

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

c/o Energy Infrastructure Planning Delivery Team, DESNZ

Dear Secretary of State

Although I was not among those formally invited to comment on your letter of 28 August, in which you seek further information regarding the Sea Link Development Consent Order (DCO), I hope and trust you will feel able to take careful notice of the concerns I set out below.

I do not for a moment dispute the need for the 'Great Grid Upgrade' (GGU), intended to reduce energy costs and increase energy security – indeed I welcome it. But given that every billion pounds invested means a billion pounds unavailable for Social Security, Defence and other worthy needs, it is self-evidently important that GGU is as cost-effective as possible, as persuasively and clearly set out in the NAO's recent report: "Value for Money – Upgrading the Electricity Transmission Network"

At the time of the Sea Link DCO Examination, National Grid (NG) presented its estimate of the total project cost: approx. £1.1 billion. Evidence presented at that time by Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS) suggested this to be a massive underestimate, a view recently confirmed by Ofgem whose latest assessment places the cost of Sea Link at approximately £3.2 billion – virtually *three times* NG's estimate.

This means that those contributing to and charged with conducting the DCO Examination were presented with what appears to have been (unless Ofgem's assessment is massively incorrect) a misleadingly optimistic scenario from NG: one has to wonder how the outcome of the Examination might have been different had it been dealing with reality.

Even Ofgem's current assessment of £3.2 billion may prove to be an underestimate if Sea Link proceeds as currently planned by NG: before it could be connected to the network it appears that there are unresolved harmonic issues requiring additional work elsewhere in the network, and reinforcement work needed in the Canterbury area, the costs of neither of which are, I believe, included. So if anything, £3.2 billion is more than likely to be an underestimate, perhaps a significant one.

These concerns matter even more because a credible alternative exists.

During the DCO Examination, SEAS (with no commercial axe to grind) set out an option with an estimated cost of *under £300 million*, based on upgrading the existing pylon corridors in Suffolk and Kent with higher capacity cables. This approach would:

- make vastly better use of infrastructure already in place;
- avoid any need for much of the new onshore construction associated with Sea Link;
- be far less damaging to the countryside, its fauna and flora;
- be much less likely to experience unexpected and potentially expensive ‘snags’ in execution; and
- enable much speedier completion.

While achieving a potential cost saving in the region of £3 billion!

Both as a born and bred Suffolk man anxious to preserve the county I love, and as a taxpayer anxious to ensure that my money is spent effectively (and in particular a belief that £3 billion or any similar sum could be much better spent in other ways), I do *urge* you to commission an independent and transparent comparison of Sea Link and the SEAS alternative as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

David Argent