



Written Submission
for the
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Response to the Examining Authority's Rule 17 letter dated
21 March 2025

Submitted for Deadline 6
3 April 2025

Planning Act 2008 (as amended)

In the matter of:
Application by Outer Dowsing Limited for an Order
Granting Development Consent for the Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind Farm

Planning Inspectorate Ref: EN010130
RSPB Registration Identification Ref: 20049053

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The RSPB's response to the Examining Authority's Rule 17 letter dated 21 March 2025 is set out in the table below.

Responses to the Examining Authority's Rule 17 letter dated 21 March 2025

Question	Question to:	Question	RSPB response
Offshore and Intertidal Ornithology: <i>In-combination AEol on the guillemot feature of the Farne Islands SPA</i>			
Q10	RSPB	<p>In its deadline 5 submission [REP5-160] the RSPB has stated that it is: "... unable to rule out AEol from disturbance and displacement effects on the Guillemot qualifying feature of the Farne Islands SPA in-combination with other plans or projects."</p> <p>Also, in its deadline 5 response Appendix K3 [REP5-172] NE has stated that it considers the proposed development would give rise to an in-combination AEol on the guillemot feature of the Farne Islands SPA, due to the substantial impacts of the Berwick Bank Offshore Wind Farm. However, NE has gone on to state that: "We note that the Applicant's proposed without-prejudice measures for guillemot, once fully agreed and if suitably scaled, would also meet the required compensation for guillemot at Farne Islands SPA".</p> <p>Having regard to the applicant's assessment in the latest RIAA [REP5-101] and the views expressed by NE, does the RSPB agree with NE's view that the current proposed 'without prejudice' compensation measures for guillemot would meet any compensation requirement for the guillemot of the Farne Islands SPA?</p>	<p>The RSPB has reviewed Natural England's REP5-172 (answer to Q77), the Applicant's latest RIAA (REP5-101) and updated "Without Prejudice Additional Measures for Compensation of Guillemot and Razorbill (tracked)" (REP5-112). The latter includes Annex 5 (Letter of Comfort from Cornwall Wildlife Trust), which is relevant to Q10.</p> <p>We also refer to row RSPB24 (and repeat relevant extracts below) in the RSPB's draft Statement of Common Ground with the Applicant (REP5-159).</p> <p><i>RSPB response to Q10</i></p> <p>The RSPB agrees with Natural England that it is not possible to rule out adverse effect on the integrity from disturbance and displacement effects on the Guillemot qualifying feature of the Farne Islands SPA in-combination with other plans or projects (see RSPB REP5-160, answer to Q77).</p> <p>However, we are not in a position to agree with NE's view that "the current proposed 'without prejudice' compensation measures for guillemot would meet any compensation requirement for the guillemot of the Farne Islands SPA [once fully agreed and if suitably scaled]". We set out our reasons below.</p>

Question	Question to:	Question	RSPB response
			<p>As set out in row RSPB24 in REP5-159, it is the RSPB's understanding that there remains significant scientific research required to determine the effects of anthropogenic pressure on the breeding success of Guillemot and Razorbill colonies in SW England, alongside other possible factors affecting those colonies, including critical factors such as food supply.</p> <p>The need for such research is confirmed by the Cornwall Wildlife Trust's (CWT) Letter of Comfort.</p> <p>As set out in REP5-159, the RSPB considers these gaps remain significant in the context of placing reliance on the proposed measures to meet any compensation requirements that may be set out by the Secretary of State, both in relation to impacts on the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA and the Farne Islands SPA.</p> <p>The RSPB welcomed the Applicant's survey work in 2024 at various sites in Devon and Cornwall, as these give an initial indication of anthropogenic and avian events observed during the survey work. However, we do not consider they provide a robust evidence base that establishes whether or not anthropogenic pressures are in fact contributing to a decline in breeding productivity and/or population of the auk populations at each colony.</p> <p>Considerably more detailed scientific study will be required to:</p>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if breeding productivity in each Guillemot and Razorbill colony is lower (over time) than it should be (and by how much); • Whether anthropogenic pressures are contributing to any lower productivity and to what extent, versus other potential contributory factors; • The extent to which the proposed measures could contribute to an increase in breeding productivity; • The likely ecological outcome in terms of increased breeding population and breeding productivity. <p>Without such information, we consider it premature to place reliance on the predicted population benefits from the additional measures that the Applicant sets out in its various documents and whether they would be scalable e.g. paragraph 247 in REP5-112:</p> <p><i>“...the implementation of the measures outlined in section 6 will support the restoration of populations to previous maxima as well as providing for an increase in productivity of the colonies.”</i></p> <p>Among other things, without a fuller scientific understanding of the ecological and other factors acting on each colony, it is not realistically possible to state that each colony can be returned to its historical maxima.</p>

Question	Question to:	Question	RSPB response
			<p>In light of our concerns set out above, the RSPB acknowledges and welcomes the Letter of Comfort from the CWT and the outline of its proposed research into the effects of recreational disturbance on breeding Guillemot and Razorbill.</p> <p>However, given the current lack of scientific understanding of the factors influencing breeding success of the auk colonies in SW England, and in advance of the findings of the CWT research (including whether its scope will consider the relative effects of other possible pressures on breeding auks, including food supply), the RSPB is unable to conclude at this point in time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether the measures identified by either the Applicant or as a result of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust study will prove effective at improving the breeding population and productivity of Guillemot and/or Razorbill at specific colonies; • the extent of any such improvement if measures are considered to be effective; and therefore • the extent to which any effective measures identified will be scalable.