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South East Anglia Link

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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

Dear Secretary of State,

SEA LINK – THERE’S A CHEAPER, FASTER ALTERNATIVE

We are responding to your letter of 28 August requesting further information in relation to the Sea Link DCO as we have very serious concerns about the cost, need and deliverability of the proposed Sea Link project, as highlighted in the reports from Ofgem and the National Audit Office which raises serious questions about value for money of the "Great Grid Upgrade".

We are pleased the Government is committed to reducing household energy costs but are concerned this will not be achieved and tax-payers will be left to pay - as with HS2 - for escalating costs on ill-thought out solutions which benefit the private, profit-driven National Grid consortium over energy users, tax-payers of this country.

This important point is made clearly in the National Audit Office’s recent report, **Value for Money – Upgrading the Electricity Transmission Network**. We are therefore writing to ask the Government to look closely at the proposed **Sea Link project in East Suffolk**, which appears to illustrate many of the concerns identified by the NAO.

Ofgem has now assessed Sea Link at approximately **£3.2 billion – around three times the cost 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, despite SEAS challenging that figure and presenting evidence that the true cost was likely to be around £3.2 billion. Ofgem has now assessed Sea Link at approximately £3.2 billion, broadly confirming the figure put forward by SEAS.** The £1.1 billion figure presented during the Examination therefore proved wholly unrealistic. **It is deeply concerning that a project of this scale was**

examined without decision-makers and affected communities being given a realistic assessment of its likely cost.

More importantly, the circumstances underpinning the original need for Sea Link have changed. The project was developed around an assumed 1,852MW export deficit at Friston, associated with the proposed Nautilus interconnector. Nautilus was subsequently relocated away from Friston before the Sea Link application was submitted, reducing the apparent deficit to approximately 352MW.

There are further concerns: Ofgem has 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. **The precise scope and location of these works have yet to be determined.** In addition, identified reinforcement between Richborough and Canterbury in Kent is excluded from NGET's current £3.2 billion Project Assessment submission.

This raises a fundamental question: **what is the true need and total cost to consumers of delivering Sea Link?**

Most importantly, **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.**

The 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.

The escalating costs matter to current and future national energy users and tax-payers and the cumulative impacts of major energy projects are already affecting the well-being and future of East Suffolk businesses, communities as well as threatening the nationally important and precious AONB and SSI's which have statutory protection.

We support the transition to Net Zero and recognise that Britain's electricity network needs substantial investment, **but achieving Net Zero must require a rigorous examination of whether the network need can be met more quickly and at a fraction of the cost by upgrading existing infrastructure** - it is not a carte blanche to spend billions of pounds on new infrastructure without rigorous evaluation of cheaper, better and faster alternative solutions. that provide genuine benefits to consumers, taxpayers and the nation.

Before consumers are committed to expenditure of £3.2 billion or more on Sea Link, we expect our Government to ensure that the SEAS alternative is **independently and**

transparently assessed against Sea Link on cost, delivery time, network capacity and environmental impact.

If a solution costing under £300 million can deliver the required network reinforcement faster than a £3.2 billion project **it should be properly examined before billions of pounds of consumers' money are committed.**

Yours sincerely,

Ann and Peter Stephenson-Wright

