



THE PLANNING ACT 2008

THE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING (EXAMINATION PROCEDURE) RULES
2010

Sea Link Energy Cable

Appendix F7 to the Natural England Deadline 7 Submission

Natural England's Additional Comments on Marine Mammals

For:

The construction and operation of the Sea Link Energy Cable.

Planning Inspectorate Reference EN020026

29th April 2026

Appendix F6 – Natural England’s advice on documentation related to Marine Mammals received at Deadline 6

In formulating our advice, the following documents have been considered in relation to the impacts of the Sea Link Energy Cable on marine mammals:

- **[REP6-031]** 6.2.4.4 (I) Part 4 Marine Chapter 4 Marine Mammals
- **[REP6-051]** 6.6 (H) Habitats Regulations Assessment Report
- **[REP6-073]** 7.5.2 (D) Outline Offshore Construction Environmental Management Plan (Tracked Changes)
- **[REP6-135]** 9.84 (D) Register of Environmental Actions and Commitments (REAC) (Tracked Changes)

The following documents have been reviewed with no comment:

- **[REP6-071]** 7.5.11 (D) Outline Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan (Tracked Changes)
- **[REP6-116]** 9.140 Outline In-Principle Monitoring Plan

1. Summary

Natural England welcomes the inclusion of the new marine mammal measures provided by the Applicant at Deadline 6 within the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Register for Environmental Actions and Commitments (REAC) and the updated information provided by the Applicant with regards to the in-combination assessment and the commitment to participate in the Developers Co-ordination Forum (DCF). Although these changes do not resolve our outstanding issues with the methodology for undertaking the in-combination assessment, we are satisfied that the commitment to the DCF will ensure that there is no adverse effect on integrity (AEoI) to the SNS SAC, provided that the commitment is conditioned within the DCO/dML. Please see the agreed position between Natural England and JNCC below at Point 2 for suggested wording of such a condition.

Natural England is satisfied that density estimates have been provided for cetacean species and it is discussed in the text which estimates the assessment is based on. However, Natural England is not clear where the density estimates for the seal species have come from as Carter *et al* (2025) relates solely to seals in Scotland. We would seek further clarification on the numbers used to undertake the calculations before we can consider this issue resolved.

2. Joint Position Statement from Natural England and JNCC

Following the request from the Examining Authority to provide an agreed position statement regarding the outstanding issues for Marine Mammals between the Applicant, Natural England and JNCC by Deadline 7, we have met with JNCC on 27th April 2026. and proposed the following wording to the Applicant on the same day as a joint position from JNCC and Natural England:

Based on the new information provided with regard to the in-combination assessment of underwater noise impacts on the Southern North Sea SAC and the management of those impacts, Natural England and JNCC are satisfied there will be no adverse effect on site integrity, provided the Applicants commitment to participate in and adhere to the Development Coordination Forum (DCF) is formally secured as a condition in the DCO/dML. This will support adherence with the noise management approach for this site and ensure the daily disturbance threshold is not breached. We also welcome the Applicants commitment to undertake SBP survey works during the summer period where practicable. We propose the following text for such a condition;

No offshore construction or UXO removal may commence until the undertaker has provided confirmation to the MMO that they have begun participation in the Development Coordination Forum. This participation must not end until approved by the MMO in consultation with the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies.

Please see our Risk and Issues Log as part of our Deadline 7 submission and our Deadline 6 Appendix F6 [REP6-246] for further detailed advice.

3. New Issues

Natural England wishes to highlight that the late addition of the Commitment GG45 in the REAC with regards to the use of Hovercraft during emergencies in Pegwell Bay brings the additional risk of disturbance to the interest features of the SPA and seal colonies in the area.

There is insufficient information provided on the timings, extent and duration of works as well as the phase of works the emergency works is intended to cover (i.e, construction, operation or maintenance). Natural England advises there is a risk of an AEol occurring from visual and noise disturbance from the use of a hover craft. Therefore, further information on the use of the proposed hovercraft is required before we can provide further advice on the impact to designated sites.