



Transboundary screening undertaken by the Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) on behalf of the Secretary of State (SoS) for the purposes of regulation 32 of The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (The 2017 EIA Regulations)

Project name:	Proposed Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection Project (MHPGC project)
Address/Location:	<p>The proposed development comprises offshore and onshore underground electricity cables and a land substation to connect the Morven Offshore Wind Array Project in Scottish waters to the National Grid. The proposed development would make landfall along the northeast coast of England, at Hawthorn Pit between Ryhope and Easington Colliery, in the local authority areas of Durham County Council and Sunderland City Council.</p> <p>The offshore part of the proposed development is located in the North Sea, in both Scottish and English waters. The MHPGC project includes offshore and onshore components in England and English waters only. Works required beyond English waters will be consented separately under the Scottish consenting regime, including a second grid connection in Scotland and the Branxton Area Connection Project.</p>
Planning Inspectorate Ref:	EN0210005
Date(s) screening undertaken:	First screening – 02 June 2025 following the applicant's request for a scoping opinion

FIRST TRANSBOUNDARY SCREENING

Document(s) used for transboundary Screening:	Morven Hawthorn Pit Grid Connection Project Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report ('the Scoping Report') February 2025
Screening Criteria:	The Inspectorate's Comments:

Characteristics of the Development

The proposed development consists of an electrical transmission link from the boundary with Scottish territorial waters to the landfall site on the northeast coast of England. The proposed development would supply up to 2.9GW of electricity from the Morven Offshore Wind Farm in Scotland to the National Grid at Hawthorn Pit. The key components of the proposed development are listed below:

Offshore

The proposed development consists of approximately 261km of subsea High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) export cables and associated cable protection. The subsea cable system would consist of no more than six cables including HVDC cables, Dedicated Metallic Return (DMR), and fibre optic cables.

Onshore

The proposed development comprises:

- A maximum of two Transition Joint Bays (TJBs) located on the landward side of the landfall to join offshore and onshore HVDC cables.
- A Land Substation (LSS) site housing electrical equipment to adjust the power quality and power factor required to connect to the National Grid at the existing Hawthorn Pit Substation. The design envelope accommodates LSS options in either dual 320kV monopole or single 525kV bi-pole HVDC configurations to convert between HVAC and HVDC transmission. The LSS would consist of a maximum footprint of 70,000m² and a maximum height of 30m.
- Onshore HVDC cables would connect the TJBs to the LSS. The onshore cable system would be a maximum length of 16.8km and consist of no more than six cables including HVDC power cables, DMR, and fibre optic cables.
- High Voltage Alternating Current (HVAC) cables will run from the LSS to the grid connection point at the existing Hawthorn Pit Substation. The grid connection cables would consist of no more than 24 cables and a maximum length of 5.3km.

Duration

The offshore components of the MHPGC project are likely to be installed over a period of up to 2.5 years. The onshore elements of the MHPGC project may be installed over a period of up to 3 years. The operational lifetime of the MHPGC project is expected to be up to 35 years, in line with the Morven Offshore Wind Array Project. The Scoping Report also states that after this period it is anticipated that the proposed development would be decommissioned, with cable left in situ and removal of onshore above ground structures.

<p>Location of Development (including existing use) and Geographical area</p>	<p>Offshore</p> <p>The offshore components of the MHPGC project would be located in the North Sea within English territorial waters, from the boundary with Scottish waters to the landfall site on the northeast coast of England. The exact landfall location is still to be determined but will be between Ryhope, Sunderland and Easington Colliery, County Durham. The scoping boundary of the MHPGC project is shown on Figure 3.1 of the Scoping Report.</p> <p>Onshore</p> <p>The MHPGC project scoping boundary comprises three potential landfall locations between Ryhope, Sunderland and Easington Colliery, County Durham. Onshore corridors to the north and south of Seaham are identified and referred to as Northern Corridor and Landfall, Central Corridor and Landfall and Southern Corridor and Landfall. These corridors are shown in Figure 6.2 of the Scoping Report.</p> <p>The main land use within the onshore MHPGC project scoping boundary is agriculture with gently sloping arable farmland falling towards the coast. The onshore scoping boundary is situated around the urban area of Seaham, atop sea cliffs ranging between 25m and 50m.</p> <p>The settlements of Ryhope, Seaham, Dawdon, Dalton le Dale, Murton, Easington Colliery, Easington, Haswell, Easington Lane and Hetton le Hole are adjacent to the scoping boundary of the proposed development. A new housing estate, Seaham Garden Village is located south of the A182 southwest of Seaham within the Central Corridor and Landfall.</p> <p>In addition, there are several industrial and commercial businesses located around Seaham including businesses on Seaham Harbour, Admiralty Way, Spectrum Business Park, Jade Business Park and Seaham Grange Industrial Estate. As well as the existing National Grid Hawthorn Pit Substation and associated infrastructure. Several roads also traverse the MHPGC project scoping boundary.</p> <p>There are also areas of nature conservation and landscape value within the scoping boundary (see Environmental Importance below).</p> <p>Distance to European Economic Area (EEA) States</p> <p>The Scoping Report does not identify the nearest EEA state to the proposed development.</p>
<p>Environmental Importance</p>	<p>Onshore</p> <p>The following internationally and nationally designated sites are identified in the Scoping Report (Tables 8.38 and 8.39 respectively) as either within or partially within the onshore MHPGC project scoping boundary:</p>

- Hesledon Moor West Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (within the scoping boundary)
- Durham Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and SSSI
- Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site
- Hesledon Moor East SSSI
- Hawthorn Dene SSSI

No potential receptors of environmental importance have been identified in the onshore environment that could result in transboundary impacts. Onshore receptors and impacts are therefore not discussed further in this screening.

Offshore

A number of designated sites are located in proximity to the offshore MHPGC project scoping boundary, including:

- North East of Farnes Deep Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) and Marine Protection Area (MPA)
- Farnes East Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)
- Durham Coast SAC and SSSI
- Firth of Forth Banks Complex MPA

Offshore: Fish and shellfish ecology (Scoping Report Chapter 7.5)

The Scoping Report in section 7.5.5 describes the likely fish and shellfish present within the regional fish and shellfish ecology study area. A list of protected species is included at Table 7.25 of the Scoping Report.

European and nationally designated sites with relevant qualifying features in proximity to the fish and shellfish study area are listed in Table 7.25 and Figure 7.20 of the Scoping Report, and include:

- Turbot Bank MPA (Scottish waters)
- River Dee SAC (Scottish waters)
- Tweed Estuary SAC (English waters)
- River Tweed SAC (English and Scottish waters)
- River South Esk SAC (Scottish waters)
- River Tay SAC (Scottish waters)
- River Teith SAC (Scottish waters)

There are no sites that overlap the scoping boundary.

The Scoping Report describes the landed catches for the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) rectangles crossed by the scoping boundary, which are shown in Figure 7.13.

Offshore: Marine mammals (Scoping Report Chapter 7.6)

The Scoping Report in section 7.6.3 describes the study area for the proposed assessment of marine mammals.

The Scoping Report states that a full screening of European sites with qualifying marine mammal features will be undertaken as part of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process. Table 7.33 and Figure 7.23 of the Scoping Report provide an early indication of the designated sites with marine mammals and their qualifying features that may be considered within the EIA Report, including:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
- Isle of May SAC
- Southern Trench MPA
- Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary SAC
- Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC
- Moray Firth SAC
- Southern North Sea SAC

The Scoping Report identified the following key species likely to occur in the study area:

- harbour porpoise
- minke whale
- white-beaked dolphin
- grey seal
- bottlenose dolphin
- humpback whale

Offshore and intertidal ornithology (Scoping Report Chapter 7.7)

Designated sites and their qualifying features within 50km of the MHPGC project are outlined in Table 7.42 and include Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar site which are partially located within the scoping boundary.

The Scoping Report (paragraphs 7.7.5.6 and 7.7.5.7) states that the MHPGC project scoping boundary includes land used by breeding seabird species including cormorant, shag, herring gull, lesser black-backed gull, black-legged kittiwake, common tern, Artic tern, Sandwich tern, common guillemot, razorbill and Atlantic puffin. The Scoping Report also states that the scoping boundary includes land used by wintering populations of long-tailed duck, red-throated diver, common gull, little gull, red-throated diver, common gull, little gull, black-headed gull, velvet scoter, common scoter, Slavonian grebe and eider.

The Scoping Report (paragraph 7.7.5.13) identifies a variety of non-breeding wader species who use the intertidal environment for feeding and roosting including redshank, oystercatcher, turnstone and curlew. Several non-breeding gull species also use the beach habitats at the proposed landfall locations including herring gull, common gull and black-headed gull.

Offshore: Commercial fisheries (Scoping Report Chapter 7.8)

The Scoping Report presents the commercial fisheries study area jointly for Scottish and English fleets. Paragraphs 7.8.5.1 and

	<p>7.8.5.9 to 7.8.5.11 identify that the commercial fisheries study area supports a range of commercial fishing activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demersal trawls, targeting nephrops, and to a lesser extent whiting and haddock • potting, targeting lobsters and to a lesser extent edible crabs • dredges, targeting scallops • pelagic trawls, targeting herring <p>Table 7.49 summaries surveillance sitings within the commerical fisheries study area by nationality and method, this includes the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Belgium.</p> <p>Offshore: Shipping and navigation (Scoping Report Chapter 7.9)</p> <p>The Scoping Report states (paragraph 7.9.5.6) that there are three subsea cables that pass through the MHPGC project scoping boundary, with all three in an east to west bearing. Two of these run between the UK and Norway, with the other between the UK and Denmark.</p> <p>The Scoping Report (paragraphs 7.9.5.11 to 7.9.5.19) states that vessel traffic data was collected in 2023 within the shipping and navigation study area recording vessels between Newcastle and the Netherlands and between Iceland and the Netherlands.</p>
<p>Potential impacts and Carrier</p>	<p>The Scoping Report identified potential transboundary impacts for the following environmental aspects:</p> <p>Offshore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish and shellfish ecology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Temporary habitat loss/ disturbance ○ Long term habitat loss ○ Increased suspended sediment concentration and associated sediment deposition ○ Colonisation of hard structures ○ Underwater sound ○ Electromagnetic fields (EMF) • Marine mammals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Injury and disturbance from underwater sound generated from unexploded ordnance clearance ○ Injury and disturbance from vessel use and other (non-piling) sound-producing construction activities ○ Injury due to collision with vessels ○ Changes in prey availability ○ Disturbance from pre-construction site investigation surveys • Offshore and intertidal ornithology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disturbance and displacement from airborne noise, underwater noise, and presence of vessels and infrastructure ○ Indirect impacts on prey species

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Temporary habitat loss/ disturbance and increased suspended sediment concentration ○ surveys ● Commercial fisheries ● Shipping and navigation <p>The Scoping Report does not identify what the potential impacts/ carrier would be for commercial fisheries and shipping and navigation. The Planning Inspectorate considers that the following could potentially arise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commercial fisheries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Temporary restricted access to fishing grounds ○ Temporary displacement of fishing activity into other areas ○ Loss of grounds ○ Changes in distribution of target species ○ Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments ● Shipping and navigation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collision risk ○ Reduced access to local ports and harbours ○ Anchor interaction with subsea cables ○ Reduction of under keel clearance ○ Interference with navigation, communications, and position-fixing equipment
Extent	With regards to the aspect areas considered above, limited information is currently available on the extent of any potential transboundary impacts. However, the information on commercial fisheries does note that the North Sea is used by vessels from Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Belgium. The information on shipping and navigation notes that subsea cables present in the scoping boundary run to/ from Norway and Denmark and the North Sea is used by vessels from Iceland and the Netherlands.
Magnitude	With regards to the aspect areas considered above, no information is currently available on the magnitude of any potential transboundary impacts.
Probability	With regards to the aspect areas considered above, no information is currently available on the probability of any potential transboundary impacts.
Duration	With regards to the aspect areas considered above, no information is currently available on the duration of any potential transboundary impacts apart from the information on the duration of the proposed developments construction and operational phases as described above.
Frequency	With regards to the aspect areas considered above, no information is currently available on the frequency of any potential transboundary impacts.

Reversibility	With regards to the aspect areas considered above, no information is currently available on the reversibility of any potential transboundary impacts.
Cumulative impacts	The applicant's Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA) has not yet been undertaken and the applicant has not identified any likely significant cumulative effects at this stage. The applicant has not yet identified an exhaustive list of the projects to be included within the cumulative impact assessment, however the Scoping Report states that the Morven Offshore Wind Array Project and the Branxton Area Connection Project will be considered.

Transboundary screening undertaken by the Inspectorate on behalf of the SoS

Under regulation 32 of The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (The 2017 EIA Regulations) and on the basis of the current information available from the applicant, the Inspectorate is of the view that the proposed development **is likely** to have a significant effect on the environment in an EEA State.

In reaching this view the Inspectorate has applied the precautionary approach (as explained in its Advice Page Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice on Transboundary Impacts and Process), and taken into account the information currently supplied by the applicant.

Action:

Transboundary issues notification under regulation 32 of The 2017 EIA Regulations is required.

States to be notified:

- France and Belgium – due to potential impacts on commercial fisheries
- Denmark and the Netherlands – due to potential impacts on commercial fisheries and shipping and navigation
- Norway and Iceland – due to potential impacts on shipping and navigation

Date: 02 June 2025

Note: The SoS' duty under regulation 32 of The 2017 EIA Regulations continues throughout the application process.

Note:

The Inspectorate's screening of transboundary issues is based on the relevant considerations specified in the annex to its Advice Page, Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice on Transboundary Impacts and Process, available at:

[‘Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice on Transboundary Impacts and Process’](#).