



UK Government

Marine Conservation Zone Assessment for an Application Under the Planning Act 2008

Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms Transmission Assets

Section 126 of The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

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List of abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation
Deemed Marine Licence	DML
Development Consent Order	DCO
Electro Magnetic Field	EMF
Environmental Impact Assessment	EIA
Environmental Statement	ES
Examining Authority	ExA
Exclusive Economic Zone	EEZ
Export Cable Corridor	ECC
Gigawatts	GW
Horizontal Directional Drilling	HDD
Interested Parties	IPs
Invasive Non Native Species	INNS
Marine Conservation Zone	MCZ
Marine Management Organisation	MMO
Marine Protected Areas	MPAs
Marine Recovery Fund	MRF
Maximum Design Scenario	MDS
Megawatt	MW
National Policy Statements	NPSs
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project	NSIP
Natural England	NE
Offshore In-Principle Monitoring Plan	IPMP
Outline Cable Specification and Installation Plan	CSIP
Planning Inspectorate	PINS
Statement of Common Ground	SoCG
Statutory Nature Conservation Body	SNCB
Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives	SACO
Suspended Sediment Concentrations	SSC
Unexploded Ordnance	UXO

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This document is a record of the Marine Conservation Zone Assessment (“MCZA”) undertaken by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero in accordance with Part 5, Chapter 1 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (“MCAA”). The assessment supports the Secretary of State’s decision when determining the application for the Development Consent Order (“DCO”) and associated Deemed Marine Licences (“DMLs”) for the Morgan and Morecambe Wind Farms Transmission Assets (the “Project”).

For the purposes of the DCO decision, the Secretary of State acts as the public authority responsible for considering whether the exercise of this function could affect any designated Marine Conservation Zones (“MCZs”).

The Project was submitted by Morgan Offshore Wind Limited and Morecambe Offshore Windfarm Limited (the “Applicants”). It comprises transmission assets associated with the Morgan Offshore Wind Project and the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm including offshore export cables, onshore landfall infrastructure, onshore export cables, onshore substations, onshore grid connection cables and circuit breaker compounds, and other related onshore infrastructure.

The Project constitutes a project of national significance for which development consent is required following a direction by the Secretary of State under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008.

The Project was accepted by the Planning Inspectorate (“PINS”) on 18 November 2024, and four Inspectors were appointed as the Examining Authority (“ExA”) for the application. The Examination of the Project began on 29 April 2025 and concluded on 29 October 2025. The ExA submitted its recommendation (“the ExA’s Report”) to the Secretary of State on 29 January 2026 in which the Project is defined as the “Proposed Development”. Numbered references to the ExA’s Report are presented in the format “[ER *.*]”. Other documents which were submitted during Examination are referenced using the reference numbers published in PINS’ Examination Library¹.

1.2 Legislative requirements

Marine Conservation Zones are designated under Part 5, Chapter 1 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 through designation orders made under section 116 of the Act. These designation orders establish the protected features of each site and set the conservation objectives that apply. This statutory framework provides for the protection of nationally important marine habitats, species, and geological and geomorphological features.

¹ [Documents | Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind \(Generating Station\)](#)

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Public authorities must comply with the duties set out in sections 125 to 128 of the Act when exercising any function that may affect an MCZ.

Under section 125, a public authority must exercise its functions in the manner it considers will best further, or where that is not possible, least hinder the achievement of an MCZ's conservation objectives for an MCZ. Where the authority believes that a proposed activity may significantly hinder those objectives, it must notify the relevant statutory nature conservation body ("SNCB") — Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Under section 126, when determining applications for authorisation (including DMLs granted through a DCO), a public authority must not grant authorisation unless it is satisfied that there is no significant risk of hindering an MCZ's conservation objectives or, where such a risk exists, that the statutory tests relating to alternatives, public benefit, and measures of equivalent environmental benefit have been met.

Section 127 enables SNBCs to provide advice and guidance to public authorities on activities capable of affecting protected features and on measures required to maintain or restore them. Public authorities are required to have regard to such advice when exercising relevant functions.

Section 128 provides a mechanism for accountability. Where an SNCB considers that a public authority has failed to comply with its duties under sections 125 or 126, or has not acted in accordance with advice or guidance provided under section 127, it may request a written explanation which the authority must provide.

Together, these provisions require the Secretary of State, as the public authority determining the DCO and associated DMLs, to consider whether the Project is capable of affecting MCZ features, to take relevant statutory conservation advice into account, and to undertake an MCZ Assessment to determine whether the Project may hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives for any relevant MCZ. The Secretary of State has therefore undertaken this MCZA in accordance with sections 125 to 128 of the MCAA.

1.3 Site conservation objectives and advice

The protected features and conservation objectives for an MCZ are set by Defra within the designation order through which the site is established. An MCZ generally has one conservation objective – that is for each feature to be in favourable condition. A general management approach is also set by Defra which specifies the approach required to achieve the site's conservation objective(s). That is for it to be maintained in favourable condition (if it is currently in this state), or for it to be recovered to favourable condition (if it is currently in a damaged state) and then to be maintained in favourable condition. These are published in the site descriptions and in advice from SNCBs².

² [Marine Conservation Zones Designation Explanatory Note](#)

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SNCBs publish site-specific conservation advice. For Zones in English waters Natural England is the relevant SNCB and it publishes conservation advice packages online through Designated Sites View³. This advice includes Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (“SACOs”) which presents present attributes which are ecological characteristics or requirements of the designated species and habitats within a site. The listed attributes are considered to be those which best describe the site’s ecological integrity and which if safeguarded will enable achievement of the Conservation Objectives. These attributes have a target which is either quantified or qualified depending on the available evidence. The target identifies as far as possible the desired state to be achieved for the attribute. In many cases, the attribute targets show if the current objective is to either ‘maintain’ or ‘recover’ the attribute

The conservation objectives, general management approach and conservation advice have been used by the Secretary of State within his consideration of the risk of the Project hindering the conservation objectives of any MCZ.

1.4 Documents referred to in this assessment

This MCZA has taken account of, and should be read in conjunction with, the documents produced as part of the application and Examination, and during the Secretary of State’s consideration of the application, which are available on the PINS NSIP website⁴. In particular, but not limited to:

- the ExA’s Report;
- Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Screening and Stage 1 Assessment Report [REP7-006] (“Screening and Stage 1 Report”)
 - Screening sections of this document are also referred to as the “Applicants’ MCZ Screening”;
 - Stage 1 Assessment sections of this document are also referred to as the “Applicants’ Stage 1 Assessment”;
- Stage 2 MCZ Assessment [REP7-031];
- Environmental Statement Volume 2, Chapter 2: Benthic subtidal and intertidal ecology [REP7-010];
- Environmental Statement Volume 2, Chapter 3: Fish and shellfish ecology [REP6-047];
- Environmental Statement Volume 2, Chapter 4: Marine Mammals [REP5-032];
- Environmental Statement Volume 2, Chapter 5: Offshore Ornithology [REP5-036];
- The Applicants’ Statements of Common Ground (“SoCG”) with NE [REP6-179] and the Environment Agency [REP7-028];
- NE Risk and Issues Log [REP6-193];

³ [Marine advice and evidence](#)

⁴ [Documents | Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms Transmission Assets](#)

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- Responses to the Secretary of State's first consultation letter⁵;
- Responses to the Secretary of State's second consultation letter (Part A and Part B)⁶;
- Responses to the Secretary of State's third consultation letter⁷;

Any references to documents in this Marine Conservation Zone Assessment are to the most up-to-date versions, unless otherwise stated.

⁵ [Documents | Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms Transmission Assets](#)

⁶ [Documents | Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms Transmission Assets](#)

⁷ [Documents | Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms Transmission Assets](#)

2 Project description

A detailed description of the Project is presented in Volume 1 Chapter 3 of the Environmental Statement (“ES”) [REP6-038] and the Non-Technical Summary of the ES [AS-056].

- Offshore works include offshore export cables (maximum 6), which transmit the electricity generated by the generation assets to the landfall for onward transmission.
- Site preparation activities will comprise:
 - low order Unexploded Ordinance (“UXO”) clearance (up to 25)
 - Boulder removal/placement and out of service cable removal
 - Sandwave clearance
 - Pre-lay grapnel run
- Key Parameters include [[REP6-038]:
 - Maximum of 4 offshore export cables (Morgan Offshore Wind Project)
 - Maximum of 2 offshore export cables (Morecambe Offshore Windfarm)
 - Sandwave clearance across up to 9% of the offshore export cable corridor (“ECC”) and up to 5% of the ECC within the Fylde MCZ
 - Cables will be buried where possible
 - Cable protection across up to 10% of cables and up to 3% within the Fylde MCZ
 - Additional cable protection for cable crossings

The Project comprises the following intertidal and landfall components:

- Landfall site: where the offshore export cables are joined to the onshore export cables via transition joint bays (TJBs). This terms applies to the whole area between Mean Low Water Springs (MLWS) and the TJBs.
 - The offshore ECC will make landfall is at St Anne’s beach
 - TJBs will be located landward of the Lytham St Annes Dunes SSSI at Blackpool Airport
 - Offshore export cables will be installed under Lytham St Anne’s Dunes SSSI using a trenchless direct pipe technique. Entry pits will be located at the TJBs; exit pits will be located on St Annes beach, at least 100m seaward of the western boundary of Lytham St Annes Dunes SSSI.
 - Cofferdams may be used at the exit pits to enable recovery of the micro-tunnel boring machine (MTBM) used to install the direct pipe casing and to allow cable pull-in.
 - Cable pull-in will utilise:
 - Jack-up vessels (2 per cable; max 1 per cable within Fylde MCZ)
 - Intermediate pulling platforms and roller boxes
 - Following pull-in cables will be buried via open trench and beach trencher down to MLWS

The Project also comprises the following onshore components and enabling works:

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- Onshore export cables: cables connecting to the offshore export cables at the landfall transition joint bays, transmitting electricity from the offshore wind farms to the onshore substations;
- Onshore substations: two electrically separate substations housing equipment to transform the incoming power to 400kV;
- 400kV grid connection cables: cables transmitting electricity from the onshore substations to the existing National Grid substation at Penwortham;
 - Grid connection cables will cross the River Ribble north of the Penwortham substation
 - Cables will be installed at a depth of 7-45m beneath the bed of the River Ribble by direct pipe trenchless technique.
- Environmental mitigation areas: temporary and/or permanent areas, including access routes, provided solely for environmental mitigation purposes;
- Biodiversity benefit areas: temporary and/or permanent areas, including access routes, designated solely to deliver biodiversity enhancements.

The Applicants' design philosophy is for the transmission infrastructure for each wind farm to remain electrically independent (i.e. each wind farm to have its own set of cabling and substation infrastructure). The application therefore comprises a range of possible construction scenarios which include:

Scenario 1: In isolation construction scenario:

- Scenario 1a: Construction of the Morgan Offshore Wind Project: Transmission Assets only (i.e. where the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm does not proceed to construction)
- Scenario 1b: Construction of the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm: Transmission Assets only (i.e. where the Morgan Offshore Wind Project does not proceed to construction)

Scenario 2: Concurrent construction scenario: Construction of the Morgan Offshore Wind Project: Transmission Assets and the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm: Transmission Assets at the same time.

Scenario 3: Sequential construction scenario: Where Morgan Offshore Wind Project: Transmission Assets are constructed first and the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm: Transmission Assets are constructed second, or vice versa. This may include:

- Scenario 3a: Immediate sequential construction of the transmission assets with no gap between the completion of construction of the transmission assets for the first project and the commencement of construction for the second project.
- Scenario 3b: Sequential construction with a gap of up to a maximum of four years between completion of construction of the transmission assets for the first project and commencement of construction for the second project.

Construction durations are detailed in Table 3.4 of the ES Project Description chapter (REP6-038). Indicative construction programmes for the proposed development are provided in Plates 3.1 to 3.3 (pages 44–46) of the same document.

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The final design for the Project may not be confirmed until after consent has been granted. Consequently, the Applicant has presented a Rochdale envelope approach whereby the maximum design scenarios ("MDS"s) are presented and assessed. The Rochdale envelope and the presented MDSs provide sufficient flexibility in the finalisation of the design whilst ensuring that the environmental effects of the Project eventually constructed have been properly assessed. The realistic worst-case MDS is assessed and outlined by the Applicant in its Screening and Stage 1 Report [REP7-006]. The Secretary of State's MCZA is based upon the realistic worst-case MDS of the Project, in accordance with PINS Advice Note 9⁸.

⁸ [Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects - Advice Note Nine: Rochdale Envelope - GOV.UK](#)

3 MCZ Screening

3.1 Screening Methodology and considerations

The Applicants' approach to MCZ screening is set out in detail in Section 1.3 of their Screening and Stage 1 Report. In the absence of PINS guidance on MCZ screening and assessment the Applicants have followed the staged approach set out the MMOs 2013 guidance starting with screening to determine whether the Project is capable of affecting an MCZ.

In summary, they considered all MCZs located within the relevant study areas by receptor group as shown in Figure 1. Sites and features were considered against the proximity to the Project and impact pathways are considered based on the Project's zone of influence ("ZOI") using the study areas from the relevant chapters of the Environmental Statement to determine whether direct and indirect impacts are capable affecting any MCZs.

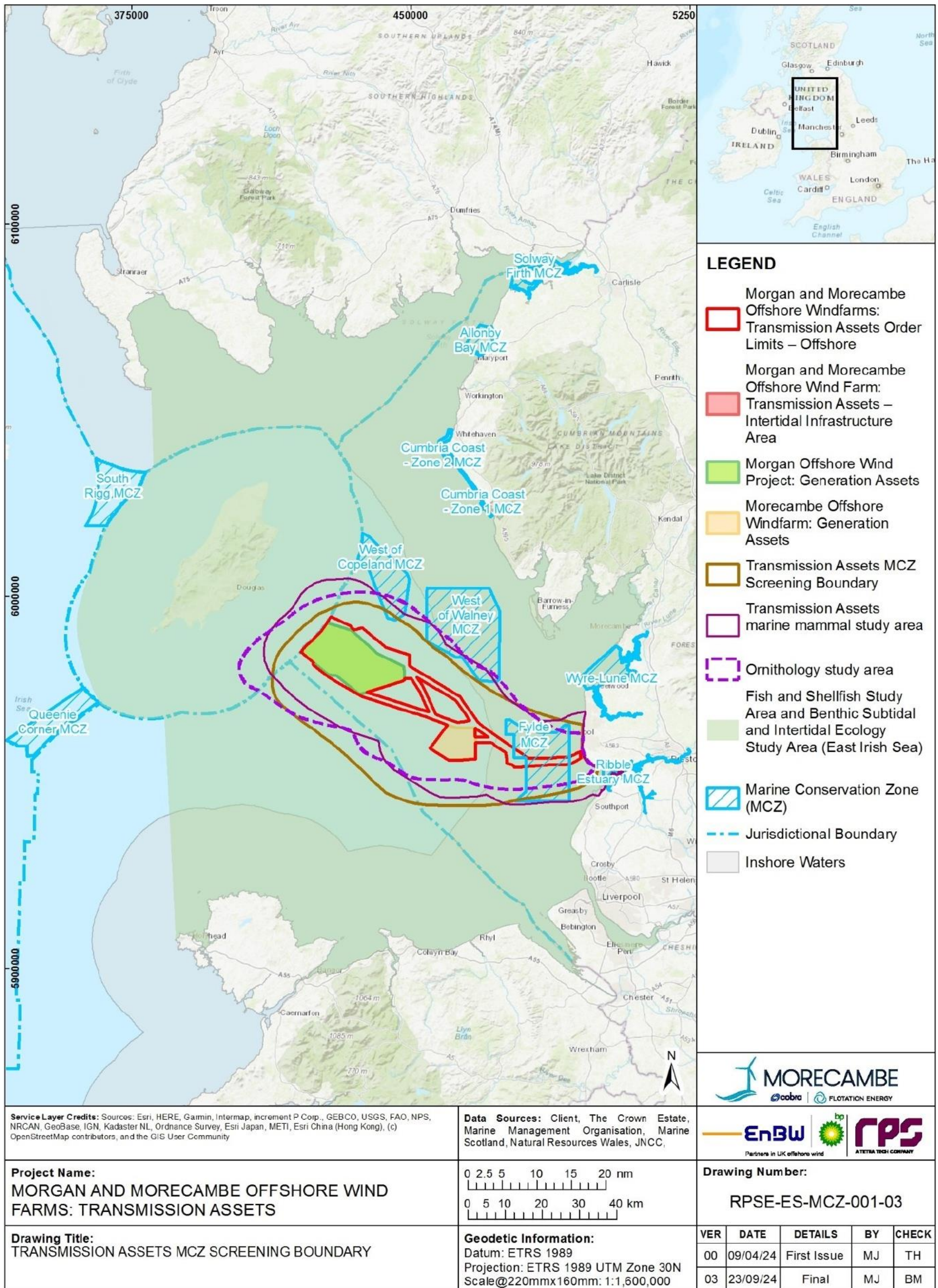


Figure 1: Order limits and MCZs considered within the MCZ screening for the Project (Figure 1.2 [REP 7-006].

3.2 MCZ Screening

3.2.1 Benthic ecology and physical processes

For benthic receptors the benthic subtidal and intertidal ecology study area (“benthic study area”) is described in Chapter 2 (Benthic, subtidal and intertidal ecology) of the ES [REP7-010]. It encompasses the wider east Irish Sea, extending from MHWS out to the furthest west extent from the Mull of Galloway in Scotland and to the west tip of Anglesey. It was selected to encompass the wider Irish Sea habitats and includes the neighbouring consented and proposed offshore wind farms and designated sites.

The Applicants considered the study area is large enough to incorporate all direct and indirect impacts of the Project on benthic subtidal and intertidal receptors. The study area is the same as the regional benthic subtidal and intertidal ecology study area defined for the Morgan Offshore Wind Project: Generation Assets and also fully encompasses the study area defined for the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm: Generation Assets. [REP7-010].

The Cumulative Effects Assessment (“CEA”) benthic subtidal and intertidal ecology study area has been defined as a 50 km buffer around the Project. This 50 km buffer is designed to capture all the relevant projects/plans/activities which have the potential to interact with the impact of the Transmission Assets. For interactive/synergistic impacts (i.e. increase in suspended sediment concentration and changes in physical processes) the study area was defined by the CEA physical processes study area (as outlined in Volume 2, Chapter 1: Physical Processes of the ES) which is defined as two tidal excursions surrounding the Transmission Assets [REP7-010].

The following MCZs with benthic features are located within the study area and considered within the Applicants’ screening:

- Fylde MCZ;
- West of Copeland MCZ;
- West of Walney MCZ;
- Cumbria Coast MCZ;
- Queenie Corner MCZ (outside the study area but immediately adjacent so included on a precautionary basis);
- South Rigg MCZ (outside the study area but immediately adjacent so included on a precautionary basis); and
- Allonby Bay MCZ.

The Applicants set out the screening criteria used for MCZs with benthic features in Section 1.6.2 of the Screening and Stage 1 Report:

- Direct impacts to benthic habitats and species were considered within the Offshore Order Limits from the following pressures:
 - temporary habitat disturbance

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- long term habitat loss
- colonisation of hard structures
- electromagnetic fields (EMF) and heat effects from cabling
- Indirect impacts to benthic habitats and species were considered from the following pressures:
 - increases in suspended sediment concentration
 - sediment deposition
 - changes to physical processes
- Indirect impacts were considered against ZOIs based on the potential size of the sediment plumes related to specific elements of the project:
 - Sandwave clearance – 5km east/west sediment plume at the edge of which SSC concentrations and sedimentation rates are expected to be at near background levels and <0.1mm respectively. (see figure 1.3 and 1.4)
 - Cable trenching activities - 5km sediment plume with SSC expected to be within background levels at the plumes edge and sedimentation rates to be <0.5mm within 2km.
 - Cable protection (impact on physical processes) – The Screening and Stage 1 Report does not provide a specific ZOI. It highlights that impacts on tidal flow and subsequently sediment transport would be imperceptible, it is therefore only considered in directly proximity to the order limits.

3.2.2 Fish and Shellfish

For fish and shellfish receptors the study area is described in Chapter 3 (Fish and Shellfish ecology) of the ES [REP7-010] and aligns with the benthic study area (Figure 1).

The following MCZs with fish and shellfish features (i.e. Smelt), are located within the study area and considered within the Applicants' screening:

- Ribble Estuary MCZ;
- Wyre Lune MCZ; and
- Solway Firth MCZ.

The Applicants set out the screening criteria used for MCZs with fish and shellfish features in Section 1.6.3 of the Screening and Stage 1 Report:

- Direct impacts to fish features of MCZs arising from temporary habitat disturbance, long term habitat loss, colonisation of hard structures and EMF were considered within the Offshore Order Limits.
- Direct impacts to fish are also considered as a result of increased underwater noise from low order UXO clearance, geophysical surveys, vessel movement and cable installation were considered within the Offshore Order Limits.
- Indirect impacts to fish are considered as a result of temporary increases in SSC and associated deposition due to the sediment plumes considered within the screening of benthic receptors; screening uses the same ZOI as for those benthic features.

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3.2.3 Marine mammals

For marine mammal receptors the study area is described in Chapter 4 (Marine Mammals) of the ES [REP5-032] and displayed in Figure 1. It comprises the Offshore Order Limits plus a buffer of at least 10km.

There are no MCZs with marine mammal features located in the relevant study area and no additional MCZs are considered within the Applicants' screening due to marine mammal features.

3.2.4 Offshore Ornithology:

For ornithological receptors the study area is described in Chapter 5 (Offshore Ornithology) of the ES [REP5-036] and displayed in Figure 1. It comprises the Offshore Order Limits plus a 15km buffer.

There are no MCZs with ornithology features located in the relevant study area and no additional MCZs are considered within the Applicants' screening due to ornithology features.

3.3 Screening conclusions

Screening conclusions and justifications for MCZs within the Projects study areas are presented in Table 1.10 of the Screening and Stage 1 Report.

Two sites overlap directly with the Project:

1. Fylde MCZ overlaps with the Offshore Order Limits:
 - The Applicants consider the Project can affect this MCZ through direct impacts and screened in to their stage one assessment.
2. Ribble Estuary MCZ overlaps with the Onshore Order Limits, where onshore cables will cross under the bed of the Ribble Estuary using trenchless installation techniques (i.e. direct pipe method):
 - The Applicants do not consider there will be direct or indirect impacts to the Smelt features of the Ribble Estuary MCZ from construction activities.
 - Potential impacts of electro-magnetic fields ("EMF") on the European smelt feature of the MCZ was considered during Examination following concerns raised by both NE and EA; this is discussed in the ExA Report [ER 4.14.16-23]
 - The cable will be buried at least 7m below the bed of the Ribble Estuary and the Applicants do not consider EMF levels will exceed background levels which the EA accepts [REP6-129]
 - NE advise that monitoring should be undertaken to confirm this prediction [REP6-179]
 - Based on evidence presented in Chapter 3 of the ES and during the examination, that with cable burial depth exceeding 7m will mean EMF levels will not be detectable above background levels, the ExA conclude that there would be no risk to the smelt feature of the MCZ [ER 4.14.21].

All other MCZs were screened out.

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The Secretary of State has considered the information presented during Examination and the potential for the Project to affect any MCZs. The Secretary of State considers that sufficient information has been provided to support his screening of potential impacts to MCZs from the Project.

The Secretary of State agrees with the ExA's conclusion that the onshore cable crossing of the Ribble Estuary is not likely to result in increased EMF and is therefore not capable of affecting the Ribble Estuary MCZ. She also notes that the Applicants are participating in strategic monitoring for EMF and does not consider project specific monitoring would be beneficial.

The Secretary of State concludes that the Project is capable of affecting the protected features of the Fylde MCZ, or any ecological and geomorphological process on which the conservation of such features is wholly or in part dependant.

A Stage 1 assessment of the potential impacts of the Project is therefore required to determine whether there is a significant risk of the Project hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the features of the Fylde MCZ. Features and impact pathways screened into the stage one assessment are set out in Table 1.

4 Stage 1 Assessment

4.1 Introduction

The Applicants approach to assessing the Project's impacts on the Fylde MCZ is set out in section 1.8 of the Applicants stage 1 assessment. The overarching assumptions relevant to the MCZ assessment are set out in paragraph 1.8.1.4 of the Applicants stage 1 assessment. The Applicant also undertook a cumulative effects assessment using a tiered approach as set out in 1.9.1.3 of the Applicants stage 1 assessment. The ExA consider the assessments are carried out in accordance with MMO guidance [ER 4.17.110].

The Applicants assessments conclude there is no significant risk of the Project hindering the conservation objectives of the Fylde MCZ [REFS]. To reach her conclusions, the Secretary of State considered a number of areas of the assessment in further detail, as discussed below.

4.2 Further considerations

4.2.1 The impact of temporary disturbance/temporary habitat loss on the subtidal mud and subtidal sand features.

The Applicants assess the impact of temporary disturbance/temporary habitat loss on the MCZ in section 1.8.2 of the Applicants stage 1 assessment. The Applicants concluded that there was no significant risk of hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives of these features of the Fylde MCZ due to temporary disturbance/temporary habitat loss. A number of issues relevant to this assessment were raised during Examination and were considered further by the Secretary of State before reaching her conclusions.

MDS sandwave clearance:

At the close of Examination NE was not content with the way the sand wave clearance volume has been derived. ExA acknowledged this point but agreed with the Applicants that it is ultimately a matter for them whether the proposed development can be constructed within the parameters specified within the dDCO and the MDS as assessed within the EIA [4.17.72-75].

On review of the issue the Secretary of State was not clear from the Applicants documents how they had calculated the MDS volume for sandwave clearance as the parameter stated did not provide a maximum depth of lowering. In the first information request the Applicants were asked to update the Outline Offshore Cable Specification and Installation Plan ("CSIP") to include the MDS by area and to explain how the MDS by volume was calculated. The Applicants submitted an updated CSIP [C1-029.10] with these amendments. The Applicants [C1-029.39] also highlighted errors in their sandwave clearance calculations including for those within the Fylde MCZ which they corrected in the CSIP [C1-029.10], Schedule of Changes to the Draft Development Consent Order [C1-029.16] and the Dredging and Disposal Site Characterisation Plan [C1-029.14]. The Applicants also make it clear at paragraph 1.5.2.9 of [C1-029.39] that

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these corrections reduce the MDS and therefore the error does not undermine the conclusions of any of its environmental assessments.

As part of the second information request, all IPs were invited to comment on responses to the first information request and no representations were received on this issue.

The Secretary of State has updated the Order to include the correct sandwave clearance volumes as proposed by the Applicants [C1-029.16] and is content that the correct MDS is now accurately secured within the Order. She agrees with the Applicants rationale that the error does not increase the risk of hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives of the Fylde MCZ as the predicted impact from sandwave clearance will be lower than that assessed in the Applicants' stage 1 assessment.

Sandwave recovery:

During Examination NE also had concerns regarding the monitoring for sandwave recovery following sandwave clearance, particularly within Fylde MCZ [ER 4.17.61]. To address these the Applicants updated the Offshore In Principle Monitoring Plan ("IPMP") [REP6-104] to include monitoring of sandwave recovery through comparison of pre- and post-construction geophysical data and the ExA concluded this addressed NEs concerns [ER 4.17.64].

The Secretary of State noted that in a previous offshore wind farm application, similar concerns relating to sandwave recovery were resolved with a longer term commitment to monitoring sandwave recovery. In the first information request the Applicants were therefore asked to consider whether, for this consent, further updates were needed to the IPMP to secure further surveys of sandwave recovery if the initial post-construction survey does not indicate full recovery. She also noted that NE [REP7-050] was unable to provide technical advice on many of the Deadline 6 submissions and therefore ask NE to comment on the updates to the IPMP.

NE [C1-016] advised that the updated IPMP progressed but did not resolve its concerns fully because it considered multiple bathymetric survey datasets may be needed to demonstrate sandwave recovery. It advised that the Applicants should therefore require further surveys in the event that the post-construction surveys do not indicate full recovery or if impacts are greater than those predicted in the EIA. The Applicants [C1-029.39] highlighted that there is provision in the IPMP for adaptive management and they consider this addresses any uncertainties. They updated the IPMP to clearly reference this [C1-029.13].

The Secretary of State considers that, should the first post-construction survey demonstrate incomplete sandwave recovery, then further surveys or remedial action will be necessary; and that this is reasonably covered by the provisions for adaptive management. However, she noted that the commitment in the IPMP specifically related to HRA and EIA conclusions and so, in the second information request, she asked the Applicants to include MCZ impacts within the scope of adaptive management commitments. The Applicants updated the IPMP [C2-029.12] to this effect and the Secretary of State is content that should the impacts to sandwaves be greater than predicted in the stage 1 assessment, there will be sufficient monitoring to identify this and provisions within the IPMP to secure adaptive management / or remedial action from the Applicants to address this. This provides the Secretary of State with greater confidence that temporary disturbance / temporary habitat loss will not hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives of the MCZ.

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Boulder Clearance within the Fylde MCZ

Prior to installation of the offshore export cables, site preparation activities, including boulder clearance, may be required to facilitate installation. Paragraph 1.5.6.11 of the Applicants stage 1 assessment explains the key methods of boulder clearance, i.e. boulder plough or boulder grab. The Applicants [REP7-042] explain that the clearance method will be established post-consent following detailed surveys with a plough being used for areas of high boulder density and a grab for medium or low density.

The MDS for temporary disturbance from construction works is set out in Table 1.16 and includes boulder clearance of up to 20m width using a plough prior to cable installation. The Applicants assessment concludes that due to the temporary nature of impacts and the recoverability of the subtidal sand and subtidal mud features, the temporary impacts from construction works will not lead to a significant risk of hindering the conservation objectives of the Fylde MCZ.

In the first information request the Secretary of State asked NE to comment on any deadline 6 and 7 documents relevant to the MCZ assessment for which it had not previously provided advice. NE [C1-016] advised that further consideration should be given to boulder clearance methods including specifically not using a boulder plough and not depositing boulders in a linear manner. The Secretary of State agreed with the Applicants assessment that the temporary disturbance based on the MDS including a boulder plough, will not hinder the conservation objectives of the site but considers that should less disturbing methods of boulder removal be reasonably available to the Applicants these would represent a better adherence to the mitigation hierarchy and are preferable within the MCZ.

In the second information request the Applicants were asked to update the CSIP to restrict the use of a boulder plough within the MCZ (i.e. to only allow use of a boulder grab). In response, the Applicants [C2-029.2] advised they had updated the Commitments Register (F1.5.3/F09) to include CoT142 "Within the Fylde MCZ, boulder ploughs will not be used for the purpose of boulder clearance, and any boulders that are relocated will be redeposited in similar habitat type and randomly to avoid the creation of linear structures which may disrupt sediment transport." They also updated Table 5 and Section 6.4 in the CSIP [C2-029.9] to reflect this. The Secretary of State considers delivery of this commitment is secured by condition 18(e)(i) of the DMLs under Schedule 14 and 15 of the Order and is therefore satisfied that the Applicants have followed the mitigation hierarchy to reduce impacts within the MCZ as far as possible.

UXO clearance and removal

During Examination NE raised concerns regarding the MDS for UXO clearance. This is discussed by the ExA [ER.17.76-78]. The Applicants stage 1 assessment considers the MDS for temporary disturbance also falls within the footprint of sandwave clearance and cable installation (Table 1.16) and temporary disturbance from UXO clearance will therefore not hinder the conservation objectives of Fylde MCZ. NE [C1-016] advised however that it considers that UXO should be moved outside of designated sites prior to detonation.

In the second information request the Applicants were asked whether it was possible to commit to removing UXO from the Fylde MCZ prior to detonation. The Applicants [C2-029.2] explained in response to point 28 that UXO relocation depended on the structural integrity of the UXO

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along with other factors and they could not therefore commit to removing all UXO. They highlight that commitment 64 will ensure UXO clearance follows a mitigation hierarchy.

The Secretary of State notes commitment 64 is secured by Condition 20(1)(b) of Part 2 of Schedules 14 and 15 to the Order and considers there are sufficient mechanisms in place to ensure impacts from UXO clearance within the Fylde MCZ are appropriately minimised.

4.2.2 The impact of suspended sediment concentrations and increased deposition on the Subtidal Mud and Subtidal Sand features.

Assessment for suspended sediment concentrations (“SSC”) from UXO clearance

The Applicants stage 1 assessment considers the impacts of SSC and subsequent sediment deposition in section 1.8.3. The Secretary of State notes that this does not consider the impacts of UXO clearance on SSC and that NE [C1-016] considers this should be assessed. The Secretary of State notes that UXO clearance is expected to have negligible impacts on SSC as set out in Table 1.12 of ES Chapter 1 and therefore considers that any potential effects within the Fylde MCZ will be similarly negligible and will not hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the MCZ.

Methods of sediment disposal

NE [REP5-179] advised that sediment deposition within the Fylde MCZ should be done using a fall/down pipe to ensure sediment is returned to the same habitat type and enable sandwave recovery. In the second information request, they Applicants were asked to commit to this method or if not, explain why this is not possible. The Applicants explain that a commitment to specific disposal mechanism is not possible at this time and suggest that the addition of NE as a consultee in relation to condition 18(1)(e) would be an appropriate mechanism to allow NE to comment on detailed plans relevant to sandwave clearance. The Secretary of State has added the ‘relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Body’, in this instance NE, as a consultee for condition 18(1) to manage potential impacts in relation to nearshore cable protection and considers this an appropriate mechanism in relation to sediment disposal within the MCZ. The Secretary of State considers this approach will ensure any risk to MCZ features for sediment disposal is appropriately managed.

4.2.3 The impact of changes in physical process on the subtidal mud and subtidal sand features.

Nearshore cable protection

During examination, NE had concerns that the installation of nearshore cable protection could affect the Fylde MCZ and wider environment through changes to physical process. As discussed in the Physical Processes, Benthic Subtidal and Intertidal Ecology section of the decision letter, the Secretary of State requested additional information from NE and the Applicants on this issue. The Applicants updated commitment 45 to include consultation with NE in the event that nearshore cable protection is required. The Secretary of State also amended Condition 18(1) of the DMLs at Schedules 14 and 15 to the Order to require consultation with the appropriate SNCB. With these changes the Secretary of State concludes that potential impacts to the Fylde MCZ from nearshore cable protection will be sufficiently mitigated and will not hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the MCZ.

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4.2.4 The impact of permanent habitat loss on the subtidal mud and subtidal sand features.

The installation of cable protection within the Fylde MCZ will result in the permanent loss of Subtidal Mud and / or Subtidal Sand. The MDS for cable protection within the Fylde MCZ is set out in Table 1.18 of the Applicants stage 1 assessment. The MDS is 3.04Ha of cable protection comprising:

- up to 2.64Ha on Subtidal Sand and/or Subtidal Mud allowed for areas where ground conditions prevent cable burial to target depth
- 0.4Ha on Subtidal Mud to protect cable crossings

Site specific benthic surveys show that the location of proposed cable crossing for Morgan falls within the subtidal mud feature in the west of the Fylde MCZ. The exact locations of cable protection required due to ground conditions are not yet known so the applicants have employed a precautionary approach which assumes that all the potential cable protection for ground conditions could be installed in either the subtidal sand or subtidal mud feature.

Sections 1.8.5 and 1.9.4 of the Applicants assessments conclude that the construction and operation and maintenance phases will not lead to a significant risk of hindering the conservation objectives of the Fylde MCZ. The Applicants therefore concluded a stage 2 assessment was not required [ER 4.17.99].

However, NE and The Wildlife Trusts concluded that the permanent habitat loss would hinder the conservation objectives of the MCZ and that a Stage 2 assessment and measures of equivalent ecological benefit (“MEEB”) are required [ER 4.17.100]. NE also considered that because the MDS covers up to 3.04Ha of cable protection on subtidal mud and 2.64Ha of cable protection on subtidal sand the total long term habitat loss should be considered as 5.68Ha [ER 4.17.101].

The Applicants maintained that their proposed approach of 3.04Ha total cable protection was a realistic MDS and NEs proposed approach would not represent the total amount of the cable protection [ER. 4.17.102]. The Applicants suggest that the exact compensation requirement can be determined post-consent and following detailed design. The ExA consider the Applicants approach to the MDS to be precautionary and realistic [ER 4.17.114] however despite this, the ExA conclude that the 3.04Ha of habitat loss is a large area and agree with NE that it will hinder the conservation objective of the site [ER 4.17.111]. The ExA conclude that the exact MEEB requirement should be agreed with stakeholders post-consent.

To support her conclusions on the assessment, the Secretary of State requested comments from NE regarding deadline 6 and 7 documents relevant to the MCZ assessment. NE [C1-016] confirmed that a commitment from the Applicants to require a new marine licence for any cable protection requirements inside the MCZ during the operation and maintenance phase resolved some of its concerns. However, NE also highlighted that as the MDS had not been refined, it considered MEEB are still required.

The Secretary of State also sought further information in relation to cable protection and permanent habitat loss within the Fylde MCZ. In the first information request the Secretary of State asked the Applicants to clarify how the MDS for cable protection in Fylde MCZ was calculated. The Applicants [C1-029.39] explained that they had high confidence in cable burial based on ground conditions and so the allowance was included as a contingency should they

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encounter any unexpected difficulties. The Secretary of State considers this a reasonable and precautionary approach.

Having considered the Applicants stage 1 assessment, the ExA report, representations made during Examination and the further information received at the decision stage, the Secretary of State agrees with the Applicants and the ExA that 3.04Ha represents a realistic MDS as she considers that NEs proposed approach would include double counting of potential impacts. The Secretary of State concludes, in agreement with the ExA, NE and TWT that 3.04Ha of permanent habitat loss from cable protection is significant area and that there may be a significant risk of the Project hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the Fylde MCZ.

4.3 Stage 1 Assessment conclusion

The Secretary of State agrees with the ExA that the Applicants stage 1 assessment process has been carried out with MMO guidance. She concludes that, due to 3.04 Ha of permanent habitat loss (comprising subtidal mud and/or subtidal sand in final amounts to be assessed), there may be a significant risk of the Project hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the Fylde MCZ. A stage 2 assessment is required to determine whether the tests set out in section 126 (7) of MCAA can be met.

The Secretary of State is satisfied that, for all other impact pathways, there is no significant risk of the Project hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the Fylde MCZ.

5 Stage 2 Assessment

5.1 Introduction

Following the conclusion of the stage 1 assessment, section 126 (7) of MCAA requires that, before the Secretary of State can grant the Order, she must be satisfied that:

- (a) there is no other means of proceeding with the act which would create a substantially lower risk of hindering the achievement of those objectives,
- (b) the benefit to the public of proceeding with the act clearly outweighs the risk of damage to the environment that will be created by proceeding with it, and
- (c) the person seeking the authorisation will undertake, or make arrangements for the undertaking of, measures of equivalent environmental benefit to the damage which the act will or is likely to have in or on the MCZ.

5.2 Other feasible means of proceeding and public benefits of proceeding

To meet the requirement in section 126(7) of MCAA, the Applicants have submitted a Stage 2 MCZ Assessment [REP7-031]. Section 1.4 of that assessment considers whether there are other feasible means of proceeding with the Project and concludes that risk to the MCZ are minimised as far as possible and that no feasible other locations, scale or methods are available to deliver the Project objectives with a substantially lesser effect on the MCZ. Section 1.5 of that assessment considers the public benefit associated with the Project and concludes that the clear public benefit outweighs the risk to the conservation objectives of the Fylde MCZ. The ExA agrees with the Applicants assessment [ER 4.17.112]. The Secretary of State also agrees.

5.3 Measures of Equivalent Environmental Benefit

Appendix A.1: Without Prejudice, In Principle MEEB Plan (“MEEB Plan”) of the Stage 2 MCZ Assessment [REP7-031] outlines the Applicants preferred options for delivering MEEB.

The Applicants explain at Paragraph A.1.7.2.1 of the MEEB Plan that strategic compensation delivered through the Marine Recovery Fund⁹ is considered to be the preferred option as it is the only measure identified that would provide like-for-like compensation for the long term loss of the subtidal sand and subtidal mud features of the Fylde MCZ. NE agreed with this approach

⁹ [Marine Recovery Fund - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/marine-recovery-fund)

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[REP6-179; ER 4.17.106]. However, at the time of Examination the MRF was not accepting applications. The Applicants therefore present potential Project led measures in table A.7 of the MEEB Plan and consider these in more detail in paragraphs A.1.7.3.4 to A.1.7.3.57.

During Examination NE advised that Project led options would not provide comparable ecological function for the habitats being compensated for and that there was no merit in further progressing Project specific compensation measures at this time [ER 4.17.105]. However, NE agreed to the Applicants retaining Project led options in the MEEB plan on the basis that they would be developed further if the MRF was unavailable [REP6-179; ER 4.17.105].

The Secretary of State notes that the MPA designation and/or extension measure is designed to compensate for damage to benthic habitats from relevant offshore wind activities; is currently available for delivery through the MRF; and can only be delivered through the MRF¹⁰. Having reviewed the MEEB Plan, the Secretary of State agrees with the Applicants and NE that strategic compensation through the MRF presents the only viable approach to deliver like-for-like compensation and should be the preferred MEEB option.

In the first information request, the Applicants were asked to confirm whether they had engaged with the MRF Operator and whether there was sufficient capacity in the MPA designation and/or extension measure for the loss of up to 3.04 ha of subtidal mud and up to 2.64 ha of subtidal sand. The Applicants [C1-029.39] confirmed they had met with the MRF Operator and that sufficient capacity was available in the measure.

During Examination the Applicants submitted a without prejudice benthic compensation schedule [REP5-108] and both NE were content with the approach to MEEB secured within the schedule and the ExA recommended that the schedule is secured by a new article in the rDCO [ER 4.17.114]. Following the close of Examination, the marine recovery fund launched in December 2025¹¹. The Applicants submitted an update letter to the Secretary of State in February 2026 [PID-002] in which they offered to update the wording of the benthic schedule to align with other recently consented Projects that were required to deliver compensation through the MRF. The Secretary of State requested an updated schedule in the first information request, and this was supplied by the Applicants [C1-029.4].

The Secretary of State considered the Schedule could more effectively secure MEEB requires and address some of the uncertainties in relation to the specific MEEB requirement and the availability of measures through the MRF. To address the uncertainty around the final impacts and MEEB requirement, she has revised Schedule 19 to the Order to require confirmation of the impacts to subtidal mud and subtidal sand following the approval of the design plan by the MMO. Noting also that the Applicants, NE, the ExA and the Secretary of State all agree strategic compensation through the MRF is preferable to Project led measures, she requires that Project led measure will only be developed if the MRF Operator confirms there are no suitable strategic measures available through the MRF.

¹⁰ [Offshore wind development: library of strategic compensatory measures - GOV.UK](#)

¹¹ [Building clean energy while our seas flourish: introducing the Marine Recovery Fund – Environment](#)

5.4 Stage 2 conclusions

The Secretary of State has reviewed the Applicants Stage 2 assessment and is satisfied that:

- there is no other means of proceeding with the act which would create a substantially lower risk of hindering the achievement of those objectives; and
- that the benefit to the public of proceeding with the act clearly outweighs the risk of damage to the environment that will be created by proceeding with it.

Having considered the additional information received at the decision stage and, having revised the requirements of Schedule 19 to the Order, the Secretary of State is satisfied that the Applicants will undertake, or make arrangements for the undertaking of, measures of equivalent environmental benefit to the damage which the act will or is likely to have in or on the MCZ.

The Secretary of State considers the tests and requirements at section 126 (7) and (9) of MCAA have been met and she may therefore grant consent to the Project.

Annex A: Protected sites and qualifying features screened into Stage 1 assessment

Table 1 - Table showing the MCZs and qualifying feature(s) screened into a Stage 1 assessment. Pressures are attributed to the relevant stage(s) of development: Construction (C); Operation and Maintenance (O); Decommissioning (D)

MCZ Name	Qualifying Feature(s)	Conservation Advice	Pressure(s)
Fylde MCZ	Subtidal Sand Subtidal Mud	See Footnote ¹²	Direct impacts: Temporary habitat disturbance Long term habitat loss Colonisation of hard structures (INNS) Electromagnetic fields (EMF) Heat effects from cabling Indirect Impacts: Increases in suspended sediment concentration Increased sediment deposition Disturbance changes to physical processes

¹²<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/ConservationAdvice.aspx?SiteCode=UKMCZ0007&SiteName=Fylde%20MCZ&SiteNameDisplay=Fylde%20MCZ&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAarea=&HasCA=1&NumMarineSeasonality=0&SiteNameDisplay=Fylde%20MCZ>

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