

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 Email: SouthEastAngliaLink@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Subject: Sea Link (EN020026) – Request for Information

From: Andrew McDonald – Sea Link Examination IP [REDACTED]

Dear Secretary of State,

SEA LINK – PROJECT DEFECTS NOW APPARENT AND A CHEAPER, FASTER ALTERNATIVE

I am writing in response to your letter of 28 August asking for further information from several consultees and interested parties in relation to the Sea Link DCO. I am not one of those you have written to, but I am writing because the contents of the recent Ofgem Project Assessment and the National Audit Office's *Value for Money – Upgrading the Electricity Transmission Network* between them raise very serious objections to the project's cost, deliverability and value for money.

The Government is committed to reducing household energy costs, and investing billions of pounds upgrading the Grid, but it is extraordinarily important that major projects delivering these aims are without exception necessary, properly scaled and provide well-tested, genuine value for money for consumers and tax payers.

The NAO report raises issues that Ofgem's assessment seems to typify.

1 Ofgem has now assessed Sea Link at approximately **£3.2 billion, a serious increase (300%) on the 2018/19 basis costs presented during the DCO examination**.

This raises serious concerns about the reliability and transparency of the information presented during the Examination. **National Grid presented an estimated project cost of approximately £1.1 billion, and were strongly challenged on that figure.** The £1.1 billion figure presented during the Examination has proved wholly unrealistic, and it's concerning that this basic item of information was so underplayed in the Examination of a project of this vast scale.

2 More importantly, the circumstances which made up the original need for Sea Link have changed, and had in fact changed before the project Application was submitted – although this was not made clear in the Application. The project was developed around an assumed **1,852MW export deficit at Friston**, associated with the proposed Nautilus interconnector – which was relocated away from Friston well before

the Sea Link application was submitted. The residual deficit (or ‘apparent deficit’) was approximately **352MW** .

3 Still more worryingly, Ofgem now reveals in the project assessment that there are unresolved harmonic issues which will require additional research and may require works elsewhere on the transmission network before Sea Link can operate legally and safely at its intended 2GW capacity. There is no detail yet available on the scope or the location of these works; and indeed **no certainty that they will be successful within the project’s current scope**. It’s also worth noting that Sea Link’s £3.2bn project cost does not include the necessary reinforcement identified between Richborough and Canterbury in Kent – that is to say, the project needs this reinforcement to meet its target 2GW, but the funds required are not within the budget submission in the Project Assessment.

4 There are therefore three serious questions so far unresolved – what is the actual need for the project; will it actually deliver as presently specified; and what will it cost? **It is extraordinary that none of these questions has yet been satisfactorily answered.**

5 **There is a cheaper, faster alternative** . During the DCO examination, Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS) identified an alternative based on upgrading and reconductoring existing pylon corridor in Suffolk and Kent. This is estimated to cost **under £300 million** , compared with £3.2 billion for Sea Link – a potential saving to consumers approaching **£3 billion** . If adopted, this alternative could also potentially be delivered more quickly, while making better use of infrastructure that already exists and avoiding much of the new onshore infrastructure, environmental damage and disruption to communities associated with Sea Link.

6 If this is even remotely true – and it needs to be taken seriously and properly tested - the savings would be about **90% of the present proposed costs**.

As a local resident (I live in [REDACTED], close to the project’s boundaries, and within the area of its traffic, business and environmental impacts), and as a consumer, I have two real stakes in this project being managed properly and without excessive or unnecessary cost and impact. Obviously the cost falls on consumers, one way or another (and on tax payers, if it is ‘another’). The government is committed to reducing the cost of energy, and **a potential saving of nearly £3 billion in delivering cleaner and safer grid energy simply has to be investigated** . Equally importantly, if the impact on the environment of this and the seven or eight other NSIP’s we are facing up to in East Suffolk could be lessened, the drive to clean energy might begin to be welcomed here in our villages and small towns, rather than being the threat we currently face.

So before you take this decision and commit consumers to spending £3.2 billion or more on the worryingly uncertain Sea Link, may I ask the Government to ensure that the

SEAS alternative is **independently and transparently assessed against Sea Link on cost, delivery time, network capacity and environmental impact** .

Yours sincerely,

Andrew McDonald

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Andrew McDonald.