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Date: **10 February 2022**

Dear Mr Dyche,

SCREENING OPINION UNDER THE MARINE WORKS (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2017

Thank you for your screening opinion request dated 02 November 2021, and further information supplied on 06 December 2021, in regards to the proposed Riverbank Protection Works, including excavation of riverbank, deposit of geotextile, rock armour and excavated material at Barra Airport, Barra (“the Proposed Works”).

The Scottish Ministers consider the Proposed Works to fall under paragraph 10(m) of schedule 2 of The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (“the 2017 MW Regulations”), with the Proposed Works being carried out in a sensitive area, as defined by the 2017 MW Regulations. Consequently, the Scottish Ministers are obliged to adopt a screening opinion as to whether the Proposed Works are, or are not, an Environmental Impact Assessment (“EIA”) project under the 2017 MW Regulations.

Under regulation 10(5) of the 2017 MW Regulations, the Scottish Ministers have consulted with NatureScot (“NS”) (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (“SEPA”), Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (“CnES”) and Historic Environment Scotland (“HES”) as to their view on whether the Proposed Works are an EIA project. Copies of the consultation responses received are attached for your review (at Appendix 1).

When making a determination as to whether schedule 2 works are an EIA project, the Scottish Ministers must take into account such of the selection criteria set out in schedule 3 of the 2017 MW Regulations as are relevant to the Proposed Works. In this regard, the Scottish Ministers have considered the following:

Characteristics of the works

The Proposed Works are to reinforce the riverbank of a river located adjacent to one of the runways at Barra Airport within the bay of Tràigh Mhòr, Isle of Barra. The river emerges from a culvert located beneath the road adjacent to Barra Airport and would naturally flow across the shore over one of the airport runways. The Proposed Works are necessary to provide

increased resistance to washout events from waves and improve sediment build up along the riverbank.

The Proposed Works are to be carried out over a 990 meters squared (“m²”) area (3.3 meters (“m”) wide and 300m long). The seaward side of the riverbank will be excavated to allow for the installation of geotextile and rock armour. The rock armour and geotextile will be placed to create an interwoven effect with additional rock armour added on top to create the desired profile. Sediment that was removed during excavation will then be used to restore the beach profile on the seaward side of the rock armour. The remaining sediment will be placed on the riverside of the rock armour to encourage the formation of a sand bank. Excavation and placement of rock armour will be carried out using an excavator.

The Proposed Works are anticipated to take 10 weeks to complete, which includes 2 weeks for mobilisation and 8 weeks of construction.

Location of the works

The Proposed Works are located within the Eoligarry Site of Special Scientific Interest (“SSSI”) which is designated for coastal geomorphology, sand dunes and machair habitats. The screening opinion request identified that the excavation of the riverbank will result in loss of habitat within the Eoligarry SSSI. Due to the highly dynamic nature of sediment in the area the applicant believes this loss is unlikely to have any significant residual effects. NS advised that the Proposed Works below Mean High Water Springs will not overlap with the machair or sand dune features of the Eoligarry SSSI. It acknowledges the possibility for some effects on the coastal geomorphology feature. It advises that due to the limited scale and influence of the Proposed Works, significant effects are not likely on the geomorphological processes or on the SSSI overall.

The Sound of Barra Special Area of Conservation (“SAC”) is 450m from the Proposed Works and is designated for harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*), reeds and subtidal sandbanks. The screening opinion request identified that the Proposed Works will involve the mechanical excavation of sediment/sand and installation of rock armour onto the geotextile. No piling or impulsive activities are proposed therefore the impact on marine mammals is negligible. The closest seal haulout site is Aird Ghrein & Sgeir Liath, which is 16km from the Proposed Works. NS advised that due to the scale and nature of the Proposed Works it is unlikely to have any significant connectivity with designated features of this site and that significant effects are not likely on the Sound of Barra SAC.

The West Coast of the Outer Hebrides Special Protection Area (“SPA”) is 750m from the Proposed Works and is designated for breeding red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*) and non-breeding: black throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), great northern diver (*Gavia immer*), eider (*Somateria mollissima*), long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*), Slavonian grebe (*Podiceps auritus*). The screening report identified the possibility for disturbance to the qualifying features as the Proposed Works are scheduled to take place during the breeding bird season. A pre-construction ecological survey will be undertaken prior to works commencing to identify areas of breeding birds. Areas where breeding birds are identified will be marked out with a buffer zone, left in situ and undisturbed until the young birds have fledged. NS advised that due to the scale and nature of the Proposed Works they are unlikely to have any significant connectivity with designated features of this site and that significant effects are not likely on the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA.

CnES referred to its screening opinion where it concluded that the Proposed Works did not constitute an EIA development. It highlighted that the impact of the Proposed Works on the

environment post-construction are similar to the existing bund system in terms of the effect on the marine environment. It also advised that there is no known presence of protected species within, or in close proximity to the Proposed Works. While there is potential habitat for otter, CnES acknowledge that otter surveys have been carried out and the screening opinion request contains standard good practice measures to mitigate potential impacts on otters during the construction phase of the Proposed Works. They highlight that whilst the bund may create a physical obstruction to some species, it does not encircle the beach or prevent access entirely. The Scottish Ministers agree with CnES that the bund will not prevent access entirely and should allow access for any mammals.

HES advised that there are no heritage assets within their remit either within, or in the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Works.

Characteristics of the potential impact

CnES advised that any potential for pollution during the Proposed Works can be mitigated against and can be successfully managed using standard mitigation as outlined in the screening opinion request. The risk of accidents likely to result in any significant effect on the environment is considered to be low. The area affected by the Proposed Works is sufficiently small and its height sufficiently limited that the Proposed Works will be absorbed by the surrounding landscape. The size of the Proposed Works on its own and cumulatively with other land uses in the area, is not of a scale that the levels of activity from construction would be likely to have a significant impact on the environment. It also highlighted that the Proposed Works will likely reduce the required maintenance and reconstruction requirements in the long term.

SEPA advised that for matters within their remit, they do not consider it necessary to undertake an EIA for the Proposed Works.

Conclusion

In view of the findings above, the Scottish Ministers are of the opinion that the Proposed Works are not an EIA project under the 2017 MW Regulations and, therefore, an EIA is not required to be carried out in respect of the Proposed Works.

If you increase, alter or extend the Proposed Works, you are advised to contact Marine Scotland - Licensing Operations Team again to confirm if the screening opinion is still valid.

A copy of the screening opinion has been forwarded to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar planning department. The screening opinion has also been made publicly available through the [Marine Scotland Information](#) website.

If you require any further assistance or advice on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Thomas Inglis
Marine Scotland - Licensing Operations Team