

Whitstable Fishermen's Association

West Quay
Whitstable Harbour
Kent CT5 1AB

17 September 2026

Your ref: EN020026

Our ref: RR-6041

Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero
By email: SouthEastAngliaLink@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam,

Sea Link Project (EN020026) – Response to Request for Information dated 28 August 2026, Paragraph 9 (Commercial Fisheries and Fishing)

Summary of position

1. The Whitstable Fishermen's Association (WFA) thanks the Secretary of State for the opportunity to respond. In answer to the question at paragraph 9, WFA's concerns regarding impacts on bottom drift fishing, set out in our relevant representation (RR-6041), have not been addressed by the outline Fisheries Liaison and Coexistence Plan (FLCP, Document 9.85, submitted at Deadline 4 in February 2026). With the limited exception of commitment CF06, discussed below, the FLCP does not reduce those concerns.
2. WFA did not respond to ExQ2CF5. The question was circulated by way of a link and was missed by WFA and we accept this was an oversight on our part, but the route by which the question reached consultees was not clear. Our silence should not be taken as acceptance that our concerns had been resolved.
3. To WFA's knowledge, the Association was not consulted on the content of the FLCP before its submission, and we understand Thanet Fishermen's Association was not consulted either. There has been no engagement from the Applicant with WFA on bottom drift fishing since.
4. The Pegwell Bay cockle grounds overlap the Kent landfall (paragraph 8.9.8). These were assessed against the 2024 draft of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO) rather than the Order as made. The assessment therefore rests on superseded management arrangements and should be updated.
5. The cockle fleet itself should also be engaged directly. TEFA, which represents the Thames Estuary cocklers, has not, to WFA's knowledge been consulted on the offshore works or the FLCP. The Pegwell Bay cockle grounds are at risk by landfall works, so TEFA should be consulted on the updated assessment and on any measures to protect those grounds.
6. The Applicant's own assessment details a significant adverse effect on the receptor group that includes drift nets (ES Commercial Fisheries). The ES also acknowledges at paragraph 8.9.21 that the proposed post-consent cooperation arrangements cannot currently be counted as mitigation. An outline plan whose substance is deferred to a post-consent document does not change that conclusion.
7. Paragraph 8.3.3 of the ES indicates that measures specific to bottom drift fishing would be brought forward. The FLCP doesn't detail any measures. Its relevant commitments are a

gear-damage claims procedure (CF04), rock berm profiling designed with towed gear in mind (CF03), and a procedure for ongoing consultation with fishers on cable protection design (CF06). A claims procedure compensates after gear has been lost; it does not avoid or reduce the risk. A 1:3 berm profile may suit trawlers, but bottom drift gear works in constant contact with the seabed, and any rock placement on drift ground will in practice end bottom drifting there.

8. WFA welcomes CF06, but as drafted it is a process for discussion rather than a protection. It should be strengthened so that rock placement is avoided on grounds where bottom drift fishing is shown to take place, with alternative protection methods agreed with fishers in those areas.
9. The sensitivity of bottom drift netting is scored as low at paragraph 8.9.39 on the basis that netters can fish at variable depths. Fishing higher in the water column is a different method, targeting different species, rather than an adaptation of bottom drift netting. The low score, and the conclusions that rely on it, should not be accepted.
10. South East Marine Plan Policy SE-CO-1 requires proposals that may displace existing activities to demonstrate how impacts will be avoided, minimised or mitigated. For bottom drift fishing this has not been demonstrated.
11. Because the marine licence for Sea Link is deemed within the DCO, its conditions will be fixed at the point of consent, and condition 4(1)(f) only requires the final FLCP to be substantially in accordance with the outline. Measures absent from the FLCP will therefore be difficult to secure later. By contrast, for the NeuConnect interconnector, which was licensed directly by the MMO, bottom drift and trawl surveys were secured in the FLCP through the marine licence following representations from Thanet Fishermen's Association. The same outcome should be secured for Sea Link now, before consent is decided.
12. WFA asks that the Secretary of State does not treat the FLCP as resolving these concerns and, should consent be granted, secures the following through the Deemed Marine Licence conditions:
 - (a) that the final FLCP includes measures specific to bottom drift fishing, developed with WFA, Thanet Fishermen's Association and KEIFCA, and approved by the MMO in consultation with those bodies before offshore works commence;
 - (b) that the FLCP is amended now to require pre-construction and post-installation surveys of bottom drift and trawl fishing activity along the cable corridor, following the NeuConnect precedent;
 - (c) that CF06 is strengthened to avoid rock placement on proven bottom drift grounds;
 - (d) post-installation and periodic surveys of cable burial and protection, with prompt remediation of cable exposed through seabed mobility or burial failure, and of other snag hazards, and direct notification to local fishers;
 - (e) a mechanism addressing displacement and loss of fishing opportunity during construction and operation, not only gear damage; and
 - (f) an updated assessment of the Pegwell Bay cockle grounds against the TECFO as made.
13. Because the deemed marine licence leaves limited opportunity to secure these measures after consent, WFA asks that the fishing industry is consulted on a revised FLCP before the

Secretary of State's decision, and that WFA is named as a consultee on the final FLCP.
WFA would welcome direct engagement with the Applicant on these matters.

Yours faithfully,


Secretary, Whitstable Fishermen's Association
