

Angus M Gillies
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar
Council Offices,
Sandwick Rd
Stornoway
HS1 2BW

Date: 23 October 2020

Dear Mr Gillies,

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

Thank you for your screening opinion request dated 16 October 2020 and supporting correspondence, including advice you have received from Comhairle Archaeology Service, NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (“SEPA”) and Historic Environment Scotland, in regards to the proposed construction of a replacement fixed crossing, between Great Bernera and the Isle of Lewis (“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 (as amended) (“the 2017 MW Regulations”) with the extent of the Proposed Works meeting the corresponding threshold described in column 2 of schedule 2. 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.

When making a determination as to whether schedule 2 works are an EIA project, the Scottish Ministers must take into account 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 works

The Proposed Works involve constructing a new 100 metre (“m”) long, clear span steel trussed modular, fixed crossing between Great Bernera and the Isle of Lewis (“the Crossing”) beside the existing Bernera Bridge, which has been deemed structurally unfit for purpose and is considered unsuitable for strengthening or remedial works. It is intended

for the Bernera Bridge to be retained in place for the foreseeable future but it will no longer be in use once the new crossing is in place.

Rock fill embankments will be constructed on either side of the Sruth Iarsiadair channel, using locally sourced quarry material tipped from the shoreline and compacted in layers until the finished embankment profile is established. The embankments will provide the sub-structural support for reinforced concrete foundation plinths (in combination forming abutments) on which the Crossing superstructure will be supported. Tremie concrete (with anti-washout admixture) will be used. Concrete base works within the marine environment will be shuttered using sealed formwork and excess water pumped out. Rock armour protection (2-3 tonne) will be placed on the exposed outer face of each embankment from the top of the embankment onto the seabed. Along the embankment edge, the armour will be trenched up to 1m in depth by 1.5m to 2.0m in width into the seabed to form a toe or key.

The north abutment will have a footprint of 378 square metres ("m²") within the Scottish marine area and will require 5,300 tonnes of armour stone and rock fill. The south abutment will have a footprint of 737m² within the Scottish marine area and will require 4,900 tonnes of armour stone and rock fill. The abutments have been designed to avoid reducing the navigable channel.

The superstructure of the Crossing will be delivered using arctic vehicles and assembled on site using cranes and tele-handlers. As the steel structure is assembled it will be launched out across the channel on temporary supports using a winch system. The temporary supports will be provided on the southern approach land strip with no requirement for any supports or otherwise in the Scottish marine area. The overall width of the Crossing superstructure is 8m and the height is 4.5m. The Crossing will accommodate one lane of traffic and a 1.05m walkway. The clear span will not restrict marine traffic. Clearance from high water (approximately 3m) will be marginally greater than that of the existing Bernera Bridge (approximately 2.5m). It is anticipated there will be no long term restriction to vessels currently using the channel as a result of the Proposed Works. The duration of the Proposed Works will be approximately 20 weeks.

SEPA raised no concerns regarding the Proposed Works but advised that best practice pollution controls should be put in place during the works.

Location of the works

The Proposed Works are not located within any sensitive areas as defined by the 2017 MW Regulations, however, the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area ("NSA") bounds the west side of the Proposed Works. The Proposed Works are not anticipated to have a significant effect on the NSA.

Two scheduled monuments are located in close proximity with the Bernera Bridge, stone setting, Great Bernera to the west and Dun Barraglom, broch, cup marked rocks, fish traps and settlement to the east of the Proposed Works. HES advised that, based on the information provided, the Proposed Works are unlikely to have significant impacts on the two scheduled monuments.

Comhairle Archaeology Service (“CAS”) advised that the potential for archaeological finds in the marine environment may be mitigated through a protocol for archaeological discoveries (“PAD”), to be put in place to ensure that any unexpected finds are dealt with appropriately. It is anticipated that a PAD will be implemented, as appropriate, during the Proposed Works.

A mussel farm is located to the east side of the Bernera Bridge. It is intended for appropriate mitigation measures to be implemented to reduce any pollution or effects on the mussel farm, including minimising the fines content of imported fill and potentially only placing rock fill on outward tidal flows away from the mussel farm.

Characteristics of the potential impact

NatureScot reviewed the proposed construction method, the scale of the footprint on the marine environment, and the habitat and bathymetric data available for the channel at Sruth Iarsiadair. Based on this information, NatureScot advised that it does not anticipate any significant impact on the marine natural heritage and that there are no protected areas likely to be effected by the construction of the Proposed Works.

The Scottish Ministers are content that based on the information and advice provided, as detailed above, the Proposed Works are not likely to have a significant impact on the environment.

Conclusion

In view of the findings above, the Scottish Ministers are of the opinion that the Proposed Works are not an EIA project under 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 at this link: <http://marine.gov.scot/ml/marine-licence-replacement-fixed-crossing-bernera-bridge-western-isles>

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

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Munro
Licensing Operations Team
Marine Scotland