

18th September 2026

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Paragon House
Albert Street
Ramsgate
Kent
CT11 9HD

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Sea Link Project (EN020026) - Response to Request for Information,
Paragraph 9**

KEIFCA notes the Secretary of State's request for confirmation as to whether its concerns regarding bottom drift net fishing have been addressed by the outline Fisheries Liaison and Coexistence Plan (oFLCP). KEIFCA's position is that those concerns have not been fully resolved at this stage.

KEIFCA has consistently raised concerns about the impacts of the proposed offshore cable route on the bottom drift net fishery and agrees with the concerns raised by Thanet Fishermen's Association. Core concerns include:

- Permanent loss or temporary displacement of bottom drift net fishing grounds, including impacts associated with cable protection, cable crossings, cable exposure and inadequate burial.
- Risk of loss or damage to bottom drift nets through snagging on cable protection or other seabed obstructions associated with the project.
- Cumulative and long-term impacts on the viability of the bottom drift net fishery arising from this project alongside other existing and future pressures in the Thames Estuary.

The Environmental Statement (ES) acknowledges these concerns and includes specific consideration of bottom drift net fisheries. However, KEIFCA does not agree with all of the conclusions reached regarding the significance of effects on this fishery. KEIFCA considers that the assessment does not fully reflect the operational requirements of bottom drift netting, places significant reliance on assumptions regarding the adaptability of the fishery and the availability of

alternative fishing grounds, gives insufficient weight to the cumulative loss of bottom drift net fishing grounds arising from existing and future developments within the Thames Estuary, and relies on mitigation that does not yet provide sufficient certainty that the identified effects will be avoided, minimised or mitigated.

KEIFCA welcomes the development of the oFLCP and recognises its value as a framework for ongoing engagement with the fishing industry. However, the oFLCP does not, in itself, secure the mitigation measures relied upon to reduce the significance of impacts on bottom drift net fisheries. Rather, it establishes a process through which such mitigation may be developed and agreed in the future. Until those measures are secured, uncertainty remains regarding the extent to which impacts on bottom drift netting can be avoided, minimised or mitigated.

This is relevant to the ES's assessment of the operational loss and alteration of fishing grounds. Paragraph 8.9.83 identifies a moderate (significant) effect on drift net fisheries arising predominantly from the risk of bottom drift nets snagging on cable protection, including rock berms. The ES also acknowledges that bottom drift netters may feel unable to fish certain locations where their gear is likely to pass over cable protection whilst soaking, which in practice represents a loss of access to established fishing grounds and displacement of fishing activity. The subsequent reduction of this effect to minor (not significant) in paragraphs 8.10.5 to 8.10.8 relies heavily on measures to be delivered through the oFLCP, including commitments CF05 and CF06 relating to cable protection design, post-installation monitoring and ongoing engagement with the fishing industry. KEIFCA welcomes these commitments, but they do not currently secure an agreed cable protection solution or provide certainty as to how impacts on bottom drift net fishing will be avoided or minimised. Consequently, KEIFCA is not persuaded that sufficient certainty currently exists to conclude that the identified moderate (significant) effect has been reduced to a minor (non-significant) effect.

KEIFCA also notes that commitment CF04, requiring the development of a procedure for claims relating to loss of or damage to fishing gear, is a welcome measure. However, whilst such a measure may assist in managing the consequences of any future incidents, it does not remove the underlying risk of snagging to bottom drift nets. Nor does it address the separate concern that the presence of cable protection may result in fishermen avoiding established fishing grounds altogether, leading to a loss or displacement of fishing activity regardless of whether gear loss or damage occurs.

KEIFCA notes that alternative cable protection solutions, including frond-covered concrete mattresses, have previously been identified by industry as a potentially preferable option because they may allow continued drift-net fishing over

protected cables, thereby maintaining access to fishing grounds whilst reducing snagging risks. KEIFCA considers that the selection and design of any cable protection measures should, where practicable, be agreed in consultation with the relevant fisheries sector prior to final FLCP and subsequently reflected within that Plan. Securing agreement on an appropriate cable protection solution at this stage would provide greater certainty that impacts on bottom drift net fishing can be avoided or minimised and would go a considerable way towards addressing the concerns previously raised by KEIFCA and the fishing industry.

KEIFCA notes that this issue is also closely linked to its concerns regarding cumulative impacts. Securing an agreed cable protection solution that minimises snagging risks and maintains access to established fishing grounds, wherever practicable, would help reduce both the direct effects of the Project and its contribution to the wider cumulative loss of fishing opportunities within the Thames Estuary.

Until such a solution is identified and secured, KEIFCA remains of the view that uncertainty persists regarding the long-term effects of the Project on bottom drift net fisheries. Consequently, KEIFCA is not satisfied that it has yet been demonstrated how impacts on bottom drift net fishing will be avoided, minimised or mitigated in accordance with South East Marine Plan Policy SE-FISH-2, and therefore considers that its concerns have not been fully addressed by the oFLCP and remain subject to resolution through the development of the final FLCP.

Given the importance of the final FLCP to the resolution of the outstanding fisheries concerns identified above, KEIFCA requests that it is formally named as a consultee in the development, review and approval of the final FLCP. As the FLCP is secured through the Development Consent Order and will not be subject to a separate marine licensing process, KEIFCA considers it important that consultation with the relevant fisheries authorities and representatives is secured before consent is granted. This would help ensure that matters relating to cable protection design, monitoring arrangements and the continued coexistence of bottom drift net fishing activities with the Project can be appropriately addressed.

KEIFCA also notes that the assessment of impacts on the Pegwell Bay cockle grounds was based on the draft Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 (TECFO 2024) arrangements available at the time the ES was prepared. As the final TECFO 2024 Order and associated management arrangements are now in force, KEIFCA considers that the Applicant should review and confirm whether the conclusions of the assessment remain valid against the final TECFO 2024 Order and current management framework. This would provide greater confidence that the assessment continues to accurately reflect the management and operation of this commercially important fishery.

If you have any queries regarding this response, please do not hesitate to contact us.

[REDACTED]

Scientific and Conservation Officer

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