

MORAY FIRTH RENEWABLES ADVISORY GROUP (MFRAG) MEETING NOTES

Meeting	MFRAG Marine Mammals Subgroup	
Date	25 th Aug 2021 09:30 – 12:30	
Location	Teams Call	
Attendees	Marine Scotland Science (MSS)	Jared Wilson (JW) [Chair], Ross Culloch (RC), Sue O'Brien (SB), Kate Brooks (KB)
	Marine Scotland Licensing and Operations Team (MS-LOT)	Gayle Holland (GH), Debbie England (DE), Stephanie Sweeting (SS)
	NatureScot (NS)	Erica Knott (EK), Chris Eastham (CE), Caroline Carter (CC)
	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	Sarah Canning (SC)
	University of Aberdeen	Paul Thompson (PT), Barbara Cheney (BC), Isla Graham (IG)
	BOWL	Joseph Deimel (JD)
	Moray East	Ruaridh Danaher (RD)
	Moray West	Catarina Rei (CR), Nuria Abad Oliva (NAO)
Action Number	Action	Completion Date
1.	All - To consider how fishing data within wind farms could be recorded, MS-LOT to explore availability of existing fisheries data	Next MFRAG-MM mtg
2.	All - To ensure effective communication between MFRAG and CFWG	Ongoing
3.	Developers – To provide survey lookahead for the full year (as available) within quarterly survey updates	Ongoing – on a quarterly basis
4.	NatureScot - to share costs for ongoing strategic monitoring with the group	By end 2021
5.	NatureScot – continue discussions with BEIS/Natural England around integration with monitoring in English waters	Ongoing
6.	NatureScot – To consider integration of future Bottlenose Dolphin monitoring and the Standing Scheme.	By end 2021
7.	NatureScot – to share CREEM's strategic monitoring paper when available.	When available

8.	EK - To provide a summary note on NatureScot's advice on marine mammal Strategic Monitoring.	Within 2 weeks of the meeting (by 8 Sep 2021)
9.	Developers - To review existing cost sharing agreements and consider how cost sharing could be set up for the 2022 Bottlenose Dolphin and Harbour Seal population monitoring costs.	By end 2021
10.	RC - To discuss trawl resistant moorings with Moray East and how these could be used during Moray East's over-trawl surveys.	In advance of the Moray East over-trawl surveys
11.	GH – To coordinate upload of strategic monitoring priorities note within the RAG page.	When available
12.	GH - To draft a letter to BOWL's OFTO reminding them of the responsibilities under their MFRAG condition.	Next MFRAG-MM mtg

1. Introductions & Meeting Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductions were made and purpose of meeting as specific to marine mammal monitoring was outlined.
2. Review actions from last meeting (May 2021)
<p>(1.) JD to investigate sharing of over-trawl methodology with MFRAG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is complete. JD and RD provided update on the progress of the over-trawl (OT trials) at Beatrice and Moray East. JD noted that the Beatrice trials were successful. RD noted that the OEC OT trials were scheduled to be undertaken shortly. Following discussion on the OT surveys, PT noted that it would be useful to understand the fishing levels within the WF sites, an action was discussed for all to think how this data could be recorded. MS-LOT noted that they would review if it would be possible to see how existing relevant fishing data could be shared. <p>(2.) GH to discuss internally with MS-LOT what the survey priorities are for the BOWL site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This action is complete. GH noted that it should be an action going forward to improve communication between the CFWG and the MFRAG groups. CR noted that the survey summary lookahead would be submitted within the next week, there was a general discussion that a longer-term view of surveys was required. An action

was discussed for all developers to include a yearlong lookahead within the survey summary report, to provide greater clarity on the survey activity over a longer time period and help inform the planning of marine mammal monitoring.

(3.) MFRAG Secretariat to set up meeting for August to discuss post-construction monitoring

- This action is complete.

(4.) NatureScot/MSS to develop monitoring proposals for discussion at the August meeting

- NatureScot/MSS met to discuss developing monitoring proposals for the August meeting and was the subject of the minutes recorded under point three below.

3. Development of Post-construction monitoring plans

Outcome of meeting with NatureScot/MSS:

- NatureScot/MSS provided an update on the monitoring priorities following a meeting undertaken in May, the key species identified for each development were:
 - BOWL – Key species Bottlenose Dolphin and Harbour Seal.
 - Moray East - Key species Bottlenose Dolphin and Harbour Seal.
 - Moray West – Key species Bottlenose Dolphin, Harbour Seal and Minke whale.
- Significant work has already been undertaken on Harbour Porpoise and the current recommendation is that at a strategic level this monitoring will continue, given its importance to most developments within the UK. This work would need to kick off in 2022.
- NatureScot have written to the University of Aberdeen (UoA) and St Andrews University Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) to provide costings to cover post-construction marine mammal monitoring proposals across the key species.
- Action on NatureScot to share this proposal when available.
- The timescales for developer contributions to the strategic monitoring programme are yet to be defined, EK noted that to date a six-year programme has been used which coincides with NatureScot's SAC condition monitoring requirements. It was noted that suggestions from UoA and SMRU on long term monitoring would also be taken into account.
- As a result of ScotWind, the current proposal would be to identify a communal pot each developer could contribute to.

❖ **Bottlenose Dolphins (BND):**

- Outcomes of the meeting with regards to Bottlenose Dolphin were:
 - As part of the proposal request, NatureScot have written to UoA and SMRU to provide costings for a continuation of their current work (photo ID).
 - PT is preparing this document and will be ready later in the year.
 - Discussions have been initiated with BEIS/Natural England around ongoing monitoring work in English waters and how this could be reflected strategically here. NatureScot took an action to continue these discussions.

- PT noted that we have not historically coordinated with the Stranding's Project, NatureScot took action to review how future proposals could consider the work of the Stranding's Project.
- RC noted that the recently stranded animal recorded as part of the Stranding's Project was not part of the SAC community, but this action provides the opportunity to discuss wider population connectivity, including with Ireland.

❖ **Harbour Seals:**

- UoA have been undertaking the existing monitoring activities in the Moray Firth and have been asked for costs to continue this work.
- For the monitoring of Harbour Seal populations, EK enquired about the possibility of utilising alternative technologies. PT noted that they were reviewing the ability of drones in respect of their functionality as part of a monitoring programme and provided a short presentation on the results of trialling drone surveys to monitor seals.
- The results of this trial were positive, with effective animal identification and ability to record animal measurements.
- PT further noted that they were currently considering undertaking tagging every 5 years, noting that the last tagging was undertaken in 2017.
- PT noted that for Moray West it would be most efficient to undertake this work during construction with the potential to learn more from tracking due to advancements in tracking devices and other technology.

❖ **Minke Whales:**

- EK noted that as Moray West will be the first development where Minke Whales are a consideration for monitoring, they were not going to be prescriptive about what is required, but that underwater noise monitoring during construction would be part of the monitoring for this species.
- EK stated that a strategic monitoring report which includes Minke Whales is due from CREAM in a few months, action on NatureScot to share this report when it available.
- RC noted that MSS are supporting a PhD student to work predominately on the west coast studying Minke Whale populations, with the opportunity to cover the east coast and therefore provide a more strategic overview.

Wider Strategic Monitoring:

- EK noted that as ScotWind approaches it will be necessary to have a wider strategy for monitoring. The PrePARED project will be part of this, but the determination period for these projects is not known.

- Key questions exist around how harbour porpoises react to different foundation types, how they will forage around these structures, how they will react to decommissioning activities and how this is practically delivered among the developer groups.
- PT noted that the strategic direction for this wider suite of monitoring activities should perhaps not be driven by one academic institution and that may be better to be a consortium of developers or through the regulator.
- EK/JW noted that there needs to be an openness about how this is delivered and that NatureScot are looking at ways of delivering this.
- EK to provide a summary note on NatureScot's marine mammal strategic monitoring proposal as discussed at the meeting.

Delivery Issues to Consider:

- PT noted that the post-construction monitoring needs to be resilient to change of staff over time and that the current contract for the existing works finishes in March and that arrangements need to be put in place soon to ensure there is continuity of work. There is less concern about the short-term monitoring gap, but what is more necessary is to ensure there is consistency in the medium term.
- CR noted that Moray West could provide a bridge for this funding (Bottlenose Dolphin and Harbour Seal population monitoring) to be continued during 2021 as part of the Moray West pre-construction monitoring, until such a time that the strategic post-construction monitoring objectives are confirmed. Moray West could recoup costs for the shared costs through Cost Sharing Agreements with Moray East and BOWL. Moray East, Moray West and BOWL took an action to review the existing funding arrangements and how the above proposal could be formalised.
- CR asked if the strategic post-construction marine mammal monitoring could be administered by NatureScot, EK noted that this would be difficult.
- JD stated that there is a difference between the construction and operational phases in terms of how new services are contracted and procured, and this needs to be considered in how the strategic work is managed such that any activities can be budgeted for.
- PT noted that the entire group will have to consider the implications of Bill Ruck selling his vessels and ensure alternative arrangements are available.

Next Steps

- UoA and SMRU to provide costed proposals to NatureScot for continuation of Bottlenose Dolphin and Harbour Seals to NatureScot and MSS for review by all MFRAG-MM members.
- Developers to discuss immediate funding proposals for the next year until strategic proposals are agreed.
- Funding pot for future projects to be developed to cover post construction monitoring, management of this strategic monitoring yet to be defined.

- RC to discuss trawl resistant moorings with Moray East and how these could be used during Moray East's over-trawl surveys.
- GH to coordinate upload of strategic monitoring priorities note within the RAG page.

4. Moray East Project Update

- RD provided update on construction programme, noting that the Wind Turbine Generators installation campaign was approaching completion, with the outstanding actions following this milestone including the final commissioning activities.
- RC took an action to discuss trawl resistant moorings with Moray East and how these could be used during Moray East's over-trawl surveys.
- PT provided update on UXO research at Moray East, noting that noise data has been passed onto NPL for analysis.
- Research notes that the modelled data fits closely with the actual noise data produced during detonation and that most of the noise comes from the depth charges.
- Research has been submitted for publication, the date of which is not yet confirmed.

5. Moray West Project Update

- NA provided a project update:
 - Consultation on Section 36 Consent Variation Application commenced in July 2021.
 - Site investigations planned:
 - Geotechnical works are due to commence in September.
 - Geophysical works due to commence first week of September.
 - Pre-construction monitoring surveys are on-going
 - Drafting Consent Plans.

6. Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Project Update

- Completion of the OFTO transaction in early August 2021 (BOWL's OFTO is called TCP).
- Discussion on the inclusion of a representative of the BOWL OFTO owner to the MFRAG groups, action for GH to draft a letter to the OFTO reminding the company of their responsibilities under their MFRAG condition.
- GH to coordinate upload of strategic monitoring priorities note within the RAG page.
- Other updates included:
 - Cod and sandeel reports now issued.
 - Benthic surveys completed in June 2021.
 - All aerial surveys now completed for 2021.
 - BOWL considering options for great black-backed gull tagging.

7. AOB

- Discussion of the NERC INSITE project – fishspamms

- PT provided an update on the jackie monitoring workstream, a linear array has been deployed around the turbine and the oil platforms. ADD playback work to be carried out approximately in September, during the 5 days window prior decommissioning works and 5 days after decommissioning.

8. Next meeting and close

- Arrange for the first two weeks in December