

Martin Watson [REDACTED]

South East Anglia Link

Martin Watson

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To: The Rt Hon Miatta Fahnbulleh MP, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero

c/o: Energy Infrastructure Planning Delivery Team, DESNZ (via
SouthEastAngliaLink@planninginspectorate.gov.uk)

Subject: Sea Link (EN020026) – Request for Information

Dear Secretary of State,

SEA LINK, LIONLINK AND VALUE FOR MONEY FOR CONSUMERS

Your letter of 28 August asked several parties for further information on the Sea Link DCO. I am not one of those listed, but two reports published since then — one from Ofgem, one from the National Audit Office — have persuaded me that this case needs a wider hearing than it is currently getting.

Both raise hard questions about what Sea Link will actually cost, whether it can be delivered as described, and whether the regulatory system around it is doing its job of protecting consumers.

I want to be clear that I welcome the Government's ambition to bring energy bills down. That is precisely why, with so much public money committed to grid infrastructure, every project needs to earn its place: it has to be needed, it has to be proportionate, and it has to represent real value for the people paying for it.

The NAO's report, Value for Money – Upgrading the Electricity Transmission Network (11 September 2026), sets out where the current system falls short if the Great Grid Upgrade is to deliver that value — pointing to gaps in oversight, a lack of transparency, and insufficient regulatory capacity to properly test costs. It recommends that Ofgem examine whether its own approach is striking the right balance between fast delivery and consumer protection.

Sea Link, the proposed 2GW transmission project through East Suffolk, is a case in point.

Ofgem's own figure for the project now stands at around £3.2 billion — close to three times what was put to the DCO examination.

That gap matters. During the Examination, National Grid's estimate was roughly £1.1 billion. Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS) disputed this at the time, arguing the real figure was closer to £3.2 billion — a position Ofgem's assessment has now largely vindicated. The number examined and relied upon, in other words, was never realistic. A project of this size should not have gone through scrutiny on a cost basis that turns out to have been so far off the mark.

The underlying justification for the project has also moved. Sea Link was designed around an assumed 1,852MW export deficit at Friston, linked to the proposed Nautilus interconnector. Nautilus was subsequently moved away from Friston, ahead of Sea Link's own application, which brings that deficit down to something closer to 352MW.

There are further complications. Ofgem has identified unresolved harmonic issues that could require additional works elsewhere on the network before Sea Link is able to run compliantly at its full 2GW — with the scope and location of that work not yet known. Separately, reinforcement work between Richborough and Canterbury in Kent, already identified as necessary, does not appear in NGET's current £3.2 billion Project Assessment submission.

Put together, this leaves an open question that I don't think has been properly answered: what does Sea Link actually need to deliver, and at what real cost to consumers?

SEAS proposed an alternative during the Examination — upgrading and reconductoring the existing pylon corridors — at an estimated cost of under £300 million. On the figures now available, that could save consumers close to £3 billion.

In addition, it is clear that the NAO's findings also have a direct bearing on LionLink, National Grid Ventures' proposed commercial interconnector affecting the Suffolk coast, which sits outside the Great Grid Upgrade altogether. Ofgem expects it to function mainly as an export route from Great Britain to the Netherlands, which would push up GB wholesale electricity prices relative to a world without it.

Given what the NAO has found, I would ask the Government to commission an independent and transparent reassessment of LionLink's economic and consumer case, tested against current 2026 evidence — rather than treating the matter as settled by a regulatory decision taken back in 2024.

None of this is an argument against offshore wind or Net Zero, both of which I support. It is an argument for getting there without waving through unnecessary cost, and without approving one major project after another before anyone has properly checked whether cheaper, better-coordinated, less damaging alternatives exist.

The energy transition will only keep public support if people can see the Government actually challenging unnecessary spending, protecting consumers, and making sure what gets built is genuinely needed — not just convenient.

Before any further commitments are made, I would ask the Government to ensure that:

- Sea Link's cheaper alternative receives a proper, independent assessment;
- LionLink's economic and consumer case is reassessed against current evidence; and
- coordinated offshore solutions, and better use of the existing network, are fully explored first.

My wife and I have been residents of the Suffolk Coast for the over 25 years. During that time, we have been delighted to see the numbers of visitors increasing dramatically, particularly since the COVID 19 lockdowns and the growth of the staycations. So many (residents and visitors) will be affected by the proposed works involved in Sea Link. A proportionate balance has to be found between the understandable desire to reach Net Zero as soon as practicable and the need to respect and maintain the beauty and accessibility of the East Anglian Coast. And, in this balance, the ultimate cost of the project to the consumer has to be borne in kind. Hence, the remarks I make above.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Watson

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