with MD-LOT, based on the outcomes of the smolt monitoring study.”

OHFT data collected during the West Coast Tracking Project shows smolt migration occurring from mid-April until the end of May and a ban on percussive piling during this time is therefore essential.

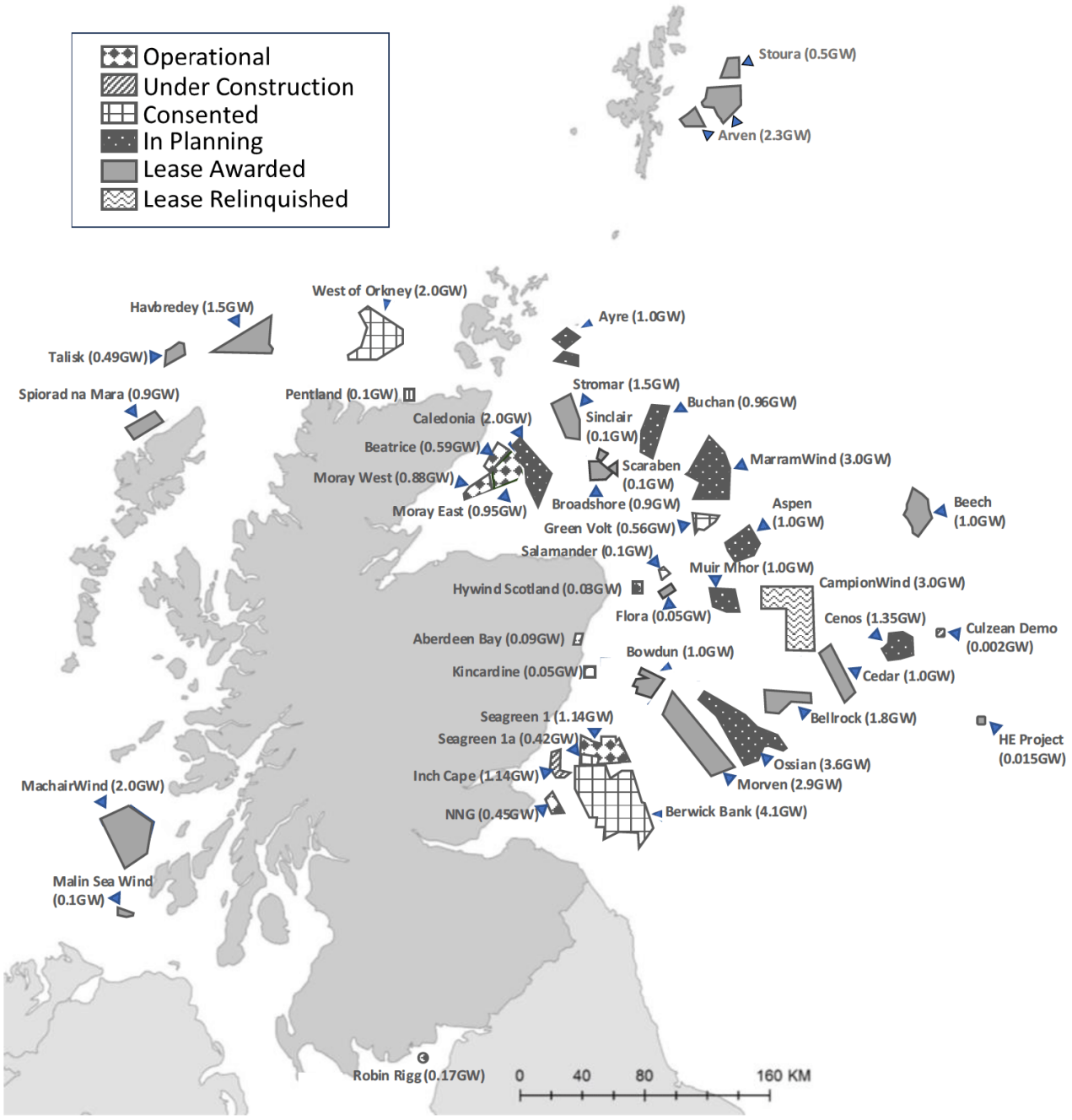
Operation phase of the development ignored in mitigation and impacts:

The mitigation incorrectly focusses only on the construction phase and is shown to be inadequate. Our concerns are also for the operational phase of the development which has been ignored or scoped out. The consenting authority should make focussing on understanding potential impact routes a condition of consent with mitigation implications on the outcomes. This initiative fills knowledge gaps from past offshore projects to ensure the real threats to vulnerable post-smolts are clearly understood and never ignored.

The (Scottish Government, 2021) (the 2021 Act) behind the EIA process aims to ingrain the precautionary principle when analysing and considering potential impacts that human activities may have on the environment so there are sustainable outcomes. The EIA does not show adequate consideration has been given to cumulative effects arising from different elements of the project on Salmonid fish receptors (intra-project effects).

The developer should be required to consider both the interactions of migratory fish with the project site, but also with the proposed cabling routes, landfall and at least three other offshore renewable sites, Talisk, Havbredey and West of Orkney also on migration routes of Langavat SAC salmon. See Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2.

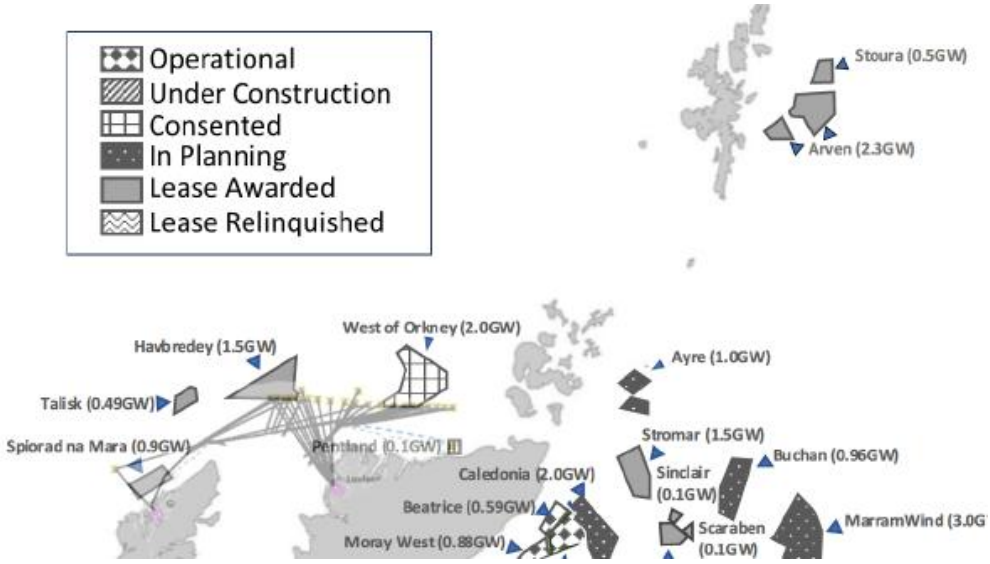


Assessments of impacts on migratory fish species should consider cumulative impacts, not only at sea as pointed out regarding other Offshore renewable sites within the established smolt migration routes, but also any impacts associated with terrestrial infrastructure, energy transmission and with particular emphasis on associated river crossings for cables.

An evidence-based example of the connectivity between proposed offshore renewable sites is illustrated in the following video clip from the ScotMer symposium where smolts from the Langavat system were picked up on the West of Orkney receiver array. (Marine Directorate 2025, April 2025). *ScotMER 7th Symposium 2025: Diadromous Fish*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8NpwEJmoIQ&list=PLTVd_Cz6dRYaTApk50qJudJih4ObsYZHQ&index=3 Relevant section at 17:47)

The following map (Figure 3.) illustrates the above mentioned tracked smolts overlaid onto the offshore renewable site map showing, from just a handful of fish, how migration routes will be affected by multiple offshore renewable sites, one of which Northland Power are also the major stakeholder in. Hevbredey, for example, will impact salmon from not only the Langavat and North Harris SAC's and other Hebridean systems, but others along the West Coast of Scotland and beyond.

Figure 3.

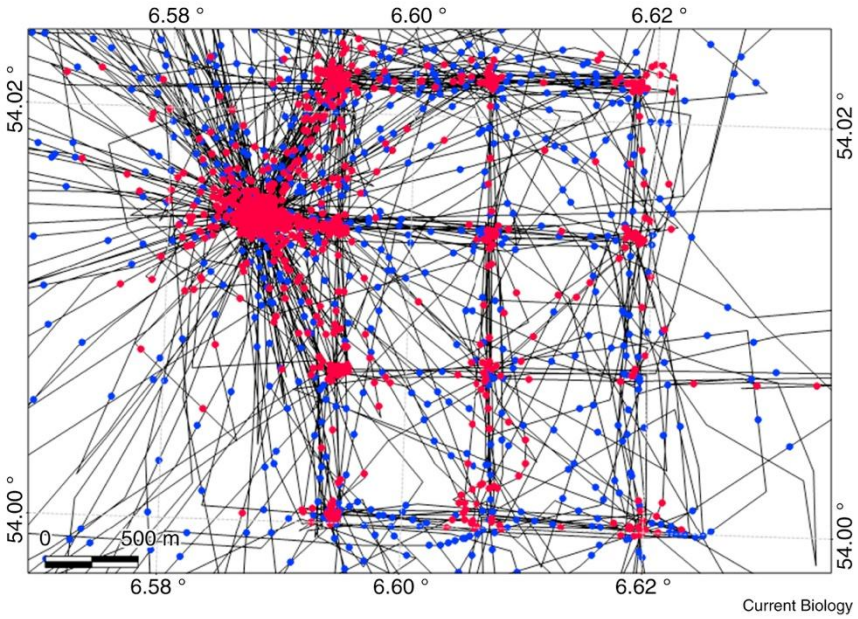


In particular, as regards the offshore part of the Spiorad na Mara development, an area we feel is important is reef effect. It is well understood that structures placed in the marine environment will act as 3D habitat which often act to aggregate fish. This will inevitably result in the aggregation of predators and the impacts on post smolt salmon and sea trout and returning adults needs to be better understood. It has already been demonstrated that post smolts pass through the proposed development site and any additional impacts arising through predation are a key concern.

Contrary to the claim in the RIAA (Niras, 2026), 7.2.9.8 "Studies on the impacts of wind farms on fish communities do not suggest that pelagic fish are found at higher densities within compared to outside of a wind farm (Methratta and Dardick 2019)" we find contrary evidence, as illustrated in brief below and must not ignore that benthic fish such as cod and saithe, as well as seals and birds are also known predators of Atlantic salmon.

The following study refers to research, which is concerning as regards predation on both smolts and returning adult salmon to the SACs within the zone of influence (Russell DJF, 2014). The following image, figure 4. illustrates the almost military patrolling undertaken by Harbour seals around offshore structures. In this case these are wind turbine foundations.

Figure 4.



The tracks of a harbour seal around Alpha Ventus windfarm. (Russell DJF, 2014)

Many other predators of salmonids are also known to congregate around offshore wind turbines. We are also mindful of the knowledge gaps in this area, as pointed out by the Scottish Government review of diadromous fish in the context of Offshore Wind – A review of current knowledge (Honkanen H et al., 2024).

These are direct quotes from this review:

"Increases in the number of cod (*Gadus morhua*) at a wind farm site have been reported in Belgium with telemetry and stomach content analysis showing evidence of crepuscular activity patterns, suggesting intensive feeding at sunset and sunrise (Reubens et al., 2014). Atlantic cod is known to prey on Atlantic salmon smolts (Hvidsten & Lund 1988;(Hedger et al., 2011a)) and may also prey upon the juveniles of the other focal species in this review."

"In a site in the Netherlands, numbers of great cormorant (*Phalocrocorax carbo*) significantly increased after an offshore wind farm was built, while numbers of common guillemot (*Uria aalge*) and northern gannets *(Morus bassanus*) decreased (Leopold et al., 2012).

"Artificial reefs could lead to a doubling of species richness and a two-order-of-magnitude increase of species abundance"(Li et al., 2023).

"In the case of horse mackerel, artificial reefs act as feeding oases, providing high availability of food items. Mackerel continues feeding on zooplankton even when it is found in close proximity to OWFs and hence, the reason of its attraction to the artificial hard substrates requires further investigation. These findings corroborate to the hypothesis that OWFs could potentially increase the local production of fish species and especially of benthopelagic and benthic species, while further research is necessary for the pelagic species." (O. Mavraki, 2020).

“...some half the cod were detected nocturnally (but rarely during daylight) near the river mouth during peak post-smolt migration, consistent with them feeding on nocturnally migrating post-smolts." (Hedger et al., 2011b).

The developer continues:

“12.8.1.22 Diadromous fish species including Atlantic salmon, sea trout, and European eel are highly mobile and exhibit broad migratory ranges between marine and freshwater environments. Due to their mobility, these species generally have a high tolerance to short term and spatially limited habitat disturbance in offshore environments, particularly where such areas are not essential to critical life stages (e.g., spawning or feeding). The Offshore Project Boundary does not overlap with any known important foraging areas for diadromous species. Consequently, their reliance on benthic habitats within the development footprint is low, and short term habitat disturbance is unlikely to result in more than minor effects. These species are therefore expected to have high tolerance to this impact.”

The developer's argument fundamentally mischaracterises the risk profile by conflating feeding habitat with migration corridor vulnerability. Their reasoning contains several critical flaws when evaluated against regulatory requirements and the biological realities of salmon smolt migration. The developer's core claim—that absence of feeding grounds within the project boundary eliminates significant risk—ignores that **smolt migration itself is a critical life stage with distinct vulnerability window.**(Bjerck et al., 2021; Mccormick et al., 1998)The argument treats the offshore zone as merely a transit corridor rather than recognising it as part of an essential migratory pathway. Under both the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Appropriate Assessment frameworks under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, competent authorities must evaluate impacts on designated species during *all critical life stages*, not only spawning and feeding(Bjerck et al., 2021; Honkanen H et al., 2024).

Under the Habitats Regulations, the **burden of proof lies with the developer to demonstrate no adverse effect on site integrity** of any Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for Atlantic salmon. Both the Langavat and North Harris SACs are in close proximity, along with many other salmon rivers, we consider of high importance.

The precautionary principle embedded in HRA requires that:

All migration pathways to/from SACs must be considered part of the functional habitat of the designated species, even if not explicitly designated as part of the SAC boundary.

Impacts on critical life stages during migration cannot be dismissed as "minor" without robust evidence. The developer must provide quantitative data showing, no increase in predation mortality during smolt passage, no alteration of migration behaviour and no barrier effects or delayed passage through the wind farm zone.

"High tolerance to short-term disturbance" is not an acceptable substitute for impact assessment. This statement is unsubstantiated and contradicts established understanding that smolt migration involves narrow physiological windows with low flexibility.

The argument fails to address:

Cumulative effects: Multiple offshore wind farms along migration corridors will compound predation risk and behavioural disruption.

Post-smolt vulnerability: The transition to marine life (post-smolt phase) represents a critical survival bottleneck where predation is a primary mortality factor.

Asynchrony between migration and environmental conditions: If artificial structures delay smolt passage or alter movement patterns, smolts may miss optimal windows for food availability and predator avoidance in coastal waters.

Connectivity:

Connectivity has been proven between the Langavat SAC and the Spiorad na Mara site. However, there are still substantial knowledge gaps. In 2023 a telemetry study showed that out of the 70 post-smolts detected successfully leaving the Grimersta River (Langavat SAC) 16 were detected on the 5 Spiorad Na Mara receivers, so 23% of the tagged smolts plus 2 tagged sea trout. In 2024 a total of 78 tagged fish commenced migration from Grimersta, of which 15 individuals (19%) subsequently entered the Spiorad Na Mara site. It is important to note that during both studies the presented post-smolt encounter rates and durations within the Spiorad Na Mara site should be interpreted as minimum values due to the design of the receiver array. (Piper, A. (2024). (In review). *Tracking juvenile salmonids to determine migration routes in relation to the Spiorad na Mara development*.).

Under Scottish Marine Energy Research (ScotMER), the Diadromous Fish Receptor Group has identified evidence gaps related to the health, distribution, and impacts on Diadromous fish (salmon, sea trout, etc.). Scottish Government has published an 'evidence map' (available for download at the above link) which identifies and scores these evidence gaps according to a specific prioritisation process. It is important that each of these evidence gaps is considered in full by the applicant, and developers should *contribute* to filling these evidence gaps as a **specific condition of consent**.

In order to properly assess Environmental Statements for developments, information on the use of the development area by diadromous fish should be provided. If such information is lacking, then a suitable monitoring strategy should be devised. Any monitoring strategies must include pre-construction monitoring in order that baseline information on movement, abundance, swimming depth, feeding behaviour etc. can be collected.

Statements that we have identified in the EIA that highlight a lack of information include:

"23.6.2.3 Predictions for the future ecosystem baseline carry significant level of uncertainty due to the complexity of the interplay between the many variables that drive trophic change. The adaptability of species is also variable, so some species may suffer significant losses while another species benefits from the same environmental change."

Limited research exists but what there is suggests offshore developments can be a driver for change in trophic interactions (N. Mavraki et al., 2021).

Another statement in the EIA with a lack of substantive evidence involves the developers' comments about predator aggregation and the potential for negative effects on migratory fish.

"12.9.6.22 Atlantic salmon post-smolts are particularly vulnerable to predation during the early marine phase of their lifecycle. Several studies have identified Atlantic cod and saithe Pollachius virens as key predators of post-smolts in estuarine and coastal waters. For example, (Friedland et al., 2017) linked reduced post-smolt survival in the Baltic to changes in cod distribution and abundance. Similarly, field studies in Norwegian river systems reported post-smolt mortality rates from predation of up to 24.8%, primarily due to aggregations of Atlantic cod (Hvidsten and Mokkelgjerd, 1988). By contrast, no significant predation effects were reported in the Tana River in northeast Norway, despite the presence of predators. It was hypothesised that the high availability of alternative prey species (particularly lesser sand eel) may have reduced predation pressure on post-smolts (Svenning et al., 2005)In addition to fish predators, marine mammals are known to prey on salmonid species. While post-smolts are most at risk during early marine migration, returning adult salmon may also be vulnerable to seal predation during coastal transit (Butler et al., 2006)

The EIA has assigned the effect from predation as **low magnitude** despite the developer acknowledging the vulnerability of salmon smolts and research showing the attractive power of offshore developments to predators (Clausen et al., 2021).

Offshore renewable developments do have the potential to directly and indirectly impact diadromous fish. WIDSFB therefore expect developers to assess and, where necessary, mitigate the potential impacts of deployed devices on such fish during the deployment, operation and decommissioning phases.

These potential impacts have been highlighted through ScotMER, and include:

- Avoidance (including exclusion from particular rivers and subsequent impacts on local populations);
- Disorientation effects that could potentially affect behaviour, susceptibility to predation or by-catch; and
- Impaired ability to locate normal feeding grounds or river of origin; and delayed migration.

Following engagement with Fisheries Management Scotland we highlight the following priorities identified through ScotMER:

- DF.01-2022: Spatial and Temporal Distribution
- DF.04-2022: Effects on diadromous fish behaviour including fish aggregations around devices (ecological traps)
- DF.02-2022: Survival and progression rates in relation to passing through marine renewable areas.
- DF.03-2022: Influence on migratory patterns due to cable deployment (EMF)

WIDSFB request that, in addition to the evidence gaps identified by ScotMER, the EIA considers the effects of predator aggregation (e.g. large gadoids/ grey seals) around the proposed development on migrating salmonids at both the smolt and adult stages and, additionally, physical barrier effects on salmon during construction and operation (e.g. noise, shadow flicker). In this regard, it should be noted that NatureScot has formally conceded that shadow flicker (Dodd & Briers, 2021; Williamson et al., 2024)from moving turbine blades (and also the direct visual effects of moving blades) may adversely affect salmonids in freshwater habitat. Since exactly the same physical principles apply in the marine environment, surface-orientated fish like salmonids are likely to be exposed to equivalent adverse effects.

Scotland's National Marine Plan includes the following policy which relates to diadromous fish:
WILD FISH 1: The impact of development and use of the marine environment on diadromous fish species should be considered in marine planning and decision-making processes. Where evidence of impacts on salmon and other diadromous species is inconclusive, mitigation should be adopted where possible and information on impacts on diadromous species from monitoring of developments should be used to inform subsequent marine decision making.

We would emphasise that to date, and as detailed above, there remains considerable uncertainty around evidence of impacts on salmon and other diadromous species. We therefore expect to see proposals for strategic research **and** mitigation. In the case of mitigation, this should be focussed, in line with international advice via NASCO on projects which improve freshwater conditions and increase the number of healthy wild salmon and sea trout smolts leaving rivers in the Western Isles.

Migratory salmonids points of note in relation to the Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA):

The HRA screening Reports section 2.4 covers consultation and explains that the Applicant submitted an EIA Scoping Report (Spiorad na Mara, 2023) and request for a Scoping Opinion the Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team (MD-LOT) in September 2023. A Scoping Opinion was received in May 2024 from MD-LOT (MARINE SCOTLAND, 2020). Specific to HRA Screening, a note was issued by the Applicant to NatureScot in January 2024 requesting comment on the proposed approach to screening, with a response received in April 2024 (Marine.gov.scot, 2024).

Nature.Scot responded to the consultation with the following comment:

"River lamprey and sea lamprey – we are content for these species to be scoped out of any further consideration as neither are routinely observed in rivers within the Western Isles".

The statement and consequent position are inaccurate. OHFT hold electrofishing data showing that Lamprey are frequently observed in the Western Isles, seen as bycatch during salmonid surveys. It should be noted that Lamprey featuring in electrofishing surveys are not the target species therefore Lamprey habitat has not been selected. The Habitats Directive

(article 6) requires assessment by a competent authority, and we do not believe this has been demonstrated. Some data is illustrated in appendix 1.

Conclusion

It should be emphasised that we have no wish to unnecessarily prevent or delay any sustainable development and we remain keen to work constructively with Northland Power and the Marine Directorate to identify appropriate monitoring programmes which will allow us to be able to assess the acknowledged risks of this development, and other proposed developments in a more appropriate manner.

However, there is a clear and urgent need to fund, plan and carry out strategic research on the movement, abundance, swimming depth, feeding behaviour, impact pathways and mortality rates relevant to diadromous fish. Such research should feed into the potential mitigation measures that might be deemed appropriate, and the conditions under which such mitigation should be enacted. Northland Power or developers associated with the Spiorad Na Mara site should be required to fund strategic post consent monitoring, in order to allow more certainty for all involved and to fill the knowledge gap. Critically, provision should also be made for appropriate remedial action that offsets any impacts identified via monitoring work. This is the very essence of the EIA framework and HRA process, both of which are intended to support sustainable use against a sound evidence base.

The scale of proposed offshore developments and other technical approaches to marine renewables development represents a step-change in the exposure of marine animals of high cultural and economic significance to attendant risks. As highlighted above, understanding of many of these risks is insufficient to support proposals for mitigation even at this late stage when substantial developments are being submitted for licensing. The cumulative impact of this proposal alongside those developments already submitted or likely to follow in the near future is potentially even greater. We believe that more needs to be done to ensure that uncertainties can be resolved by a data led approach. The EIAR, HRA and RIAA are currently incomplete.

In conclusion, in the light of the ongoing failure to understand, quantify and address concerns relating to impacts on diadromous fish, we object to the proposal as currently set out. The developer has failed to demonstrate that there will be no adverse effect on SAC integrity and therefore we do not consider that this development can proceed. If Scottish Ministers determine that a legal robust case can be made for the development to proceed based on Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI), we believe that clear, demonstrable compensation must be put in place which is directly relevant to diadromous fish arising from relevant SAC rivers in the Outer Hebrides as set out Article 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive, as transposed into UK law via the Habitats Regulations.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted]

Clerk, Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board

Appendix 1.

Date	Site Code	Number of Lamprey	River
28/07/23	**OuterHebrides_NEPS23_02876**	**2**	**Main Stem Barvas**
24/07/23	**OuterHebrides_NEPS23_02896**	**1**	**Main Stem Barvas**
20/07/21	**OuterHebrides_NEPS21_1887**	**21**	**Allt Casgro**
20/07/21	**OuterHebrides_NEPS21_1871**	**1**	**Main Stem Barvas**
14/07/21	**OuterHebrides_NEPS21_1862**	**11**	**Main Stem Barvas**

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Western Isles Fishermen's Association

Meeting Minutes

Commercial Fisheries Consultation – Spiorad na Mara

Date: 4 September 2025

Location: Stornoway Business Hub

Attendees:

[Redacted]	Fisherman and Vessel Owner
[Redacted]	Fisherman and Vessel Owner
[Redacted]	Economic Development Officer, Western Isles Council
[Redacted]	Fisherman and Vessel Owner
[Redacted]	Fishing Industry Representative (FIR)
[Redacted]	Western Isles Fishermen's Association
[Redacted]	Outer Hebrides Regional Inshore Fisheries Group
[Redacted]	Spiorad na Mara Community Liaison Officer
[Redacted]	Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO)
[Redacted]	Commercial Fisheries EIA Consultant

1. Project overview and update

- [R. presented project slides providing an update on Spiorad na Mara.
- The project is located 5–13km off the west coast of Lewis, with a potential capacity of ~900MW, enough to power 1.2 million Scottish homes, and reduce CO_2 emissions by 1.7 million tonnes annually
- Timeline milestones were reviewed: construction targeted for 2028 with operations commencing by 2031, for an anticipated 35-year operating life
- Updates since PC1:
    - Offshore array reduced in size with maximum 60 turbines (down from 65).
    - Landfall confirmed north-east of Barvas, cable search area reduced, and Stornoway identified as the preferred O&M base
    - Offshore cable installation may involve up to 12 array cables routed either directly to shore or via an offshore substation. Where burial is not possible, cable protection (rock placement, concrete mattresses) will be used
- [raised concerns about cable protection and the need to safeguard fishing gear. It was noted that a gear snagging protocol would allow fishers to leave gear and claim expenses.
- [R. confirmed one geophysical bathymetric survey had been undertaken to date.
- [Re. asked about heat emissions from cables and potential attraction of species such as scallops. [R. confirmed this will be considered in the fish, shellfish, and benthic ecology impact assessments.
- Discussions covered turbine layout spacing (minimum 900m) and whether fishers would operate gear in the array area. Consensus was that fishing will continue within the array post-construction.
- Concern was expressed over the ambitious 2030 construction start and potential access restrictions during works.

2. Commercial fisheries overview

[Re presented fisheries baseline slides

- Local landings (ICES rectangle 45E3) are valued at ~£4 million annually. Lobster is the primary species targeted across the project area, while nephrops (caught east of Lewis), scallops, and razor clams are not significant within the site

Fishers confirmed:

- Lobster is the key target species and very important across the project, brown crab were historically more important, though catches have declined.
- Tangle netting for turbot, monkfish, and skate occurs from ~5–6nm outward. Crawfish only occur in shallow waters. Monofilament nets remain prohibited inside 6nm.
- Seasonal patterns:
    - Potting effort around the Butt of Lewis occurs year-round, whereas along the west coast fishing is typically April–September, with a seasonal closure from 1 Oct.
    - Seasonal closure at the Flannan Isles opens 1 April and closes 1 Oct.
- Recently, >14m vessels are excluded inside 6nm, opening inshore grounds to smaller vessels.
- Netting grounds exist within the southwest portion of the cable search area, particularly May–August.

[R presented the inshore fishing grounds map which shows key grounds based on AIS and plotter data. The fishers agreed that this map under-represents the activity, and that the areas throughout the export cable area of search should be green and is prime lobster ground. The areas inshore from the array area should also be green, including immediately north of Loch Roag, with no navigational channels in place to restrict fishing.

[R raised concerns about heavy metal contamination from turbines affecting shellfish quality. [R confirmed this issue would be fed back to project ecologists.

3. Fisheries Mitigation, Monitoring and Communication Plan (FMMCP)

The group discussed potential mitigation and support measures:

- Lobster hatchery and stock enhancement – supported in principle.
- Community quota schemes – to enable diversification into quota whitefish fisheries, ensuring benefits remain with local fishers.
- Diversification examples: reseeding scallops in Loch Roag and fishing using disco-scallop pots ([Re).
- Local port development – proposals to consider expanding Carloway pier for O&M to maximise local benefits, rather than relying solely on Stornoway. This was compared with aquaculture, where mainland processing limited local benefit.
- Research and training – support for marine research, monitoring, and college training initiatives (e.g. OFLO courses, STEM scholarships).
- Scallop hatchery proposals – to restock local grounds such as Loch Roag.
- Fisheries Fund – [Re highlighted an existing council fund for new entrants, which could be bolstered by developer contributions.
- Community quota – consensus support for buying licences to lease to new entrants. Requests were made for significant quota allocations (e.g. 1,000 tonnes of mackerel).

Operations within the array: [R confirmed COLREGS apply, and fishing near turbines would be permitted but not within 50m. Safety zones of 500m apply during construction, with penalties up to £50k for breaches.

Monitoring: [R noted monitoring of fisheries activity will feed back into the FMMCP through a Commercial Fisheries Working Group. [Re confirmed that by end of 2026 all vessels will carry tracking (iVMS), allowing real-time assessment of displacement.

4. Other notes

- Ongoing scientific work includes razor clam electrofishing licences in Broad Bay and seasonal closures in the Sound of Barra.
- The Sound of Barra scallop fishery (1 May – 24 August) continues to produce premium quality scallops under the seasonal mobile gear ban (since 1984).

5. Meeting close

[Re confirmed that the mitigation table from the FMMCP would be distributed to those in attendance and welcomed feedback and comments to each mitigation measure proposed. [Re highlighted that the FMMCP is a live document and applicable throughout the lifetime of the project.

Western Isles Fishermens Association

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7 May 2026

Marine Directorate
Licensing Operations Team
Scottish Government
375 Victoria Road
ABERDEEN
AB11 9DB

Dear Sirs

MD-00011742 & MB-00011743- - SPIORAD NA MARA LIMITED – SPIORAD NA MARA OFFSHORE WINDFARM NORTH WEST LEWIS

Western Isles Fishermen's Association would wish to lodge a formal objection against the planning application by Northland for an offshore windfarm to the North West of Lewis, until the full impacts on the fishing industry have been fully assessed and compensation arrangements have been agreed with the fishing industry.

Western Isles Fishermen's Association represents the interests of 150 vessels based in the Western Isles, ranging from single handed static gear vessels to larger vessels that have a crew of 4 that trawl mostly for nephrops, dredge for scallops, and static gear vessels targeting lobster, brown and velvet crab with a further 2 vessels using electro fishing to target razor fish.

The fishing industry has been of significant economic importance to many remote fragile communities throughout the Western Isles and has provided employment to nearly 300 fishermen for over a generation, in remote coastal island communities where alternative employment opportunities do not exist

CHAIRMAN: [Redacted] **SECRETARY:** [Redacted]

With the development of salmon farming and to a lesser extent mussel farming, sheltered inshore waters available to the fishing industry has been greatly reduced, around the Western Isles. Conflict amongst marine users has been managed, however, as the salmon industry has seen an increase in mortalities, they are now moving their operations further offshore, into commercial fishing grounds that have been harvested sustainably by fishermen for generations.

Further competition on traditional fishing grounds is now evident with the emerging offshore renewables sector, creating further contraction of grounds available for commercial fisheries. The recent Scotwind Licensing Round and the Award of N4 to Northland Power, poses further significant risks to the inshore fleet operating in the area. Previous generations of fishermen have been dependent on having access to the proposed site, which has been and still is an extremely productive and commercially lucrative area for lobster and brown crab, with an emerging white fish netting fishery developed in the area over the last 30 years.

Fishermen in the Western Isles have been at the forefront of introducing sensible shellfish management for their inshore shellfish grounds, out to 6 miles offshore, for the last 40 years. Those measures include seasonal closures for creel fishing, pioneering the introduction of lobster v-notching legislation, introducing a maximum landing size for female lobsters, increasing the minimum landing size for lobsters and velvet crab. In addition, a pot limitation pilot was trialled in the Western Isles using a tracking system for use in under 12 metre vessels, developed by St Andrews University, this tracker used with a CatchApp can establish an exact daily value from the fishing grounds used by smaller vessels. The cumulative impact of the above management measures has now seen the catch per unit effort for lobster increasing significantly over the last number of years, to match catch per unit effort seen 50 years ago.

Fishing industry represents did meet with Marine Directorate officials during the range of public meetings held in Stornoway when the proposed site had been identified. Officials in attendance at those meetings were made fully aware of the economic importance of the proposed N4 site to local fishermen who had been fishing the area for generations for lobster and brown crab and more recently netting for white fish that has been developed within the site over the last 30 years.

Local fishermen have met with representatives from Northland to consider the impacts that the development would have on their future operations and it was clear that there are still many outstanding issues that must be clarified before the industry could support the current planning application.
Northland have given no assurance to fishermen that they will be an compensation for loss of earnings due to loss of access to their traditional grounds, or any indication of mitigation measures that would assist the industry during such major developments. The offer of £4.5 Million annually to local communities on the West of Lewis, for the duration of the project, is simply £5,000 per megawatt for the proposed 900 megawatt should the project proceed. The papers relating to the meeting with Northland representatives is attached for information.

Clearly, loss of access to very lucrative lobster and brown crab grounds is going to result in significant financial loss for the vessels that fish within the proposed site from April to October, during the period when most of the construction works would be undertaken by the developers. The construction season for installation the turbines and array of cabling to the shore coincides with the seasonal fishing season for lobster and brown crab fisheries in that area.

Due to the hard rocky seabed conditions between the turbines and the shore, it's likely that a considerable amount of cabling can't be buried and this will pose a serious major risk of future entanglement with static gear rope when hauling pots for the duration of the development. Whilst reference is being made to matting and boulder coverage on unburied cables, those are most likely to be to being damaged and removed on the seabed, following disturbance that will occur on the shallower grounds during the stormy conditions that will be experienced on such exposed inshore grounds during winter periods from westerly to north eastly wind directions.

The financial loss to the fishing industry during the construction stages, when they will be excluded from their traditional grounds, coupled with future dangers and risks of gear entanglement for the duration of the project, will force existing and future fishermen out of business unless fair and adequate compensation is offered before the development commences. All current static gear vessels operating in inshore waters inside 6 miles are under 14 metres overall length, and will have no alternative fishing grounds during the season when they achieve highest commercial returns from lobster and brown crab, with a similar season coinciding with returns for high value white fish species targeted by tangle netting on the seabed, by at least 2 local fishing vessels within the proposed development site.

Interim shellfish measures introduced on 12 May 2024 for the whole of Scotland except for the Solway, where a disproportionate percentage of berried lobsters where caught in that area with no alternative species available for vessels.

- prohibit a commercial fishing vessel from retaining onboard, landing, offering for sale or consigning a berried (egg bearing) lobster

- prohibit a commercial fishing vessel from retaining onboard, landing, offering for sale or consigning a berried (egg bearing) brown crab

- prohibit a commercial fishing vessel of greater than 12 metres overall length, that caught over 200 tonnes of brown crab and/or lobster during any 12 month period(s) from 2020 onwards from deploying creels, pots or traps within any part of Scottish inshore waters (0-6 nautical miles), with the exception of the inshore waters surrounding St Kilda (Hirta and Boreray), Flannan Isles, Rockall, Sula Sgeir, North Rona, Sule Stack, and Sule Skerry

The above was further amended on 31 May 2025 by a fishing licence variation, to include vessels greater than 14 metres overall length and remains in place.

Fishermen have suggested certain mitigation measures that could be considered to assist the industry towards covering some of the losses they will experience if the planning for Spiorad Na Mara is approved. However, there has been no positive feedback from the developers that they would consider implementing such measures, The negative impact on West of Lewis fishermen, currently potting for lobster, brown crab and netting for white fish will be very considerable and must be fully compensated for before planning is approved for the Spiorad Na Mara N4 development.

We note the following within the papers submitted with the planning application:

A003- Disruption Agreements will be implemented to coordinate and agree appropriate co-operation and establish evidence-based disruption payments to fishermen, where identified as significant within the EIA. This is for during the pre-construction, construction, and decommissioning stages.

This measure is secured in Section 36 Consent and/or Marine Licence via the condition for an FMMCP to be submitted to MD-LOT for approval. Spiorad na Mara EIA

Chapter 25: Summary of Offshore Mitigation/Statement of Offshore EIA Commitments, Volume 2a.

Relevance to commercial fisheries assessment states “Provides a fair and transparent mechanism to compensate fishers for demonstrable and evidence-based disruption, supporting socio economic resilience and minimises conflict.”

The inclusion of the above is welcome, however, clarification on the value of compensation must be agreed before any planning consent is issued, as the commercial loss from future fisheries from such a large area for the next generation of fishermen will be enormous.

Scottish Government must recognise that a fair compensation scheme must be agreed to compensate the fishing industry for the significant economic loss they are going to suffer if this development is approved. Furthermore, fishermen in the area will be displaced to other areas and this will adversely impact on other fishermen, as their income levels will be greatly reduced due to increased effort on other grounds due to displacement of effort from the proposed N4 site.

In conclusion, Western Isles Fishermen’s Association is opposed to the offshore Spiorad Na Mara N4 planning application, until agreed financial compensation is reached with the fishing industry for the loss of access to some of the most valuable lobster and brown crab inshore grounds around Scotland.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Secretary

Whale and Dolphin Conservation

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Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations
Scottish Government

May 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

WDC comments on Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm - Isle of Lewis - EIA Section 36 Consent and Marine Licence Application

WDC have been engaging with the UK and devolved government bodies and developers for several years regarding marine renewable energy and providing advice regarding marine renewable developments and their potential impacts on whales, dolphins and porpoises (cetaceans).

WDC supports the development and appropriate siting of offshore wind farms as part of a balanced green transition, complementing onshore renewables and wide scale energy reduction measures, to address the climate crisis. The UK Government has committed to ambitious renewable energy targets, which includes increasing offshore wind farm capacity from 13.7GW to 50GW by 2030 (HM Government, 2023). This will also support ambition to achieve net-zero by 2050 (Burnett et al., 2024).

To meet targets to address both climate change and biodiversity loss, offshore wind farms must be developed without adversely impacting marine biodiversity. This is especially critical as the marine environment plays a crucial role in combatting climate change by acting as a major carbon sink (Heinze et al., 2015).

While acknowledging the urgent need for responsible expansion of renewable energy production, WDC has serious concerns about the potential impacts of wind farm developments, both individually and cumulatively, on cetaceans (James, 2013). It is crucial to consider the full range of short and long-term impacts on both individual cetaceans and populations.

The details of our concerns for the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm development are outlined in Annex 1. Our primary concern surrounds the noise pollution resulting from pile driving and its potential impacts on cetacean species in the region. WDC are encouraged however, to see the developer has committed to achieving a 12dB reduction in noise levels using noise abatement.

Our key recommendations for this development are:

- Where possible quieter construction/installation methods that minimise impulsive noise e.g. gravity-based foundations/drill and grout piling should be prioritised.
- There needs to be more clarity in the final MMMP on how a 12dB reduction will be achieved and what the process or contingency plan is if a 12dB reduction is not achievable or feasible when it comes to construction.
- WDC would like to be included as a consultee on the final MMMP.

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- A commitment to a long-term post consent monitoring plan for all stages of the project. This is to ensure that a 12dB reduction is maintained during piling and to allow monitoring of impacts from vessel movements, cable repairs, turbine noise etc and potential long term/population impacts from the development.
- WDC recommends that additional mitigation is used during other construction activities that create noise which could lead to disturbance.
- WDC believes that all impacts should be scoped into the CEA to allow for a full and appropriate assessment of all the cumulative impacts not just disturbance from piling noise and disturbance from turbine noise.
- Ground-truthing of modelled noise assessment data should be undertaken.
- All collected data as part of this project should be made available to all stakeholders.
- An assessment report should be publicly available within a reasonable timeframe of construction completion.

The full list of recommendations are detailed in Annex 1.

We are happy to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours faithfully,
[Redacted]

Offshore Industries Coordinator
[Redacted]

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Annex 1

General Comments

We recognise that the conclusions drawn are a 'worst case scenario' when assessing the impact on marine mammals and believe this to be appropriate given the considerable unknowns surrounding the development of the wind farm.

WDC are encouraged to see the developer has committed to achieving a 12dB reduction in noise levels during piling by using noise abatement.

Location of Spiorad na Mara

The proposed Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm is located within an area of interest for multiple species of cetacean including, harbour porpoise, Risso's dolphin, long finned pilot whale, white-beaked dolphin, humpback whale, Atlantic white sided dolphin, fin whale, minke whale, common dolphin, killer whale, bottlenose dolphin and beaked whale species. It has been identified that many of these species are present annually and species such as harbour porpoise, white-beaked dolphin, Risso's dolphin and minke whale are frequently sighted throughout the year (HWDT, 2026).

Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm is located close to the North-east Lewis NCMPA (designated for Risso's dolphin) and the Inner Hebrides and the Minches SAC (designated for harbour porpoise). The Sea of the Hebrides NCMPA (designated for minke whale) is also southeast of the proposed development.

Development within this area is of particular concern to WDC as the proposed development has the potential to disturb a variety of cetacean species and the long-term impacts of disturbance and potential displacement are unknown. In recent years there have also been unusual mass pilot whale strandings in this area and whilst it wasn't possible to attribute the cause, disturbance to sensitive deep diving species has been known to cause strandings elsewhere (Brownlow et al., 2024; Brownlow et al., 2026).

European Protected Species (EPS)

All cetaceans are European Protected Species (EPS) and in Scotland are protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (up to 12nm) and the Conservation of Offshore Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (12nm -200nm) making it an offence to kill, injure or disturb them. Given that the proposed development is projected to cause disturbance, an EPS licence will be required for the project.

Baseline survey methodology

WDC acknowledge that the 24 months of DAS (Digital Aerial Survey) and 12 months of static PAM (Passive Acoustic Monitoring) data collected as part of the project is used in conjunction with other surveys. WDC would advise that between 3-5 years' worth of dedicated marine mammal surveys are undertaken as part of the baseline, to be able to fully assess any marine mammal populations and the potential for impacts but acknowledge that using 2 years of data is the standard.

WDC note SCANS IV and SCANS III surveys have been used to assist with assessing populations, and potential impacts on marine mammals. However, the SCANS surveys are only one seasonal

snapshot in time, with gaps between datasets. It is not therefore appropriate to be used solely for estimates of density and finer-scale information is required (Green et al., 2012). Therefore, WDC acknowledge that fine-scale density estimates have been used (where available) alongside uniform density estimates and that additional data has been included in the assessment including data from the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) and the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS). WDC acknowledge that WDC Shorewatch data along with Orca data has been incorporated 'via inclusion of publications making use of these data'.

In tables 13-5 and 13-6 of Chapter 13 (Marine Mammals) which detail MPAs and activities/ impacts scoped into the assessment, the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC (designated for harbour porpoise) has not been scoped in along with the other two MPAs despite being 43km away from the proposed development. WDC acknowledges that as it is an SAC the Inner Hebrides and Minches SAC is assessed within the RIAA however we are interested to understand why this SAC is not scoped into the assessment chapter alongside the other two protected sites.

Underwater noise modelling

WDC appreciates that noise modelling has been undertaken for piling with mitigation (a modelled 12dB reduction) and without mitigation. It is good to see multiple piling locations have been modelled, accounting for differing environmental conditions and differing maximum hammer energies, with the worst-case scenario taken forward to the assessment. It is also useful to see the modelled impact reduction and comparison between mitigated piling vs non mitigated piling.

WDC acknowledges that the conclusions made in the EIA are based on mitigation being used e.g. noise abatement being implemented during the project particularly during the construction stage to reduce noise from piling. See WDC's further comments on the mitigation methods.

WDC understands that cumulative noise impacts have been calculated as part of the noise modelling for piling. As there can be noise and disturbance created from other sources during the installation of noise abatement (e.g. from additional vessels leading to an increased construction time) the potential additional cumulative impacts of noise abatement should also be considered.

Potential impacts

UXO clearance

WDC understands that UXO clearance is not included within the assessment as it is no longer included within the design envelope. However, WDC notes that the applicant states '*Should any UXO clearance be required following pre-construction surveys, this activity would be consented separately to this Application, and ultimately safely disposed of from the seabed, ensuring safety during installation'*. If UXO clearance is required, then low-order techniques must be prioritised to minimize underwater noise impacts and harm to wildlife.

Pile Driving Noise

Noise levels during construction remain a key concern due to pile driving of foundations (WDC, 2025). We recognise that worse case scenarios (using abated percussive piling) have been used when assessing the noise impact on marine mammals from pile driving and believe this to be appropriate given the considerable unknowns surrounding the development of the wind farm.

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Research shows that pile driving noise can cause TTS in marine mammals (Kastelein et al., 2015, 2016) and prolonged or intense exposure may lead to PTS. Studies have shown that displacement ranges in harbour porpoises can extend from 12 km to over 20 km from wind farm sites (Benhemma-Le Gall et al., 2021; Haelters et al., 2015; Tougaard et al., 2009). There is concern that displacement from critical habitats may disrupt vital activities such as foraging, nursing and mating, affecting individual fitness and population viability. There has been extensive focus on harbour porpoise's responses to pile driving noise, but little is known about how other species (in particular, baleen whales) respond to pile driving noise. This highlights the need for more studies on large whales and other under-represented cetacean groups to gain a comprehensive understanding of noise impacts.

Pile driving noise can also disturb feeding behaviour and movement. Experiments show that harbour porpoises exhibit reduced foraging success (Kastelein et al., 2019) and swim faster (Kastelein et al., 2018) when experimentally exposed to pile driving sounds. Given that harbour porpoises can spend over 60% of their time foraging to meet their high metabolic requirements, any reduction in foraging time or efficiency poses serious risks (Rojano-Doñate et al., 2024). Cetacean foraging could also be impacted indirectly through the responses of their prey to pile driving sounds. For example, pile driving can disrupt movement behaviour in Atlantic cod, a common prey for humpback whales (van der Knaap et al., 2022), or could mask fish vocalisations that may serve as foraging cues for cetaceans (Wilson et al., 2004). Additionally, Yang et al. (2021) identified changes in stress hormones and disrupted immune function when cetaceans were exposed to intense pile driving-like noise.

WDC notes that along with percussive piling, a drill and grout approach will be undertaken at the southern end of the site (in the Percussive Piling Exclusion Area) to reduce underwater noise impacts to migrating fish. WDC recommends that if this method of installing piles is possible throughout a larger area of the site this should be prioritised as this will likely have a lower impact than percussive piling. WDC also notes that gravity-based foundations are being considered as an alternative design option to piling. Where possible the applicant should prioritise quieter construction/installation methods that minimise impulsive noise.

WDC notes that the maximum offshore construction period is projected to be 5 years with working hours expected to be 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during the construction period, with pile driving/installation of the foundations estimated to be over a 2-year period. This has the potential to cause disturbance to cetaceans over a prolonged time scale and thus WDC is encouraged by the commitment to use noise abatement (to achieve a 12dB reduction) during construction to reduce the impacts from underwater noise created during piling operations. WDC acknowledges that pin piles will likely be used and that there will be no concurrent percussive piling during the project thus reducing cumulative noise impacts.

However, WDC is still concerned that many individuals (from multiple species) are likely to be disturbed even with the commitment to a 12dB reduction. For instance, it is predicted that 27.7% of the Coastal West Scotland and Hebrides MU bottlenose dolphin population and 9.186% of the Celtic and Greater North Seas MU Risso's dolphin population is likely to be disturbed during piling activities. WDC acknowledges that iPCoD modelling was also undertaken for the project alone to show the percentage change 18 years after piling ends. For bottlenose dolphin this amounts to a 2.33% change in the mean population size. For Risso's dolphin, which may be resident in the waters around Lewis, this percentage change couldn't be calculated due to there being no parameters for iPCoD modelling available. WDC is concerned that there could be substantial changes in and harm to these populations as a result of disturbance and thus if further noise reduction is achievable via the use of noise abatement or alternative installation techniques then this should be investigated further.

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Other construction noise

WDC acknowledges that the developer has qualitatively presented the potential for auditory injury and disturbance from other sources of construction noise. The construction activities listed pose a risk of disturbance to cetaceans especially those with high source levels. The marine mammal chapter states that '*impacts to seals and most cetaceans will occur within 5 km of the activity, taking place intermittently, over the short-term construction period, while impacts on baleen whales may extend to 10-20 km'* and concludes that disturbance from other construction noise to be 'negligible'. WDC disagrees that this potential level of disturbance is negligible (especially for baleen whales) and recommends that a more rigorous assessment of 'other construction noise' is undertaken in order to inform additional mitigation to be used during these activities. WDC does not consider the construction period to be 'short-term'.

Vessel presence

WDC note that the maximum number of vessels within the Offshore Project Boundary (208.2 km^2) at any one time is 35 during construction with a total maximum number of operational and maintenance vessels movements (return trips) estimated at up to 32,034 over the 35-year operational lifetime.

WDC is concerned about the impacts of increased vessel activity throughout the life of the development. Increased vessel presence and noise can interrupt cetacean foraging behaviour (in particular for harbour porpoise) which could lead to significantly fewer prey capture attempts (Wisniewska et al., 2018). There is an increased risk of collision and disturbance to cetaceans from increased vessel activity (Dyndo et al., 2015; James, 2013). During all stages of the project, vessel traffic will be increased which may result in temporary habitat loss for marine mammals. WDC requests that appropriate mitigation measures are included in a vessel management plan to reduce disturbance and risk of collision. If any instances of collision occur, they should be reported.

Given that the exact type of noise abatement to be used is not yet known, WDC would be interested to know if the maximum number of vessels accounted for also accounts for any additional vessels needed to install noise abatement systems.

Prey availability

WDC have concerns about prey impacts as any development has the potential to change the prey availability, and it is uncertain if marine mammals would be able to adapt to any changes. Whilst WDC acknowledges that cetaceans can have generalist diets the added energetic cost of travelling/searching and foraging for less desirable prey species as a result of changes to prey availability, could have long term impacts on diet and survival. As harbour porpoise need to feed almost continuously (Wisniewska et al., 2018, 2016), small changes to their ability to forage, and their prey availability has the potential to have a significant impact (Kastelein, 2018).

Operational noise

WDC acknowledges that the project will have an anticipated operational phase of up to 35 years, through to decommissioning in the year 2068. Whilst it is anticipated that operational noise levels will be much lower than construction noise, there is limited data available on operational noise impacts on marine mammals, so a long-term monitoring plan should incorporate operational noise

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impacts on cetaceans if the development goes ahead. This will allow monitoring of impacts and potentially adaptive management and mitigation measures to be applied if required, to reduce impacts from vessel movements, cable repairs, turbine noise etc.

Cumulative assessment

The purpose of the Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) is to assess the effects of the development on the population of cetaceans in the area; therefore, all projects that have the potential to impact that population must be considered. WDC notes the applicant has included a number of offshore developments in this assessment however, we feel that activities other than development of offshore wind farms need to be considered, e.g. shipping, oil and gas exploration, port and harbour developments etc to give a more realistic and accurate assessment of the potential cumulative impacts.

There are multiple impacts including (but not limited to) auditory injury from other construction noise, disturbance from other construction noise, vessel collision, disturbance or temporary habitat loss from presence of vessels, indirect effects of impacts on prey availability, barrier effects and long-term changes in habitat and foraging opportunities that have been scoped out of the CEA. WDC believes that these impacts should be scoped into the CEA to allow for a full and appropriate assessment of all the cumulative impacts not just disturbance from piling noise and disturbance from turbine noise.

WDC has significant concerns regarding the levels of disturbance and likely harm projected in 2030/2031 as part of the cumulative assessment from piling noise particularly for bottlenose dolphin (up to 28.9 % of MU disturbed), Risso's dolphin (up to 31.3% of MU disturbed) minke whale (up to 40.2% of MU disturbed), and white beaked dolphin (up to 53.7 % of MU disturbed). WDC acknowledges for some species (where parameters exist) iPCoD modelling indicates relatively small percentage changes in the MU populations 6 years after cumulative piling ends however, WDC is concerned with both population and individual animal welfare and consider these levels of disturbance to be high. WDC acknowledges that the screening methods used have impacted the results of the cumulative assessment.

<u>Mitigation methods</u>

WDC acknowledges a commitment to a Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan/Protocol (MMMP). We recognise that the outline MMMP will be finalised closer to construction, once all details and plans are known. We believe this to be appropriate as this enables the latest proven mitigation methods to be included in the MMMP. WDC notes that currently the MMMP only focuses on the piling stage of the project and does not cover operational or decommissioning stages. WDC requests that the final MMMP considers mitigation required at all stages of the project to allow for full consideration of any long-term impacts on marine mammals.

WDC notes that the very dated JNCC (2010) guidance has been detailed in the MMMP document. It specifies, amongst other monitoring and mitigation measures, that soft-starts should be used. However, soft starts are only a reduction in sound source at the initiation of a piling event. WDC do not consider 'soft-start' to be an adequate mitigation measure to ensure there are no significant impacts on sensitive protected species. Soft start is not a proven mitigation technique and so cannot be relied upon to mitigate impacts, especially for developments in close proximity to important and critical habitat areas. The in-situ methods in the JNCC guidelines have been widely criticised as arbitrary and with a lack of supportive evidence (Wright and Cosentino, 2015; WDC,2025). Furthermore, the JNCC guidance does not require operators to quantify or report the expected risk reduction of

mitigation measures, preventing meaningful comparison between approaches (Leaper et al., 2015). Additionally the guidelines have not been updated for a number of years and therefore do not include the latest and increasing body scientific data of the impacts of noise on marine mammals (Wright and Cosentino, 2015).

WDC acknowledges that the mitigation zone of 500m has been informed by the underwater noise modelling (with noise abatement) and may be refined post-consent in discussion with relevant stakeholders. WDC also acknowledges that Marine Mammal Observers (MMOs) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) operators will be present and recommends that they are always used in conjunction not just when visual operations may be limited. WDC notes that MMOs and PAM operators are limited by environmental factors (e.g. sea state, poor visibility), observer limitations (e.g. skill level, fatigue) and species behaviour (e.g. diving behaviour, vocal traits) which can limit their ability to be an effective tool for reducing harm (Leaper et al., 2015; Weir and Dolman, 2007; Wright and Constantino, 2015).

WDC notes that the developer has committed to achieving a 12dB reduction in noise levels (at source) at piling locations throughout the programme by using noise abatement. WDC appreciates that the specific noise abatement system (or systems) required to achieve the 12dB commitment is not known at this stage. When this has been chosen more information should be provided on potential options and if 12dB is the maximum of if further reduction could be achieved.

WDC would also like to see a commitment to post consent acoustic monitoring throughout the duration of piling to ensure that a 12dB reduction is maintained. Any instances where the 12dB reduction has not been maintained and thus additional mitigation needs to be undertaken should be included in the reporting deliverables. There needs to be more clarity in the final MMMP on how a 12dB reduction will be achieved and what the process or contingency plan is if a 12dB reduction is not achievable or feasible when it comes to construction.

It is not clear from the marine mammal chapter or outline MMMP if ADDs are intended to be used for mitigation prior to piling. Not only do ADDs add another source of noise into the environment but the use of ADDs has not be proven as a mitigation for pile driving and cannot be relied upon for the range of species likely to be encountered in the wind farm region. Furthermore, the short and long-term impacts of ADDs on marine mammals need to be thoroughly considered.

WDC acknowledges that a vessel management plan and a marine pollution contingency plan will be created. The vessel management plan should specify what steps are being made to reduce the likelihood of collision with cetaceans.

<u>Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment</u>

WDC notes that applicant has taken into account the conservation objectives for the Inner Hebrides and the Minches SAC as part of the RIAA and has undertaken an assessment for the project alone and in-combination.

WDC acknowledges that disturbance from the project is projected to occur wholly outside of the SAC boundary. However, as highlighted by Nature Scot '*the number of harbour porpoise using the site naturally varies and there is likely to be a lot of movement of animals in and out of the site'*. Therefore, individuals may travel outside the SAC (and within the wider West Scotland Management Unit) and be impacted by pressures, and this risk should be appropriately considered.

WDC note that in addition to physical presence of vessels being included within the project alone assessment for marine mammals, that it should also be factored into the in-combination

assessment as increased vessel noise can interrupt cetacean behaviour and may lead to significantly fewer prey capture attempts (Wisniewska et al., 2018). WDC recommend that additional pressures are included within the in-combination assessment not just disturbance from underwater noise during construction percussive piling. Other projects that will have an overlap with the operational stage of the project should be considered within the in-combination assessment not just those that have a temporal overlap with the piling stage. WDC is concerned that the in-combination assessment is relatively light touch and that there may be an AEOI from in-combination effects when all pressure and all stages of development are considered.

In-field impact monitoring

In-field monitoring should be undertaken to ensure that the proposed modelling impacts calculated are accurate. If measured noise levels exceed modelled/predicted noise impacts, then the development should be halted and mitigation methods revisited. As discussed previously, acoustic monitoring should be undertaken throughout piling to ensure that the 12dB noise reduction commitment is being achieved.

WDC recommends that post consent acoustic monitoring is undertaken to assess the long-term impacts of the project on cetacean presence and behaviour and to allow for long term population assessments. As one of the first offshore wind projects in this part of Scotland, this development provides a unique opportunity to collect data and improve understanding of environmental impacts including on cetacean behaviours in this area, which may inform future developments. Strategic monitoring and join up with other developers would help to better understand the impacts to marine life in the wider area as a whole.

Decommissioning

WDC understands that the project is anticipated to have an operational phase of up to 35 years, through to decommissioning in the year 2068 and that there will be a decommissioning programme that will be updated regularly to account for updates to best practices.

Full list of recommendations
WDC strongly recommends the following:

- Where possible quieter construction/installation methods that minimise impulsive noise e.g. gravity-based foundations/drill and grout piling should be prioritised.
- There needs to be more clarity in the final MMMP on how a 12dB reduction will be achieved and what the process or contingency plan is if a 12dB reduction is not achievable or feasible when it comes to construction.
- WDC would like to be included as a consultee on the final MMMP.
- A commitment to a long-term post consent monitoring plan for all stages of the project. This is to ensure that a 12dB reduction is maintained during piling and allows for monitoring of impacts from vessel movements, cable repairs, turbine noise etc and potential long term/population impacts from the development.
- Any instances where the 12dB reduction has not been maintained and thus additional mitigation needs to be undertaken should be included in the reporting deliverables along with any instances where operations were halted due to marine mammals.
- WDC appreciates that the specific noise abatement system(s)/technology required to achieve the 12dB commitment is not known at this stage. When this has been chosen more

information should be provided on potential options and if 12dB is the maximum of if further reduction could be achieved.
- WDC believes that all impacts should be scoped into the CEA to allow for a full and appropriate assessment of all the cumulative impacts not just disturbance from piling noise and disturbance from turbine noise.
- WDC recommend that additional pressures are included within the in-combination assessment not just disturbance from underwater noise during construction percussive piling.
- WDC recommends that additional mitigation is used during other construction activities that create noise as they can lead to disturbance.
- Visual and acoustic monitoring should be ongoing concurrently throughout construction.
- Ground-truthing of modelled noise assessment data should be undertaken.
- All collected data as part of this project should be made available to all stakeholders.
- An assessment report should be publicly available within a reasonable timeframe of construction completion.

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