

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 – [REDACTED]

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you as the Councillor for Walberswick Parish Council dealing with NSIPs in relation to your letter of 28 August requesting further information from several parties in relation to the Sea Link DCO. Although Walberswick Parish Council is not one of your listed recipients, our Council participated in the Sea Link DCO as an interested party and made representations at each stage of the examination on behalf of the hundreds of residents and many thousands of visitors to Walberswick on the Suffolk coast.

It has come to our attention that both Ofgem and the National Audit Office have raised serious questions about the cost, deliverability and value for money of Sea Link and, more widely, the effectiveness of the current regulatory approach in protecting consumers. As hundreds of participants in the inspection panel process raised serious issues about the need for Sea Link, especially considering the tremendous damage the project will cause to the economic viability and liveability of our area, these reports are timely and deeply worrying.

We note that the current Government is rightly concerned about the very high price of UK energy to consumers and businesses and wants to do what it can to limit these. As we note below, and assume many scores of others are informing you, you can right now save UK bill payers nearly £3 billion by rejecting the Sea Link proposal whilst still delivering on a robust upgrade of the grid to accomplish the same thing. These savings would well exceed the VAT reduction on energy bills.

For those of us who sat through the Sea Link DCO hearings, we are not surprised that Ofgem found that the information that NGET presented to the Inspection Panel was less than reliable and, in our view, unnecessarily opaque. National Grid presented an estimated project cost of some £1.1 billion which they must have known was a gross underestimate. When a local group, SEAS, challenged this figure, offering one of some £3.2 billion, NGET rejected it. And yet this is almost exactly the figure Ofgem has arrived at. Moreover, SEAS challenged NGET's assertion that Sea Link was needed to deal with an overflow of 1,852 MW at Friston. In fact, this was also incorrect because several of the connections that NGET claimed were coming to Friston, were (thankfully) to be located somewhere more appropriate. NGET knew this yet decided to exclude it from its DCO submission. The real export deficit is estimated at only 352MW.

Again, SEAS, using expert industry advice, identified an alternative based on upgrading and reconductoring the existing pylon corridors. Such a solution would cost less than £300 million, saving the public nearly £3 billion. Moreover, it could be done faster and without the incredible environmental, social and economic harm to Suffolk and Kent that would come with SeaLink. Simply put, it would be a win for all concerned.

Industry insiders tried to convince your predecessors that anyone who objects to an energy project should be dismissed as "NIMBY". In fact, all of us who represent our local communities as volunteers and have spent literally hundreds of days engaging with Government on NSIPs in our local area, are the ones that have acted in good faith and for the public good. For example, during the Sizewell C hearings, local people, supported by analysis by the Financial Times, argued that SZC would cost about £40 billion rather than the £18 billion claimed by EDF and the previous Government. EDF and Government

repeatedly said they did not recognise the £40 billion figure. And yet, when it came time for the FID, your immediate predecessor used a cost of £38 billion. This figure is now rising even more. It turns out that local communities who participate in the hearings are the ones becoming best informed and are acting honestly in the national interest. This is very much true for Sea Link. We are here to help you make the best decision for our community and for the United Kingdom more widely.

Another concern for you must be that this tiny strip of Suffolk Coast cannot manage the massive amount of energy infrastructure already being built here with the largest nuclear plant in the UK and Europe (Sizewell C) and the Scottish Power EA1 and EA2 converter/substation construction already underway. This area of the country has no road network, an eroding coastline, the most highly sensitive and protected environmental sites and no excess work force. Surely, no one could think it wise to try to add projects like Sea Link (and soon another Lionlink) into this same 5 square mile area already struggling so much under the construction of these other projects. SZC is already running behind schedule and over budget. SeaLink's cumulative impact in literally the same small area of Suffolk as these other behemoth projects is not only harmful to the local communities and natural environment, but will directly interfere with the ability of publicly financed SZC from being built on time and within budget. Just look at Sea Link's proposed converter station location. To build it, Sea Link will periodically close the new train line just constructed to transport aggregate and other materials to build SZC. These closures will hit exactly as SZC is reaching its busiest construction period. Why would Government wish to support an unnecessary project like Sea Link which will sacrifice the efficient construction of SZC? When looked at in this context, Sea Link makes no sense economically nor does it improve our energy security.

To add to concerns about the need for SeaLink, and its spiralling price tag, Ofgem has also identified unresolved harmonic issues which may require additional works elsewhere on the transmission network before Sea Link can operate compliantly at its intended 2GW capacity. It would be the worst kind of decision-making for Government to green light a project that not only is nearly 300% over budget before it even begins construction, but that will need undefined 'fixes' to operate. This is the story of the HS2 debacle. If it is the wrong project in the wrong place, the correct thing to do is not to build. Confident that UK consumers and businesses will absorb the risk and pick up the tab, NGET seems determined to plow ahead with a flawed project, at highest cost, with disregard to its impact and the availability of better, lower-cost and lower impact solutions.

The energy transition needs public support. That support will come when Government visibly challenges monopolies like National Grid and their profit-making subsidiaries to ensure that energy projects are the best they can be. Externalities and financial risk needs to stay with the developer, not put on consumers and local communities. When Government listens to local communities that are well informed, engaged, and passionate about doing the right thing, then you will bring the country along with you on the Net Zero transition.

I therefore write to implore you to stop Sea Link until it's needs case, technical feasibility and cheaper alternatives are properly and independently assessed. This is the minimum needed for good governance.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Josie Bassinette, on behalf of Walberswick Parish Council