

**Examining Authority’s Issue Specific Hearing 2 (ISH2) Wednesday 28 to Friday 30 January 2026 Supplementary agenda additional questions**

In response to the Examination Authority’s Action Points arising from Issue Specific Hearing 2 (ISH2) on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2026 the MCA would like to comment as follows at Deadline 4, Tuesday 10 February 2026.

| Action                         | Description   | Action By | When | Response from MCA  |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------|------|--|
| <b>Shipping and Navigation</b> |   |           |      |  |
| 91.                            | MCA to clarify the additional area of interest that it stated it is seeking and provide the reasoning for seeking its inclusion in the NIP. | MCA       | DL4  | <p>The SUNK region is highly constrained with dense maritime traffic, challenging environmental conditions, specialist pilot boarding arrangements, and the presence of deep-draught vessels potentially up to 20m in the future. The risks of collision or running aground here could have catastrophic consequences.</p> <p>As the National Competent Authority for the SUNK Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) and the Coastal State responsible for implementing the UK’s maritime safety policy, the MCA is seeking to secure the safety of navigation at four significant areas of interest listed below (numbered 1 – 4) and maintain the safety of navigation during operations at several areas along the cable route which are not currently included in the NIP and would expect to see addressed in either a VMP and/or NIP.</p> <p>None of these areas are new and have been raised in the various MCA submissions. The defined area of interest <b>figure 1</b> below for concurrent RAM and Reduced Visibility is, however, slightly larger than agreed for Five Estuaries and North Falls Offshore Windfarm projects, the justification for which is included in the MCA response to question 98 below.</p> |

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|  |  |  | <p>The four significant areas of interest for MCA are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) <b>Safeguarding navigable depth and preventing anchor strikes by deep draught vessels in the vicinity the SUNK DW anchorage.</b> See <b>figure 2</b> below. This area is between KP 33 and KP 38, we are aiming for no depth reduction, adequate burial as per recommended Depth of Lowering in the Cable Burial Risk Assessment, including any potential anchor interaction with associated protection measures. Where this is not achievable, further discussion is required on the application of the 5% depth reduction as per current DCO DML condition.</li><li>2) <b>Securing the 22m safe guarded depth</b> for future dredging as agreed with the ports. See <b>figure 2</b> below. This area is between KP 38 and KP 44, we fully support the Port's requirement for the cable (and any covering material e.g. rock armour) to be <u>at least 22 metres</u> below Chart Datum in the vicinity of the Deep-Water (DW) Route and DW Anchorage to allow future vessels with a draught of 20 metres. The MCA would expect a post-lay cable burial survey to be carried out to confirm where the target depths have or have not been met and secured in the DCO.</li></ol> <p>It is the MCA's view that the requirement for a post-lay cable burial survey (to confirm the target has been met) <u>is</u> suitably secured in the DCO DML part 2 Schedule 16 Conditions 14, which states:</p> |
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|  |  |  | <p>14. (1) <i>The undertaker must submit to the MMO within three months of completion of licensed activities, an ‘as built’ plan which will display (a) the location of the cable as laid with specific details of the achieved burial depths, (b) locations of buried and surface-laid cables, (c) the placed location and quantity of rock placement or concrete mattresses used in these licensed activities; and (d) final clearance depths over the protected cables and clumped disused cables.</i></p> <p>REAC GM02 states “<i>As-built locations of cable and external protection will be supplied to UKHO (Admiralty), The Crown Estate and Kingfisher (KIS-ORCA)</i>”.</p> <p>3) <b>Concurrent RAM and Visibility</b> – see the defined areas of interest <b>figure 1</b> below for concurrent RAM and Reduced Visibility. Securing an area for Sealink to commit to no concurrent activities with other projects <u>and</u> for Sealink to cease operations in visibility of less than 2nm. The justification for this can be seen in the MCA response to <b>question 98</b>.</p> <p>4) <b>Long Sand Head and NE Spit.</b> Sea Link is committed to <b>12.5m</b> depth below chart datum to be maintained within the Long Sand Head (LSH) two-way route and at the Northeast Spit which has been agreed with the ports for their purposes, and the MCA fully supports. We would like to ensure burial in the LSH route (between KP 60 and KP 66) is as per CBRA and apply the 5% maximum depth reduction which is achievable with the water depth at this location. NE Spit (between KP 85 and KP104) where the water depth is less than 12.5m, the 5% reduction may not be appropriate across this area. The following condition has been agreed</p> |
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|  |  |  |  | <p>with the PLA and the MCA would like to propose for inclusion in the DCO DML –</p> <p><i>‘For the defined Areas on Interest at the Long Sand Head and North Sea Spit, the works must not exceed a maximum 5% reduction in surrounding depth referenced to chart datum, unless otherwise agreed with the MMO in consultation with the MCA and relevant ports. Any changes to surrounding water depth must not reduce water depth to less than 12.5m’.</i></p> <p>In addition, we believe that the current NIP only provides details for the operational aspects of how the installation will be carried out within three main areas detailed in applicant submission (AS-104):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) Northern offshore Aol (approximately from KP35-55)</li><li>(ii) NE Spit Area (approximately between KP 85-105); and</li><li>(iii) Kent Landfall</li></ul> <p>For the purposes of vessel coordination, the MCA is seeking all key areas along the cable route to be included, which would be consistent with other projects, in order to secure our safety of navigation interests.</p> <p>The current NIP does cover some key areas of concern. However, there are other areas which fall outside the NIP and are concerning from the safety of navigation perspective and should be addressed in the NIP. These areas would benefit from being included in the coordination and safe operation of all vessels involved in the project.</p> |
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|  |  |  | <p>It is the MCA's view that a NIP solely focussing on the above three areas cannot be considered as a substitute to a Vessel Management Plan (VMP). We would prefer the applicant to consider adding the following areas to the NIP if the applicant would like to treat NIP as a substitute to VMP.</p> <p><u>The area east of the North Shipwash buoy (area between KP 15-20)</u> is used by smaller vessels approaching Harwich Haven from the north. The access to the Shipway, which leads to the Haven Pilot Boarding Ground (PBG) runs through a narrow passage between shoals, creating a natural chokepoint for these vessels. The proposed Sea Link cable route passes less than a mile from this chokepoint meaning that cable laying, servicing, surveying and related activities will directly interact with the vessels operating in this area. An agreed plan will therefore be required to manage installation and maintenance activities safely and effectively.</p> <p><u>Extend the already identified Northern Offshore AoI, from KP33 to KP70.</u> This is to factor in the vessel using the SUNK DW anchorage (KP 33-35). Vessels navigating through the complex SUNK outer precautionary area (KP 55-60) and Long Sand Heads two-way route (KP 60-70) where there are large commercial vessels, recreational crafts and dredgers regularly operate.</p> <p>Extend either the landfall section or the NE Spit area and <u>consider the area between KP105-KP115.</u> In particular, the area near East Goodwin Sands where there are numerous vessels including leisure crafts and the navigation is complex owing to shallow water and obstructions.</p> |
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| 92. | Provide update on securing future dredging depths through the dDCO requirements and DML condition(s) in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. | Applicant, MCA, PLA | DL4 | The MCA will shortly send a table of comments on the current DCO DML conditions to the applicant for further discussion in the near future. The MCA will report back at the next deadline on the outcome of these discussions.   |
| 93. | Provide an update on whether REAC SN22 provision should be secured in the dDCO/DML<br>Applicant, MCA DL4   | Applicant, MCA      | DL4 | <p>It is MCA's view that SN22 '<i>Anticipated reductions in water depth greater than 5% will be discussed with the MCA and other relevant stakeholders such as Statutory Harbour Authorities (SHA) and Competent Harbour Authorities (CHA)</i>' must be secured in the DCO DML as this is fundamentally important to the safety of navigation.</p> <p>However, this must only apply outside of those areas where safe guarded depths are agreed / being agreed between the Ports, MCA and the applicant.</p> <p>The DCO DML currently states: <i>(6) In undertaking the licensed activities, the undertaker must not reduce water depth by more than 5% unless agreed with the MMO in writing.</i></p> <p>During maintenance and cable protection replenishment -</p> <p><i>(3) In undertaking activities under condition 12(2)(d), the undertaker must not reduce water depth by more than 5% unless agreed with the MMO in writing.</i></p> <p>The MCA is therefore satisfied that this is suitably secured in the DCO DML and that the MMO will consult with the MCA and relevant ports in order to confirm discharge of this condition. Again, however, this must only apply outside of those areas where safe guarded depths are being agreed between the Ports, MCA and the applicant.</p> |

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| 94. | Provide an update on safeguarding location for crossing with Gridlink. Provide an update on discussions with Gridlink including as to whether this should be through a cable crossing agreement or whether an area needs to be safeguarded as an area of interest to provide adequate certainty. | Applicant, Gridlink, MCA | DL4 | <p>The Grid Link planned in service crossing is located within the North East Spit agreed area for the 12.5m safe guarded depth. The MCA will discuss this further with the applicant in order to confirm how this depth is going to be maintained at the cable crossing.</p> <p>For cable crossings, the cable protection measures installed in cable crossing areas should not reduce the depth of water by more than 5% of chart datum or the secured depth of 12.5 m whichever provided greater depth for safe navigation.</p> <p>If the applicant is unable to meet this, they should consult with the MCA and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that the risk to navigation is reduced to ALARP. We would recommend the applicant ensures maximum burial in areas where planned cable crossings are expected so there is minimal reduction in depth.</p> |
| 98. | MCA to provide the applicant with an updated defined area for the avoidance of concurrent restricted ability to manoeuvre activities and restriction on activities when visibility is poor in relation to Sea Link activities.   | MCA                      | DL4 | <p>As the National Competent Authority for the SUNK Vessel Traffic Services (VTS), the MCA requests that our defined area of interest (<b>figure 1</b> below) for Sea Link to commit to no concurrent activities with other projects <u>and</u> for Sea Link to cease operations in visibility of less than 2nm, is secured in the DCO DML as this is a key risk mitigation measure to preserve the safety of navigation in the SUNK area.</p> <p>Specifically:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No Sea Link project activities involving vessels Restricted in Ability to Manoeuvre (RAM) to operate concurrently with activities involving RAM vessels planned by the Five Estuaries and North Falls offshore windfarm project in the SUNK area (or</li> </ol>  |

other future projects), within the MCA defined area bound by the following coordinates:

| ID | Latitude       | Longitude       |
|----|----------------|-----------------|
| A  | 51° 53.0032' N | 001° 38.2325' E |
| B  | 51° 53.0032' N | 001° 47.2371' E |
| C  | 51° 48.0528' N | 001° 47.2371' E |
| D  | 51° 48.0528' N | 001° 38.2325' E |

And

- 2) No Sea Link project vessels with Restricted Ability to Manoeuvre (RAM) (cable laying, UXO clearance, survey) are to operate when visibility is below 2 nautical miles within the MCA's defined area in **figure 1**.

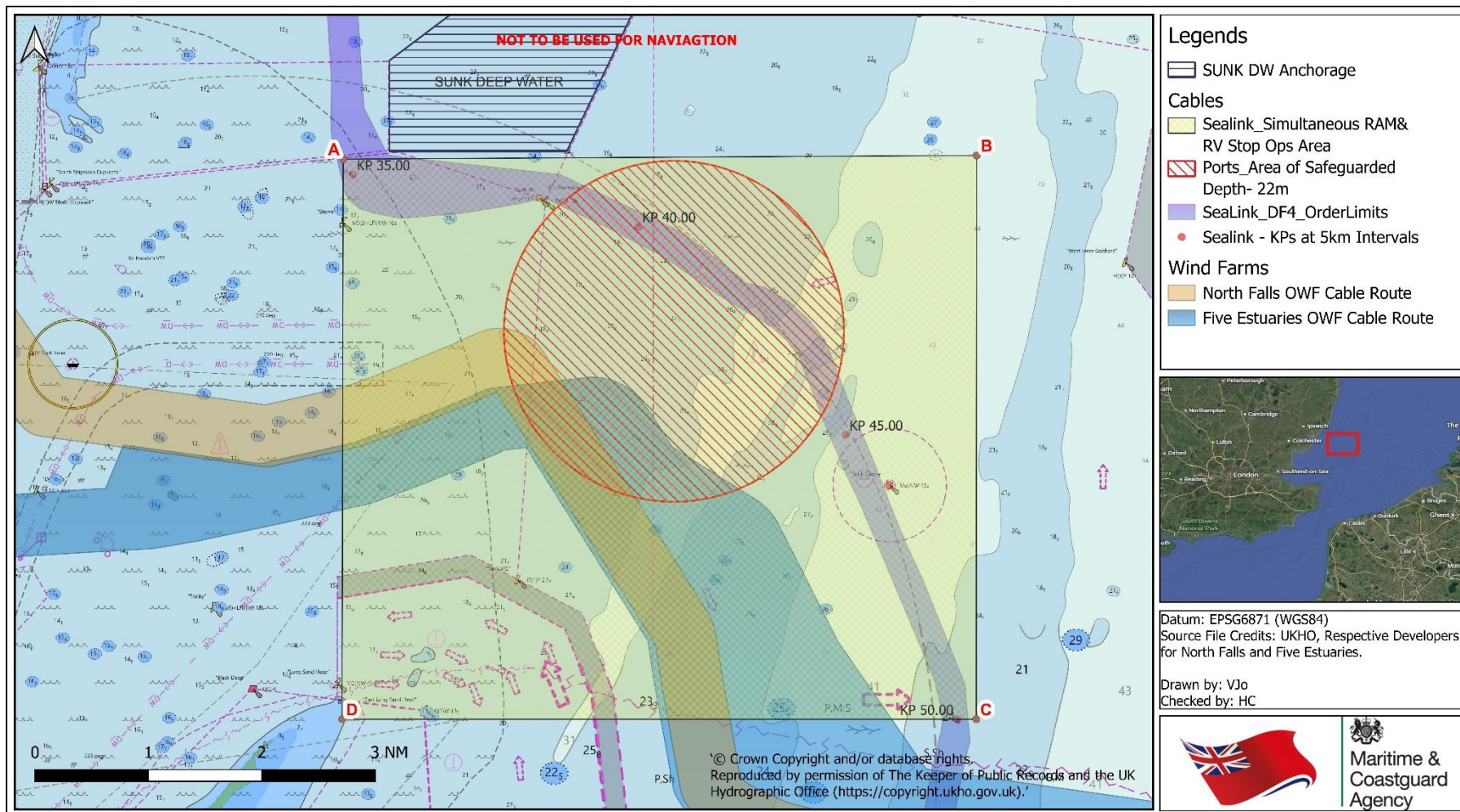
The MCA's justification for our defined area of interest is as follows:

- 1) The defined area of interest in **figure 1** is a relatively small area of navigable sea room considering the size and draft of the vessels involved. Pilot boarding/dis-embarking is an 'area' and not a specific point. Vessels are usually requested to come to a position 1NM to the east of the pilot boarding area or 1.5 northeast for the ultra-large vessels. The vessels are then given a heading to board which could be any heading based on the weather / sea conditions. As such, vessels are boarded anywhere to the east of a line drawn North-South through the pilot diamond, including in the anchorages. The same applies to vessels disembarking a pilot which could be anywhere in (or close) to one of the Deep-Water Routes in the Sunk Inner.

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|  |  |  |  | <p>2) Additionally, the MCA is requesting a larger defined area of interest <b>figure 1</b> than was previously permitted for the North Falls &amp; Five Estuaries projects. When those projects were approved, both were located to the south of the area, which still left a small section of navigable sea room to the north for other activities. However, the Sea Link project now occupies the northern part of the area significantly reducing the remaining safe sea room and further limiting the ability to conduct marine operations or transits to and from PLA and HHA.</p> <p>3) This is further compounded as almost all vessels exit the Sunk Inner to the Southeast to follow the IMO routing measure in the Strait of Dover which is considered as one of the busiest and most complex shipping lanes in the world. If all three project operations were taking place at the same time, the southeast corridor would be reduced to less than 1NM wide.</p> <p>4) Also, a recent trend is that, due to the northward migration of the Long Sand bank (within the SUNK area), the larger vessels using the Long Sand Head two-way route increasingly tend to divert into the Sunk Inner (north of the magenta line marking the northern limit of the LSH route), to maintain safe navigable depth. This behaviour further reduces available sea room particularly when vessels are simultaneously outbound from the PLA or HHA and can therefore create additional navigational constraints. This can be seen in <b>Figure 3</b> attached below, sourced from applicants' submission APP-284- Fig. 6.4.4.7.4.14.</p> |
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|  |  |  |  | <p>A further complication is that, during the summer months, numerous sailing vessels often cut directly across the area on a straight southeast course from Harwich. This reduces available sea room and is made more challenging by the fact that many of these pleasure craft have low-power radios and only carry Category B AIS transponders, making it difficult or sometimes impossible for VTS to detect or communicate with them.</p> <p>Similar issues arise with fishing vessels, which often switch off their AIS to avoid revealing their location to other fishermen. These factors further constrain the already limited safe sea room, both before and after a vessel has a pilot on board. This risk should not be underestimated, as the operators of such vessels are frequently unaware of, or do not fully adhere to, the Collision Regulations, including the requirement not to impede deep draft vessels in designated deepwater routes.</p> <p>In summary, the MCA is seeking this defined area of interest in <b>figure 1</b> to account for a credible worst-case scenario, namely, multiple RAM operations taking place within an already constrained sea room, potentially in restricted visibility, and in proximity to some of the largest vessels operating worldwide. An incident involving an ultra-large vessel, such as one comparable to the <i>Ever Given</i>, would have significant safety implications, attract global media attention, and could adversely affect the UK economy. The proposed restriction is therefore both proportionate and essential to ensuring the Safety of Navigation.</p> |
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## The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's defined Area of Interest



**Fig.1- MCA RAM & Restricted Visibility Stop SimOps Area**

## The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Depth Area of Interest

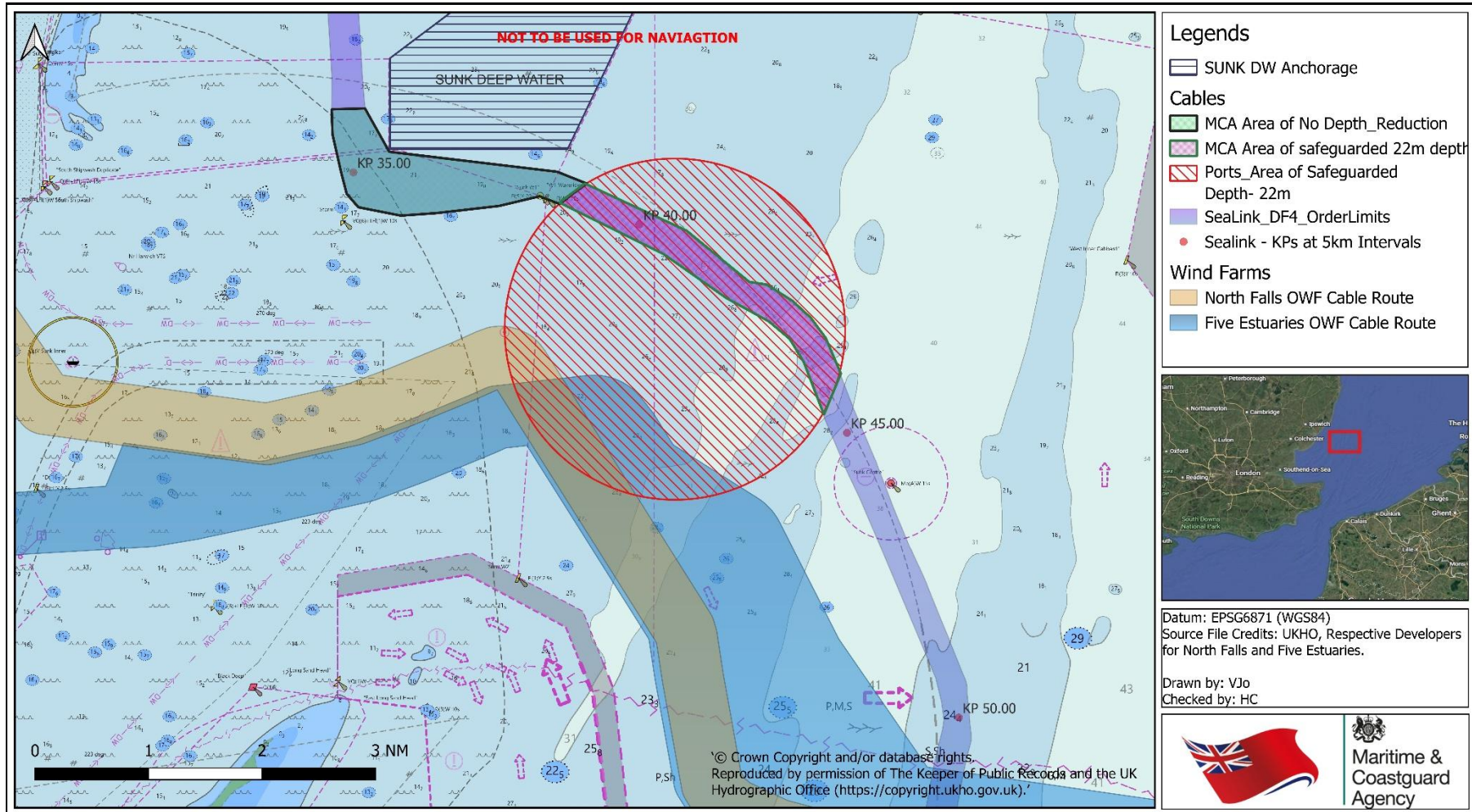


Fig.2- MCA Depth areas of Interest

### Navigational Constraints - Traffic Pattern of Large Vessels

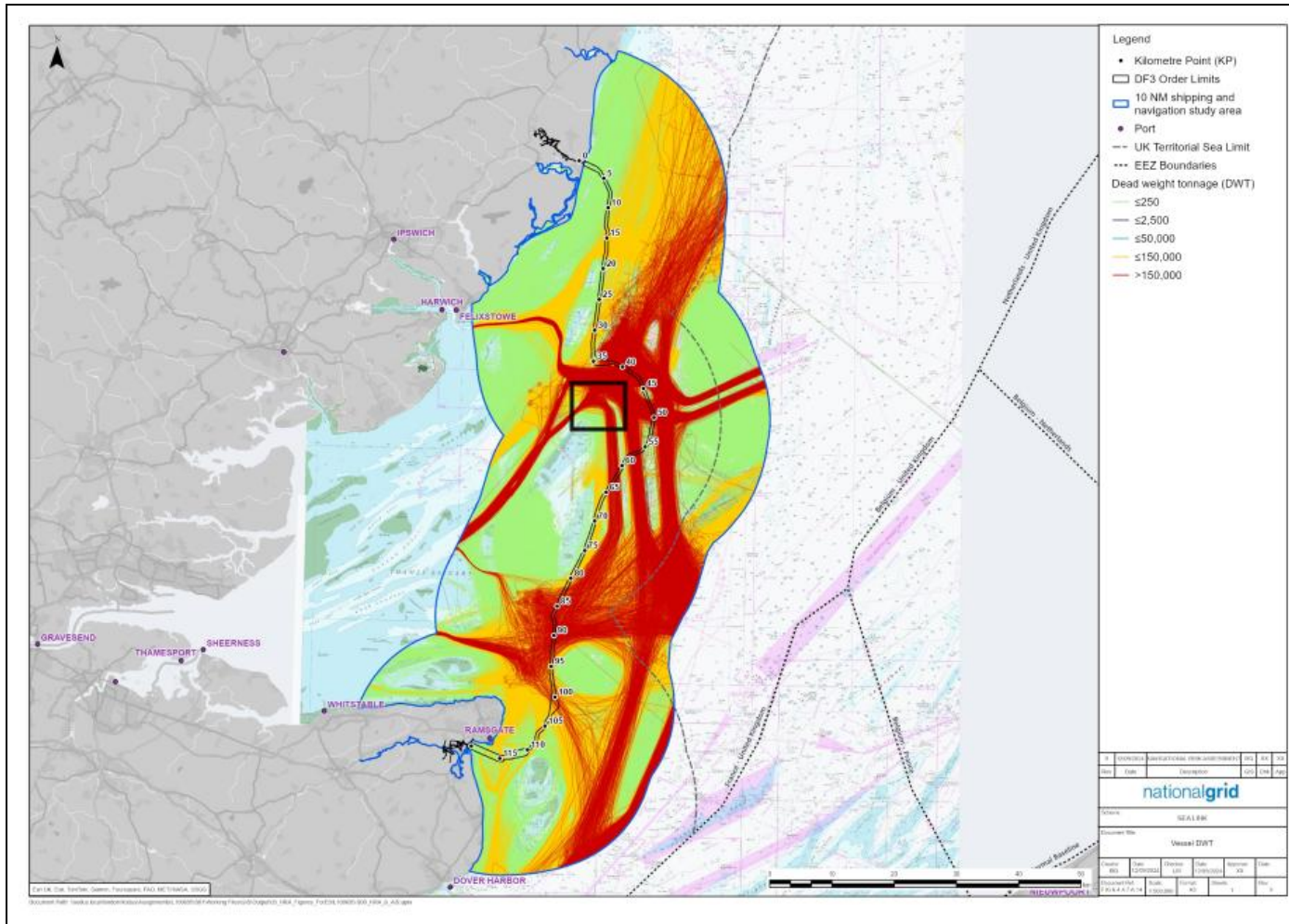


Fig.3- Traffic Pattern of large vessels (within the black box) in Long Sand Heads two-way route (ref: Fig. 6.4.4.7.4.14 (APP- 284))