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JNCC Reference: OIA-11457
JNCC Registration ID Number: [redacted]
PINS Reference: EN020026
Date: 13 April 2026

To whom it may concern,

Sea Link Project Development Consent Order Application – Environmental Statement and Management Plans – EN020026 – Response to Examiners Questions 3

Thank you for consulting JNCC on the Sea Link Project Development Consent Order (DCO) Application including the Environmental Statement (ES) and Management Plans. Notification of acceptance for examination by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero was received on 23 April 2025.

The Sea Link Interconnector project is proposed by National Grid Electricity Transmission plc to reinforce the transmission network in the South East and East Anglia. The new HVDC offshore cable will be 130km in length and is completely within the UK inshore region (within 12nm of the coast). This means that the cable falls within the geographical jurisdiction of Natural England. However, the cable passes through two MPAs that are jointly managed by JNCC and Natural England as described below:

- The Southern North Sea (SNS) Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for the protection of harbour porpoise. The conservation objectives for the site are to maintain site integrity by ensuring:
  1. Harbour porpoise are a viable component of the site
  2. There is no significant disturbance of the species
  3. The condition of supporting habitats and processes, and the availability of prey is maintained
- The Outer Thames Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), designated for the protection of red-throated diver, common tern and little tern. The conservation objectives of the site are to maintain or enhance favourable condition of the features.

JNCC have therefore concentrated our comments on the features of these two designated sites.

The advice contained within this minute is provided by JNCC as part of our statutory advisory role to the UK Government and devolved administrations on issues relating to nature conservation in UK offshore waters (beyond the territorial limit). We have subsequently concentrated our comments on aspects of the documents that we believe relate to impacts within offshore waters and defer to comments provided by Natural England (NE) for aspects relating to inshore waters (within 12nm).

The advice below relates to ornithology and marine mammals only and is captured under the following headings:

- Ornithology
- Marine mammals

The following documents were reviewed in providing this response:

- EN020026-003007 - Sealink ExQ3;

We have highlighted questions from the ExA in bold and JNCC's responses are below.

1 Ornithology

1.1 EN020026-003007 - Sealink ExQ3

2MO3 Displacement effects NE [REP5-199] has provided a substantial number of references that demonstrate the potential for displacement due to vessel movements. Can NE signpost to specific references to demonstrate that harm is likely from a small number of isolated vessel movements (as opposed to continuous offshore windfarm construction vessel traffic)

JNCC were aware that this question was to Natural England only. However, we included the below text in case it is of use to the Examining Authority. We have confirmed our alignment with Natural England on this comment prior to submission.

JNCC is not aware of any studies specifically examining differences between relatively short term and longer-term disturbance. However, from other work that does exist, it has been shown that resettlement of red-throated diver can be up to seven hours following a disturbance event (Burger et al. 2019). Frequent disturbance is therefore likely to result in lower or zero density of red-throated diver along that corridor, as reflected in lower occurrence of red-throated divers within established shipping routes. However, less frequent or short-term disturbance may also have significant consequences. The Conservation Objectives for the non-breeding red-throated diver qualifying feature of the Outer Thames Estuary SPA include reducing the frequency, duration and/or intensity of disturbance affecting roosting, foraging, feeding, moulting and/or loafing birds so that they are not significantly disturbed.

Since foraging is predominately during the hours of daylight (Duckworth et al. 2021), a seven hour resettlement period renders that area essentially inaccessible to foraging for a day. There are therefore concerns that short-term activities could still add to the disturbance experienced by sensitive qualifying features, preventing the site from meeting its conservation objectives. A restriction on activities within the SPA during the sensitive period would remove this potential conflict.

2 Marine mammals

2.1 EN020026-003007 - Sealink ExQ3

3MM4 - Southern North Sea Special Area of Conservation

Applicant to provide the information requested by Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) [REP5-194] in its response to 2MM5 [PD-021] in relation to the additional detail on the scale of impact for impact pathways relating to prey species.

As stated in Table 2.3 ID 2.3.13 of the Report on the Implications to European Sites, JNCC said they would provide a response regarding the applicants likely significant effect (LSE) conclusions for the Southern North Sea SAC and impact pathways relating to prey species following a review of the HRA. Having reviewed the HRA (EN020026-002913-6.6 (G)), JNCC now agree with the conclusion that, owing to the highly localised effect of this impact, a Likely Significant Effect on the Southern North Sea SAC is unlikely from this pressure.

Please contact me with any questions regarding the above comments.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

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3 References

Duckworth, J., O'Brien, S., Petersen, I. K., Petersen, A., Benediktsson, G., Johnson, L., Lehikoinen, P., Okill, D., Väisänen, R., Williams, J., Williams, S., Daunt, F., Green J. A. (2021) Spatial and temporal variation in foraging of breeding red-throated divers Journal of Avian Biology, Vol 52 (6) https://doi.org/10.1111/jav.02702