

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name: *SIMONSFELD ONSHORE WIND*
 Project Number: *(2017-0323)*
 Country: *AUSTRIA*
 Project Description: *Construction and operation of three wind parks in the Austrian Federal State of Lower Austria. The project has a total capacity of 39 MW. One wind farm is a re-powering project.*

EIA required: *yes*
An EIA is pursued only for a part of the project. The corresponding EIS will eventually be published on EIB website.

Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise¹: *yes*
 (details for projects included are provided in section: "EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise")

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

The project relates to two new wind farms (Kreuzstetten IV; Dürnkrot II) and one repowering scheme (Hipples II). Dürnkrot is a co-development with a third party comprising 9 wind turbines in total out of which 4 turbines are allocated to this operation. Hipples II consists of 2 wind turbines and replaces the existing wind farm Hipples which consists of 7 smaller-scale wind turbines (4.8 MW in total). Hipples II makes use of existing infrastructure such as access roads and cabling. It is located adjacent to the Kreuzstetten IV scheme.

	No. of turbines	Total installed capacity
Kreuzstetten IV	7	22 MW
Dürnkrot II	4	13 MW
Hipples II	2	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>39</i>

In 2014, a wind power development plan was developed by the government of Lower Austria. It identifies preferential zones for wind power development on the basis of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The three wind farms are located inside preferential development zones as identified by this plan. All wind farms are located in the vicinity of existing wind farms.

Wind farms fall under Annex II of Directive 2014/52/EU amending the EIA Directive 2011/92/EU. It is therefore up to the Member State's competent authority to judge whether an individual wind farm requires an EIA or not, based on criteria defined in Annex III of the EIA Directive. In line with national legislation (UVP Act, 2000), wind farms above 20 MW (Kreuzstetten IV, Dürnkrot II when considering all 9 turbines) including their 30 kV grid

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.

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connections were screened-in. Scheme Hipplles II (size below 10 MW) was screened out and permitted under the Electricity Act of Lower Austria (2005).

Scheme Kreuzstetten IV (comprising 7 wind turbines) is also part of operation WINDKRAFT SIMONSFELD WIND POWER (2013-0333) with the same promoter. The due diligence of that preceding operation back in 2014 had confirmed the promoter's adequate environmental management capacity. This is further confirmed by monitoring experience gained since then. At the time of the corresponding appraisal, however, scheme Kreuzstetten IV was at an early authorisation stage and a corresponding loan condition was proposed. Since then, the wind farm has finalised its authorisation process.

Comprehensive Environmental Impact studies have been produced for schemes Kreuzstetten IV and Dürnkrot II. For Hipplles II, which can be considered as an extension to Kreuzstetten IV given its proximity, expert studies have been produced on key risk areas (biodiversity, noise, shadow flickering). They make use of cumulated impact analyses pursued for the adjacent Kreuzstetten IV wind farm incl. assessments of cumulated impacts on Natura 2000 sites.

All three wind farms are located on agricultural land and outside protected areas. None of the projects is located inside any existing or candidate Natura 2000 sites as laid out in publicly available shadow lists.

Scheme Dürnkrot II is located in the vicinity of several protected areas. Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Community Interest (SCI) "March Thaya Auen" (AT1202V00, AT1202000) is the closest one with ca. 5 km distance to the wind farm. It is , amongst others, relevant for several birds of prey species (imperial eagle, red kite, sea eagle etc.). Another Natura 2000 site is ca. 9 km away (SCI "Weinviertler Klippenzone" AT1206A00). It provides habitat to protected bat species (incl. barbastelle bat, greater mouse-eared bat). Protected areas under national law are ca. 5-9 km distant.

For Kreuzstetten IV and Hipplles II, the closest Natura 2000 site is SCI "Weinviertler Klippenzone" at a distance ca. 3-4 km. The closest SPA is more than 10km away. Protected areas under national law are ca. 3-4 km distant.

Appropriate Assessments in line with EU Directives were carried out in both EIA processes, concluding that the projects have no significant impact on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites. The permitting process of the Hipplles II wind farm takes note of the proximity to adjacent Natura 2000 sites and concludes that no significant negative impacts are expected.

Given the presence of protected species and habitats in the project areas, each site underwent an avifauna impact assessment comprising data collection over at least 1 year as part of the authorisation processes. Significant negative impacts on birds and bats were excluded by the experts. Residual risks are addressed by site-specific mitigation measures: In case of Kreuzstetten IV, 7 ha fallow land need to be established and maintained in-line with detailed requirements. Further, 1 ha of forest shall be taken out of industrial use to protect species living in forests (bats in particular). In case of Dürnkrot II, 18 hectares of improved bird of prey habitats have to be implemented by the promoter and its development partner adjacent to and inside the "March Thaya Auen" SPA. Given the scheme's proximity to forest areas, also bat-related precaution measures have been identified: under defined ambient conditions (evening to night time, August/September, low wind speed) all Dürnkrot II wind turbines shall be taken out of operation.

The two EIA processes were subject to public consultation. No third party concerns were raised in relation to the Dürnkrot II wind farm. During authorisation of the Kreuzstetten IV wind farm, several concerns were raised by various citizens of neighbouring municipalities. In all cases, the competent authorities consulted experts on these concerns and reflected them in their permit decision making to the extent necessary.

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Visual impacts exist but they are mitigated by locating all wind turbines next to existing ones (clusters). Individual, more exposed wind turbines of schemes Kreuzstetten IV and Dürnkrot II feature a relatively lower hub height.

At the end of the EIA processes, environmental permits were granted by the competent authority of Lower Austria. This happened in March 2014 (Kreuzstetten IV) and June 2015 (Dürnkrot II), respectively. Hipples II was granted its various permits in the period April to December 2015. A non-significant modification of the permit for Hipples II wind farm was approved in September 2016.

The permits generally oblige the promoter to apply all relevant mitigation measures, e.g. on health and safety, ground water protection, noise and traffic during construction, as well as noise, shadow flicker and icing risks during operation. Two wind turbines of the Kreuzstetten IV wind farm must be operated in a low-noise-mode during night time at defined wind speeds. They are located around 1200 m distant to the closest area of building land. The aforementioned mitigation measures relating to birds and bats are to be fully implemented prior to commercial operation and maintained and monitored in-line with detailed requirements during the whole operating phase of the wind farms. The Hipples II wind farm may cause excessive shadow flicker in one location. The two turbines must consequently be temporarily shut down if needed to ensure full compliance with applicable shadow flicker thresholds.

Post consent, 4 private people filed a legal appeal against the Kreuzstetten IV permit. The appeal was based on multiple concerns that were already raised during authorisation. It was declined by the federal administrative court in April 2015.

There is a permit amendment process ongoing for Dürnkrot II scheme. It predominantly relates to the use of turbines with greater dimensions (4 wind turbines under this operation: 122m instead of 114m rotor diameter at a slightly reduced hub height) and corresponding non-significant modifications of project layout. The promoter and its development partner provided expert studies as part of their application for amendment which conclude that there are no significant negative environmental impacts resulting from these changes. The amendment approval process also comprises consultations with public and authorised experts. It is still ongoing at the time of appraisal. A loan condition is proposed.

A permit under the aviation act (Luftfahrtrechtliche Ausnahmegewilligung) for the Hipples II wind farm will expire on 20.05.2017, two years after the permit was granted back in 2015. The promoter and the competent authority agreed to launch a repeat authorisation process once the project's implementation schedule can be confirmed.

The promoter is an SME with significant experience in the development and operation of wind farms and other renewable energy installations in Austria and this geographical area in particular. The promoter and its contractors are deemed to have an adequate environmental and social capacity.

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EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise

The direct CO₂ equivalent emissions of the 3 wind farms under this investment programme are negligible.

In accordance with the Bank's current Carbon Footprint methodology it is calculated that based on the avoidance of electricity generation from a combination of existing and new power plants in Austria (75% operating margin and 25% build margin), the total relative effect of the project is a net reduction in CO₂ equivalent emissions by 58 kt CO₂e/yr.

For the annual accounting purposes of the EIB Carbon Footprint, the project emissions will be prorated according to the EIB lending amount signed in that year, as a proportion of project cost.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is proposed that an environmental permit, in-line with the final design of the scheme Dürnkrot II, must be provided to the Bank prior to a related disbursement.

A permit under the Austrian aviation act (Luftfahrtrechtliche Ausnahmegewilligung) for the Hipplers II wind must be provided to the Bank prior to a related disbursement.

Based on the information available and subject to the proposed loan condition, the project is acceptable for Bank financing.

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