

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name:	<i>Offshore Transmission Network Round 3</i>
Project Number:	<i>2014-0200</i>
Country:	<i>United Kingdom</i>
Project Description:	<i>Framework facility to support financing of 2 offshore wind farm transmission networks (Humber Gateway and Westermost Rough) under the third phase (Round 3) of the UK regulatory regime OFTO. This follows a previous framework approval covering six Round 1 projects (Serapis No. 2009-0322) and four Round 2 projects (2011-0265).</i>
EIA required:	yes
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise ¹ :	no

Summary of Environmental and Social Assessment, including key issues and overall conclusion and recommendation

The project concerns a framework facility, for the third Round under the OFTO (Offshore Transmission Owners) regulation, which is intended to provide funding for entities that will own and operate the high-voltage assets (≥ 132 kV) connecting large-scale offshore wind farms to the national onshore transmission network. The ownership will be transferred to the entities through a competitive tendering process under the OFTO regulation. The transmission assets which may potentially benefit from this framework facility are associated with the following wind farms: Humber Gateway (219 MW wind farm located 8 km off the Yorkshire coast) and Westermost Rough (210 MW wind farm located 8 km off the Yorkshire Coast).

Wind farms fall under Annex II of the EIA Directive (2011/92/EU). According to national regulations an offshore wind farm, and its associated transmission infrastructure, is subject to a full mandatory EIA including public consultation. Hence, all components of this framework facility have been subject to comprehensive EIAs. Having obtained all necessary consents is one of the qualifying pre-conditions for offshore wind farm developers to be accepted for the OFTO regime tender process. In 2003 and prior to the development of the project related EIAs, the UK government conducted a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in accordance with the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, for its plan to develop offshore wind in its territory. Three large Strategic Areas – the Liverpool Bay, the Thames Estuary and the Greater Wash – have been identified.

For the transmission assets, which will be part of the Tender Round 3, as well as for the associated offshore wind farms, full EIAs have been conducted, including an appropriate assessment of impacts on biodiversity (Habitats and Birds Directives), public consultation has taken place, consent has been granted and mitigation measures are being implemented accordingly.

¹ Only projects that meet the scope of the Pilot Exercise, as defined in the EIB draft Carbon Footprint Methodologies, are included, provided estimated emissions exceed the methodology thresholds: above 100,000 tons CO₂e/year absolute (gross) or 20,000 tons CO₂e/year relative (net) – both increases and savings.

The various studies undertaken analysed potential impacts on the sea floor (sediment), coastal processes (erosion), water quality, fish populations and benthos organisms, marine mammals, bird populations, noise, coastal landscape, shipping, fishing activities, navigation safety and flight paths.

Conclusions of the overall assessment process, for all components of this framework facility, indicate that, provided the proposed mitigation and monitoring requirements are put in place, the facilities would neither have significant adverse effect on the environment nor adversely affect the integrity of any European site in view of the site's conservation objectives nor Annex I species and their habitats.

All the key statutory licenses and consents have been obtained, including Section 36 consent (construction and operation of a generating station), Marine license, planning permissions under the Town and Country Planning Act (onshore cable route and onshore substation) and FEPA license (marine ecosystems).

Based on the information available, the environmental processes undertaken, the conclusions and the mitigation plans in place, the framework facility is acceptable for Bank financing from an environmental perspective.

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

One of the main impacts on ecosystems during construction relates to the noise from the piling process with disturbance and possible injury to marine mammals.

An assessment of marine mammals was carried out as part of the EIA. The assessments identified three key species: harbour porpoises, grey seals and harbour seals. The assessments also considered the cumulative impacts resulting from other wind farm projects. It has been concluded that in case of construction activities occurring at the same time, the cumulative impacts of concurrent piling on Humber Gateway and Westermost Rough sites would be of minor significance for the three species highlighted.

In particular, for both projects, the marine licenses granted by the UK Marine Management Organisation (MMO) include a set of conditions related to the implementation of the mitigation measures. A key condition of the marine licenses concerns the marine mammals with the preparation of a Marine Mammal Mitigation Programme to be agreed with MMO prior to construction.

In order to avoid beginning piling activities while marine mammals are present within a specific zone, developers shall implement the following mitigations measures: measurements of underwater noise during construction, qualified marine mammal observers, passive acoustic detection, soft start procedures for the piling activities and enhanced acoustic monitoring in case of poor visibility. The mitigation programmes were prepared on the basis of JNCC guidelines (Statutory nature conservation agency protocol for minimising the risk of disturbance and injury to marine mammals from piling noise).

After mitigation, moderate residual impacts are expected for seals during construction as a result of possible temporary impairments of hearing and no or minor residual impacts are expected for cetaceans.

Humber Gateway:

Humber Gateway wind farm will be located 8 km off the coast of Yorkshire. The route length will be 9 km for the subsea cable and 30 km for the onshore cable. A detailed EIA was carried out for all project components, including public consultation and the environmental approval was issued in February 2011.

An appropriate assessment of impact on biodiversity has been conducted and it has been concluded that the wind farm will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the relevant European sites (Humber Estuary SAC and Ramsar site, Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA, North Norfolk Coast SPA).

During construction, temporary disturbance due to increased turbidity may occur with impacts on some benthic organisms and fish species. In relation to the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA) located 55 km to the north of the wind farm, the increase of vessel traffic during construction and maintenance may disturb seabirds. Careful routing of vessels will be considered and specific operational procedures will be applied in order to minimise impacts on seabird habitats. The environmental impact study has identified the potential for some visual impacts on seascape from several viewpoints including the Spurn Head due to the location of the wind turbines. Onshore, the cable route will affect a small area of woodland with potential significant impact on bat roosts; this will be mitigated with the installation of bat boxes or through replanting.

In accordance with the conditions stated in the marine license, a Marine Mammal Mitigation Programme has been prepared in consultation with Natural England, JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) and Cefas (Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science). This programme was approved by MMO on 11/04/2013.

Westermost Rough:

Westermost Rough wind farm will be located 8 km off the coast of Yorkshire. The route length will be 12 km for the subsea cable and 15 km for the onshore cable. A detailed EIA was carried out for all project components, including public consultation and the environmental approval was granted in November 2011.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) assessed the likely significant effect on European sites. Potential impacts in terms of marine mammals, offshore ornithology, coastal processes, reefs (Annex I habitats), and amphibians have been considered for the Humber Estuary European Marine Site (SAC, SPA and Ramsar site) and the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA. Considering the planned mitigation measures and on the basis of Natural England's advice, DECC has concluded that the proposed project will not significantly affect these two European sites.

The onshore cable route will be close to several waterbodies hosting Great Crested Newts, a species listed in the Annex IV of the Habitats Directive as a European Protected Species, with a potential temporary loss of habitat during construction. A Great Crested Newt mitigation programme has been prepared and agreed with Natural England.

The environmental impact study identified potential impact on seabirds during construction that will be mitigated applying appropriate mitigation measures to avoid disturbing rafting birds. The other significant impacts relate to visual impact, navigation and fisheries; appropriate mitigations measures will be implemented to reduce impacts where possible.

In accordance with the conditions stated in the marine license, a Marine Mammal Mitigation programme has been prepared for Westermost Rough. This programme was approved by MMO on 22/11/2013 after having consulted Natural England.

Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Details of the project have been publicised and made available to residents and local authorities. The project developers undertook a public consultation for each of the wind farm projects and carried out public exhibitions in order to inform the general public and receive comments. Stakeholders and interested parties have been also consulted during the approval processes of these projects including relevant authorities and expert bodies in the preparation of the respective mitigation plans.