

East Suffolk Communities Energy Partnership Sea Link Examination Written Representation for Deadline 7

East Suffolk Energy Communities Partnership IP [REDACTED] (ESCEP) is a group of over 30 parish and town councils in East Suffolk directly affected by the multiple NSIPs along the Heritage Coast. At this concluding stage of the Inspectorate's Examination of the Sea Link project, ESCEP wish to highlight several issues which we feel have not been sufficiently addressed or resolved and which we believe merit further examination before the Inspectorate can make a recommendation to the Secretary of State.

1. The "Needs" case.

ESCEP supports the detailed case made by Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS): in REP6-256A.

SEAS set out several issues that have arisen within the process of claim and rebuttal on the subject of the "Needs" Case for the Sea Link project and which remain outstanding and unanswered. These include:

- The shifting nature of the Applicant's "Needs" Case, from a need based on the original 2,000MW deficit, but which has now disappeared in the absence of the Nautilus project, to a mix of residual deficit and unsupported boundary constraints and 'network resilience' requirements. The figures given for these 'boundary constraints' are out of date or inaccurate, and when all current projects are included, there is no deficit at all across EC5 and LE1 boundaries - whereas Sea Link actually fails to address the total SC2 boundary constraint. The 'current requirement' for 352MW is only relevant in the late 2030s and is contingent on multiple conditions (full operation of Sizewell C, extension of Sizewell B, contracted OWFs, and Lion Link). The basis of the "Needs" Case has altered, but NGET's argument has not.
- A mistaken reliance on the 2024 Clean Power 2030 report and Action Plan as evidence of "*critical*" and "*urgent*" need – these reports were not referenced in the original 2025 Strategic Options Back Check Report, and did not establish Sea Link as necessary for connecting either Five Estuaries OWF or Rampion Extension – nor did the Secretary of State's decisions in those DCO applications rely on Sea Link. The Application thus fails on consistency of decision-making and policy support for prior DCO approvals.
- An erroneous claim that national policy supports Sea Link as "Critical" or "Urgent". EN-1 at paragraph 3.3.68 discusses general reinforcement needs, and not specific projects – and the need for reinforcement in East Anglia can, in our view, be met through more efficient and less damaging means. The project's 2GW is disproportionate to the residual need, and NGET's alleged

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'urgency' does not justify bypassing policy requirements for efficiency and environmental considerations. EN-1, it follows, cannot be said to 'have effect' regarding these proposals if there is no evidence for their need. The Applicant's further claim that Ofgem's grant evidences the project's 'urgent need' is flatly denied by Ofgem itself in the granting document of 19/11/2025. There is no specific policy support for NGET's claims.

- The Applicant's claim that the proposals are the only solution to meet national net-zero targets - this is a misapplication of policy, and the project must not be immune from scrutiny of alternatives or cost-effectiveness. Even as a Critical National Priority project, it would have to demonstrate need, efficiency, and environmental harm minimization; and yet the residual need claimed (352MW) can, we believe, be met with lower-impact, cost-effective solutions at a significantly lower cost (estimate: £170m). Over-sizing the project contradicts good design principles and policy aims for efficiency and environmental protection.

ESCEP therefore considers that the detailed case for alternative and lower cost solutions set out in SEAS' REP6-256A deserve the Examining Authority's close attention, given the financial, socio-economic and environmental risks of the current proposals. The alternative proposals (including installing a new 400kV 6.930MVA double circuit OHL between Sizewell and Bramford over a distance of 55km and a new 400kV 6930 MVA OHL between Canterbury North and Kemsley) will meet actual rather than incorrectly calculated, current and forecast, capacity requirements, will be Security and Quality Supply Standard (SQSS) compliant (Sea Link will not be SQSS compliant in SC2 without further, unplanned works), and will cost a fraction of the estimated NGET project costs. They would be deliverable within the Sea Link time frame.

Without a clear "Need" case, we consider the project falls at the first hurdle. However, in case the Inspectorate determines otherwise, ESCEP wishes to highlight other areas which we believe need further examination before a recommendation may be made:

2. Abnormal Indivisible Load (AILs) access – the Benhall Bridge

- NGET remains committed to its two proposed options to allow access to the converter station site for AILs – both require work to the Benhall Bridge and both are flawed as they require both the closure of the rail line and the closure of the B1121 for, as yet, undetermined periods of time. Any daytime closure (possession) of the rail line would require passenger rail replacement services and any nighttime possession would prevent Sizewell C material being delivered to Sizewell C site and particularly impact on local residents of Whitearch Park. Closure of the B1121 would direct LGV and bus traffic to use

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the B1119 which would place further pressures and road safety concerns on the A12/B1119 junction and direct traffic through Saxmundham on a road unsuitable for additional traffic and which is the access to a SEND school (for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities). Moreover, NGET negotiations with Network Rail are only at the early stages and it has yet to undertake site based investigatory work on the bridge. It is thus not known whether either of its two options are even feasible. ESCEP believes that NGET must decide now which of its two options it will follow so that:

- the necessary discussions with Network Rail can take place so possessions can be booked (Network Rail requires considerable notice, usually many months, sometimes years, to set up possessions;
- and so that the Inspectorate can assess fully the implications of the decision to allow a reasoned judgement of its viability in advance of the recommendation to the Secretary of State.

3. Health and wellbeing

- ESCEP is concerned that NGET has failed to satisfactorily address the mental health concerns previously raised by numerous interested parties. Its responses have not only relied on data which covers too broad a geographical spread, but it has also reduced its responses to mitigations around core working hours, traffic, noise, and light pollution. This means that NGET has ignored broader psychosocial impacts such as cumulative disruption, uncertainty, erosion of community wellbeing, etc. ESCEP believes that NGET must undertake a mental health survey of the residents of the Saxmundham, Benhall, Sternfield and Friston – these are the communities which will particularly suffer the impacts of the construction of the Sea Link project and then have to live with the converter and sub-stations on their doorsteps for the foreseeable future. ESCEP does not believe that the full scale of the mental health impacts of the project will be known until such a survey is undertaken and believes that the Inspectorate cannot make a reasoned judgement in the absence of this data.

4. Junction modelling:

- NGET has at a late stage undertaken some junction modelling. However, it has not undertaken modelling for A12 south of Farnham to the A14 or the A12/B1119 junction, the latter is one where NGET notes it is likely to be used by the project's traffic if the Benhall Bridge/B1121 is closed - for example to strengthen the bridge or if a mini-bridge is used to allow AIL transport to site. Notwithstanding the points about the Benhall Bridge raised above, ESCEP

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does not believe that a decision can be made on the application without modelling of this junction which is hazardous as demonstrated by a fatal accident at the site in late 2025.

5. Post-consent approvals by a DESNZ Unit

ESCEP is very concerned that NGET has submitted a late DCO draft change that would, if accepted, undermine entirely the role of the local planning and Highways Authorities in the discharge of requirements, should the Proposed Project be permitted to proceed. The attempt to make proleptic changes to the DCO in this way reveals a dismissive attitude to public accountability and demeans the role of the community's elected representatives in holding the Applicant to its commitments. It should be rejected in its entirety.

Background

- In their response to the Government's Nuclear Regulatory Review 2025 (the 'Fingleton Review'), the Government has published a policy paper (13/03/2026), entitled "Building our nuclear nation: government response to the Nuclear Regulatory Review 2025" ("Fingleton Response").
- The Fingleton Recommendation 30 was as follows:

'DESNZ should establish a unit which discharges DCO Requirements. Guidance issued by MHCLG should be updated to endorse the use of this unit as the discharging authority for DCOs relating to nuclear development. Local authority involvement in the discharge of conditions can be secured through a requirement for consultation prior to submission to the Department.'

The Government's response was:

"The government accepts this recommendation. DESNZ will establish a new unit within its Infrastructure Planning Delivery team to consolidate and deliver post-consent discharge functions in consultation with Local Authority Planning Departments. This will speed up decisions on the meeting of post-consent requirements. This will be focussed initially on nuclear power and electricity networks projects, with a view to extending this to other types of energy projects if evaluation of its effectiveness supports its expansion."

- NGET now propose a change to their DCO draft, *'since the Applicant considers that it is prudent to seek to anticipate the establishment of this DESNZ unit by providing for it in the drafting of DCOs granting consent for electricity networks.'*

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The actual drafting changes proposed are based on the recommended inclusion of the phrase:

'...(including where the relevant planning authority is the DESNZ unit for the purposes of a Requirement)...

where the original draft referred to

'...a relevant planning authority...'

Objections

- Four major issues immediately arise that should disqualify this submission from the process.
- In principle, a submission anticipating a future change of legislation should be debated openly and with parties to the application fully aware of the detailed provisions of the change, and with the ability to consult and enquire. The Applicant has held back their submission for over a month since these changes were proposed in the government announcement made on 13/03/2026, and there were opportunities for discussion and consideration at OFH3 and particularly ISH3 in the week of 23/03/2026. The lack of a fair hearing for the proposed changes is the responsibility of the Applicant, and a change of this magnitude (involving the actual *elimination* of local transparency and accountability on decision making) demands the scrutiny that oral examination at one of these hearings would have allowed.
- The proposal supposes additionally and without justification from Fingleton that NGET should have the authority to decide whether or not to allow the DESNZ 'Unit' to make discharge decisions, but does not set out any framework under which this decision would be made, nor any of the arrangements (transparency, accountability) under which the decisions of the Unit itself would be made. No proposal of this significance should be accepted 'in principle' on this basis.
- The submission of a proposal of this significance within a week of the final deadline for submissions will (as this submission shows) immediately distract Interested Parties from the existing pressing issues at the final Deadline, yet again emphasising the dismissive attitude of the Applicant to the burden of consultation on local organisations and Interested Parties.

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- The changes in the roles of ESC and SCC are left entirely undefined - consultation and accountability are left unbalanced, and the local expertise that is absolutely essential to the process of discharge will by definition be lacking at a central Unit, particularly one in its infancy. It is entirely unclear if the Unit will rely on input and expertise from the local planning officers and highways officers, but none of this is specified or mentioned in the draft changes proposed, and the decision-making authority of the DESNZ Unit will be based, in the context of Recommendation 30, entirely on speeding up a process that has material and very substantial implications for local people, communities and environments.

Conclusion

- ESCEP cannot suppose that the Examining Authority will be disposed to allow a change of this magnitude to be accepted in the absence of any detailed assessment of its operation, its resource implications, the impact on the relationship between statutory consultees and *their* legal obligations, and all without any public discussion or oral examination. ESCEP strongly urges The Authority to refuse the draft changes.

6. Cumulative Impact

- The Applicant has not confirmed that the mitigation hierarchy has been fully applied as requested by the Examining Authority as this would be dependent on a reliable and coherent cumulative assessment of the impacts which the Applicant has singularly failed to provide. On this basis, the application currently fails to meet the requirements of EN-1, EN-5 and the EA Regulations and ESCEP does not believe a fully informed decision can be made by the Inspectorate at this time.

As noted in 1. (the “Needs” case) above, the Sea Link project represents a solution to a problem that no longer exists, based on erroneous policy claims and incorrect capacity data. Given that the actual local issues in both Kent and Suffolk have better, more economic and more efficient solutions, we urge the Inspectorate to give full weight to the alternative case.

However, in case the Inspectorate determines otherwise, from the above, it is clear that too many substantial questions remain unresolved at this late stage of the examination process. ESCEP therefore calls on the Inspectorate to extend the examination so that all the above may be thoroughly considered and resolved to ensure that the recommendation to the Secretary of State is a fully informed decision.