

[REDACTED]

South East Anglia Link

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing as an Interested Party to express my deep concerns regarding National Grid's Sealink proposal and to respond directly to the issues you invited comments on in your Request for Information dated 28th August.

My concerns arise both from National Grid's own documentation and from the ongoing impacts already visible at Pegwell Bay and Minster Marshes. The converter station site they propose sits on marshland and boggy ground which they themselves acknowledge is unsuitable for this type of construction. Raising the platform height by an additional two metres would require thousands of tonnes of aggregate and extensive piling, resulting in thousands of heavy-lorry movements through Pegwell, Minster, Ramsgate and Cliffsend. This would place enormous pressure on a landscape that includes a protected SSSI supporting breeding Grey Herons, Little Egrets, Nightingales and many other Red List species.

The proposed converter station would also be built directly on a dyke and scrub hedgerow used for bird ringing and regularly visited by Brown Hare, Turtle Doves and Badgers. Four years of near-constant disturbance in what is currently a quiet, tranquil refuge for both wildlife and local residents would cause irreversible harm.

National Grid presents Sealink as a green energy project, yet the location chosen is one of the most wildlife-sensitive areas in Kent. A project that destroys irreplaceable habitat cannot be considered green. Offshore alternatives exist that would avoid the need for a converter station on the marshes, and these must be properly assessed.

I also remain concerned that when Nemo Link was constructed, rumours already circulated about further cables through Pegwell Bay. If National Grid anticipated future connections, why was this not incorporated into the Nemo design, and why was the Richborough converter station not built with additional capacity within the Energy Park boundary? Pegwell Bay should not be repeatedly subjected to major infrastructure works.

The mitigation plan offered is wholly inadequate. The claim of a 10% biodiversity gain is unrealistic given that many of the birds feeding at Pegwell Bay rely on Minster Marshes at high tide. Damage to one site directly affects the other. The cumulative impact of ongoing construction around this wildlife hotspot is already harming nature, farming, landscape character and community wellbeing.

In addition to these overarching concerns, I wish to comment on several of the specific points you have invited responses on:

- **Benthic mitigation (para 3):** I support Natural England and Kent Wildlife Trust's position that mitigation must be secured before harm occurs, with robust monitoring thereafter.

- **Intertidal features of the Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI (para 4):**

Damage from Nemo Link is still ongoing. National Grid's approach to preventing further harm is inadequate, and cumulative impacts must be fully recognised, especially given their intention to bring a third cable through Pegwell Bay.

- **Chalk habitat (para 5):** The chalk is irreplaceable, as National Grid acknowledges. I ask that you apply the wholly-exceptional-reasons and compensation test explicitly in your decision-making.

- **Hovercraft impacts (paras 6–7):** I support Natural England's request for a worst-case assessment, including impacts on seals, and KWT's request for advance notification and ongoing monitoring.

- **Converter station design (para 13):** National Grid has not selected a design and wishes to retain four options. It is unclear how a decision can be made when the visual impact and construction implications remain undefined.

- **Breeding birds (paras 16, 21–22):** National Grid must commit to no works from March to September at the SSSI. The phrase "after a nest check" should be removed. A site office has already been placed beside an active barn owl box on Minster Marshes, demonstrating the risks of inadequate safeguards. Further dormouse surveys are also essential.

- **Overhead-line collision monitoring (para 19):** Diversers should be fitted from the outset, not after collisions occur. Five years of monitoring is appropriate, not the two years proposed by National Grid.

- **Unexploded ordnance (paras 26, 33):** National Grid has not addressed Natural England's point that intertidal UXO detonation may require habitat restoration. This must be included.

- **Saltmarsh survey and access routes (para 28):** Access locations and widths must be agreed before consent is granted.

- **No Pegwell landfall works November–February (para 32):** National Grid's limitation "below mean high water springs" is insufficient. No works should occur at Pegwell Bay during winter to protect overwintering migratory birds.

- **Tourism impacts (para 44):** National Grid has not carried out a meaningful assessment of impacts on tourism. Their compensation offer is derisory, and the claim that Thanet's tourism industry will not be affected is simply not credible.

- **Converter station noise (para 55):** I support KWT's call for monitoring and mitigation if noise limits are breached.

Pegwell Bay and Minster Marshes form part of the Garden of England. They are irreplaceable landscapes that support nationally important wildlife and provide vital wellbeing benefits to local communities. I urge you to reconsider the Sealink proposal and ensure that environmental protection is placed at the heart of your decision.

Yours sincerely, Keith Ross

Keith Ross

