

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a green tractor working in a field. The tractor is positioned on the right side of the frame, moving towards the left. The field is brown and appears to be recently plowed. In the background, there are several green trees and a clear blue sky.

The Great Grid Upgrade

Eastern Green Link 3 (EGL 3) and
Eastern Green Link 4 (EGL 4)

Preliminary environmental information report (PEIR)

Volume 1, Part 3, Chapter 17: Designated Sites
May 2025

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17. Designated Sites

17. Designated Sites

17.1 Introduction

- 17.1.1 This chapter collates the preliminary findings of the environmental assessments undertaken to date for the Eastern Green Link 3 (EGL 3) and Eastern Green Link 4 (EGL 4) English Offshore Scheme relating to designated sites and species. Specifically, it relates to the English Offshore elements of EGL 3 and EGL 4 (the English Offshore Scheme) seaward of Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) and considers impacts during the construction, operation (and maintenance) and a high level assessment of the decommissioning phases.
- 17.1.2 In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Section 81 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) (MCAA) cable installation beyond 12 NM is exempt from requiring a Marine Licence. There are certain activities, however, associated with cable laying that this does not apply to, including the placement of cable protection and dredging activities associated with sandwave levelling. The draft Development Consents Order (DCO) (and dML) to be submitted with the final Environmental Statement (ES) will therefore be structured to reflect this.
- 17.1.3 Preliminary assessment of effects in **Volume 1 Part 3** for the English Offshore Scheme do consider cable laying beyond 12 NM, however this is to provide a holistic view of the English Offshore Scheme only, and National Grid Electricity Transmission plc's (NGET) ('the Applicant') will not be seeking consent for the 'exempt cable'.
- 17.1.4 To ensure that the English Offshore Scheme does not have a significant adverse effect on designated sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening and Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment Screening, as well as MCZ Stage 1 Assessment have been carried out to support the Secretary of State's decision-making process under the relevant legislation. This chapter explains the HRA and MCZ assessment process and summarises the findings of both assessments. This chapter should be read in conjunction with:
- **EGL 3 and EGL 4 Draft HRA Report (May 2025) (document reference EGL-WSP-CONS-XX-RP-Y-001);**
 - **Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.A Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment Screening;**
 - **Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.B MCZ Stage 1 Assessment**
 - **Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.C In-Principle MEEB strategy.**

17.2 Limitations

- 17.2.1 At this preliminary stage of assessment, a Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA) has not been completed, however, will be provided with the ES. The RIAA will provide a clear conclusion of whether a potential significant effect on any site designated pursuant to the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) can be ruled out, or if any mitigation measures can be relied upon, and how these are secured through the draft DCO. The RIAA will be a combined

document also presenting the conclusions of the English Onshore Scheme. The HRA screening provided with this Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) presents the preliminary assessment of sites to be taken forward in the RIAA, this is provided in **EGL 3 and EGL 4 Draft HRA Report (May 2025) (document reference EGL-WSP-CONS-XX-RP-Y-001)**.

- 17.2.2 The information provided in this PEIR is preliminary and the final assessment of potential significant effects will be reported in the ES. The PEIR has been produced to fulfil NGET’s consultation duties in accordance with Section 42 of the PA2008 and to enable consultees to develop an informed view of the preliminary potential significant effects of the English Offshore Scheme.
- 17.2.3 This PEIR has been collated based on publicly available data and information only. It is assumed that the data collected is accurate.

17.3 Designations

Table 17-1 – List of designations relevant to the English Offshore Scheme

Designation	Description
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Sites designated for the protection of habitats and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive. In the UK, SACs are designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) (COHSR) and the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) (COMHSR).
Special Protection Area (SPA)	Sites designated for the protection of rare and vulnerable bird species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive. In the UK, SPAs are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations (2010) (as amended) for terrestrial sites, and under the COMHSR (2017) for offshore sites.
Ramsar Sites	Sites designated under the International Treaty for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands. In the UK, any wetland site that meets one or more of the treaty's criteria can be designated as a Ramsar site. For legislative and management purposes, Ramsar sites are typically designated in conjunction with relevant European sites. Conservation objectives and operational advice are provided as part of the associated European or European marine site.

Designation	Description
Marine Conservation Zones	The MCAA (2009) enables the establishment of MCZs. These zones safeguard a variety of nationally significant marine wildlife, habitats, geology, and geomorphology and can be designated across English and Welsh territorial waters, as well as UK offshore waters. Additionally, the MCAA provided for the conversion of previously designated Marine Nature Reserves into MCZs.
Sites of Special Scientific Interests (SSSI)	Areas of land identified through scientific surveys as having the highest conservation value. SSSIs are legally protected to preserve their wildlife or geological features. In England and Wales, SSSIs are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), as amended (mainly by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)).
Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA)	Areas of Sea designated for the protection of marine ecology. This prohibits any activities including deposits, extraction or destruction, allowing only non-damaging levels of other activities. They are designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009), and will improve the understanding of how marine ecosystems work.
Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area (NCMPA)	<p>NCMPAs protect nationally important habitats and species, these are designated in offshore Scottish waters (beyond 12 nautical miles). The Marine (Scotland) Act and the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act allow the designation of these sites by Scottish Ministers.</p> <p>This is included as there is potential for sites across the Scottish water border to the effected by the English Offshore Scheme.</p>

17.4 Consultation

- 17.4.1 To inform the preliminary assessment of effects, the Applicant carried out consultation with Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) and key stakeholders in the following stages:
- Scoping Report submitted to the Planning Inspectorate 29 July 2024; and
 - Scoping Opinion received from the Planning Inspectorate 5 September 2024.

17.4.2 A summary of the consultation and feedback is outlined in **Table 17-2**. This table highlights key comments that have informed the preliminary assessment of effects and methodology, particularly relating to designated sites.

Table 17-2 – Key consultation and stakeholder feedback in relation to designated sites

Consultee	Consultation	Comment	Applicant Response
The Planning Inspectorate	Scoping Opinion 5.01 to Table 22-3 in Scoping Report	<p>In the absence of supporting information, the Planning Inspectorate is unclear why the Scoping Report considers the following impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary increase and deposition of sediments - geomorphological features and marine mammals/reptiles. • Changes in prey – Intertidal, subtidal and benthic ecology. • Physical disturbance – Intertidal, subtidal and benthic ecology and fish and shellfish. • Collision with vessels – Offshore ornithology. • Underwater noise - Intertidal, subtidal and benthic ecology. • Temperature increase – Marine mammals/reptiles. <p>In the absence of any justification, the Planning Inspectorate considered that the ES and any accompanying assessments should consider all potential impacts to the groups of receptors identified in Table 22-2 or provide a justification where these are scoped out.</p>	<p>Justification for why these effects have been scoped out has been provided in EGL 3 and EGL 4 Draft HRA Report (May 2025) (document reference EGL-WSP-CONS-XX-RP-Y-001)</p>
The Planning Inspectorate	Scoping Opinion 5.02	<p>For the Northeast of Farnes Deep HPMA and MCZ, the ES should be clear that whilst these two sites may occupy the same or similar physical area, there is the ES should acknowledge the different features and conservation advice and this should be considered in the relevant assessments where appropriate.</p>	<p>Difference between designated sites made clear in Paragraph 17.6.6. These are also considered separately within Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.A Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment Screening and</p>

Consultee	Consultation	Comment	Applicant Response
			Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.B MCZ Stage 1 Assessment
The Planning Inspectorate	Scoping Opinion 5.03	Matters relating to the Habitat Regulations Assessment and Marine Coastal Zone Assessment: the Planning Inspectorate has not provided comments on these sections as they sit outside the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) with which this Scoping Opinion relates.	Noted
Natural England	Scoping Opinion Letter Annex A 07/03/2024 Section 2.4	<p><i>“The application documents should thoroughly assess the potential for the proposal to affect designated sites.”</i></p> <p>This should include consideration of SACs, SPAs, potential SPAs (pSPAs), pSACs, and Ramsar sites.</p>	The PEIR and HRA screening considers SACS SPAs, pSPAs, pSACs and Ramsar sites within the study area
Natural England	Scoping Opinion Letter Annex A 07/03/2024, Section 2.4	<p><i>“Under Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and Regulation 28 of the Conservation of Offshore Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) an appropriate assessment needs to be undertaken in respect of any plan or project which is (a) likely to have a significant effect on a European site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) and (b) not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site.”</i></p>	The RIAA provided with the ES
Natural England	Scoping Opinion Letter Annex A 07/03/2024 section 2.6	<p><i>“The application should consider including information on the impacts of this development on MCZ interest features, to inform the assessment of impacts on habitats and species of principle importance for this location.”</i></p>	The MCZ Screening and Stage 1 Assessment considers the impacts interest features and is provided with PEIR
Joint Nature Conservation Committee	Scoping Opinion Letter General Comments 23/08/2024	<p><i>“JNCC recommends the applicants are careful to distinguish the North East of Farnes Deep MCZ and HPMAs.”</i></p>	The North East Farnes HPA and MCZ are assessed separately.

17.5 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Requirement for HRA

- 17.5.1 The 'Habitats Directive' (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora) protects habitats and species of European nature conservation importance. Together with the 'Birds Directive' (Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds), the Habitats Directive establishes a network of internationally important sites ('Natura 2000 Sites') designated for their ecological status. This includes SACs which are designated under the Habitats Directive and promote the protection of flora, fauna, and habitats, as well as SPAs designated under the Birds Directive to protect rare, vulnerable, and migratory birds. Collectively SACs and SPAs are referred to as European Sites in UK legislation.
- 17.5.2 Government policy also requires other protected sites to be treated as if they are designated European sites. This includes proposed SACs, potential SPAs, Ramsar sites and areas identified or required to compensate for damage to a European site.
- 17.5.3 Under the Habitats Regulations, the competent authority is required to undertake a HRA to determine whether there is potential for a plan or project to have an adverse effect on a European site, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. The HRA process comprises three key stages, as follows:
- **Screening for Likely Significant Effects (LSE):** The process of identifying potentially relevant European sites, and whether the English Offshore Scheme is likely to have a potential significant effect on the site either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. If it is concluded at this stage that there is no potential for LSE, there is no requirement to carry out subsequent stages of the HRA.
 - **Appropriate Assessment – the 'Integrity Test':** Where an LSE for a European site cannot be ruled out, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, it is necessary to provide further information to enable the competent authority to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) of the implications of English Offshore Scheme on the integrity of the site(s), either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, in view of the site's conservation objectives and identify ways to avoid or minimise any effects. Where it is not possible to rule out an adverse effect on site Integrity (AEol) (integrity test), the HRA must progress to Stage 3.
 - **Derogations:** Where an AEol cannot be ruled out, three legal tests must be met and passed for derogations to be granted. First an assessment of alternative solutions to identify and examine alternative ways of achieving the objectives of English Offshore Scheme to establish whether there are solutions that would avoid or have a lesser effect on the site(s). Where no alternative solution exists and where an AEol remains, the next test is the consideration of Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI). If it has been shown that there are IROPI, the third test must identify and ensure that any compensatory measures needed to protect the overall coherence of the designated site network are taken.
- 17.5.4 The requirement for HRA is further described in **EGL 3 and EGL 4 Draft HRA Report (May 2025) (document reference EGL-WSP-CONS-XX-RP-Y-001)**.

Guidance

- 17.5.5 The Screening has been undertaken according to the following Guidance:

- Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice on Habitats Regulations Assessment (UK Government, 2024) (Ref 17.1);
- Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site (HM Government, 2023). (Ref 17.2);
- Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2021) (Ref 17.3);
- Managing Natura 2000 sites. The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2018). (Ref 17.4);
- The European Commission Guidance - Article 6 of the Habitats Directive - "Rulings of the European Court of Justice. Final Draft", September 2014 (EC 2014). (Ref 17.5);
- EU Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC (EC, 2007). (Ref 17.6);
- Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (EC, 2002). (Ref 17.7); and
- Environmental principles policy statement (DEFRA, 2023) (Ref 17.8).

17.5.6 In relation to guidance from SNCBs this includes:

- Joint SNCB Guidance for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of Harbour Porpoise SACs (Joint SNCB, 2020) (Ref 17.9).
- Joint SNCB Interim Displacement Advice Note (Joint SNCB, 2022) (Ref 17.10)
- Joint SNCB Interim Advice on the Treatment of Displacement for Red-Throated Diver (MIG-Birds, 2022) (Ref 17.11).
- Natural England Offshore Wind Cabling: ten years' experience and recommendations (Natural England, 2018a) (Ref 17.12).

Relevant European Sites

17.5.7 Selection of relevant European sites in this screening follows the below principles:

- Any European site within or adjacent to English Offshore Scheme which, using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model, may be affected by the proposed activities.
- Any European site within the likely ZOI of the English Offshore Scheme following the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.
- Any European site that is designated for mobile Annex II species that have the potential to occur within the English Offshore Scheme or the likely ZOI of the English Offshore Scheme.

- 17.5.8 The relevant European sites have been identified within **EGL 3 and EGL 4 Draft HRA Report (May 2025) (document reference EGL-WSP-CONS-XX-RP-Y-001)**. Search Areas for Annex I habitats and species and Annex II species which are Primary and Qualifying Interests of a European site were developed based on either the maximum ZOI of a potential impact on a designated feature (i.e., the maximum spatial extent over which potential impacts could affect receptors), or for mobile Annex II species, the spatial extent over which the impacts of anthropogenic activities should be taken into consideration.
- 17.5.9 A geographical information system (GIS) using publicly available shapefiles from Natural England, (2024a, 2024b), NatureScot, (2023) and the Scottish Government, (2023) was used to identify European sites within the relevant search areas. Below lists the SACs and SPAs in the vicinity of the English Offshore Scheme, respectively.
- Southern North Sea SAC [UK0030395].
 - Greater Wash SPA [UK9020329].
 - Humber Estuary SAC [UK0030170].
 - The Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC [UK0017075].
 - Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA [UK9020316].
 - Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA [UK9006101].
 - Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC [UK0017072].
 - Northumberland Marine SPA [UK9020325].
 - Tweed Estuary SAC [UK0030292].
 - St Abb's Head to Fast Castle SPA [UK9004271].
 - Lindisfarne SPA [UK9006011].
 - River Tweed SAC [UK0012691].
 - Farne Islands SPA [UK9006021].
 - Forth Islands SPA [UK9004171].
 - Isle of May SAC [UK0030172].

Stage 1 Screening Conclusions

- 17.5.10 Having regard to the relevant legislation and the methodology followed, a Stage 1 Screening for LSE was undertaken to ascertain whether or not the English Offshore Scheme could have an LSE on any European site alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.
- 17.5.11 The screening approach identified 15 UK European sites and five marine mammal transboundary European sites as relevant, either because they were in the direct ZOI of the English Offshore Scheme, or they contained mobile Annex II species which could potentially travel into the ZOI of the English Offshore Scheme .
- 17.5.12 A review of the English Offshore Scheme description identified 14 potential impact pathways during construction, operation and decommissioning, namely:
- Temporary habitat loss/seabed disturbance;

- Permanent habitat loss;
- Changes in distribution of prey species;
- Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments;
- Water flow (tidal current) changes, including sediment transport considerations;
- Temperature changes – local;
- Electromagnetic Field (EMF);
- Introduction or spread of MINNS;
- Barriers to species movement;
- Underwater noise changes;
- Visual/physical disturbance or displacement (above water noise);
- Collision with project vessels;
- Accidental Spills; and
- In-combination effects.

17.5.13 Assessment taking into consideration the conservation objectives for the European sites and the Designated Features was undertaken for each relevant European Site and is summarised in **Table 17-3** . Where Screening concluded that at this stage LSE cannot be ruled out, it is proposed that Appropriate Assessment is undertaken for the European Site. Considering the conclusions, the Applicant will prepare a RIAA for the following European sites:

- Southern North Sea SAC; and
- Greater Wash SPA.

Table 17-3 – Summary of HRA Screening Conclusion

European Site	Qualifying Feature	Potential Impact	LSE Conclusion
Southern North Sea SAC	Harbour Porpoise	Changes in distribution of prey species	LSE
		EMF	No LSE
		Underwater noise changes	No LSE
		Visual/physical disturbance or displacement	No LSE
		Collision with project vessels	No LSE
		In combination	No LSE

European Site	Qualifying Feature	Potential Impact	LSE Conclusion
Greater Wash SPA	Breeding seabirds Sandwich tern Little tern	Changes in distribution of prey species	LSE
	Common tern	Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments	LSE
	Non-breeding seabirds Little gull	Underwater noise changes	No LSE
	Non-breeding diver Red-throated diver		
	Non-breeding seaduck Common scoter		
	Breeding seabirds Sandwich tern Little tern	Visual/physical disturbance or displacement	No LSE
	Non-breeding diver Red-throated diver	Visual/physical disturbance or displacement	LSE
	Non-breeding seaduck Common scoter		

Stage 2 Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment (RIAA)

17.5.14 The Report to Inform of Appropriate Assessment will be undertaken to inform the ES. The RIAA consists of an in-depth assessment of the implications to sites conservation objectives. The RIAA will provide an assessment of those sites and features where LSE is concluded. The following will therefore be assessed in the RIAA:

- Southern north sea SAC – Changes in prey distribution for Harbour porpoise;
- Greater Wash SPA – Changes in prey distribution for all birds;
- Greater Wash SPA – Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments for all birds; and
- Greater Wash SPA – Visual/physical disturbance or displacement for non-breeding diver, Red-throated diver, non-breeding seaduck and common scoter.

17.6 Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment

Requirement for MCZ Assessment

17.6.1 Section 126 (6) of the MCAA requires that applicants seeking to undertake an activity which could hinder the conservation objectives of any MCZ, they must satisfy the competent authority that there is no significant risk of the proposed activity hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the MCZ. At present, three pilot HPMAAs have been designated in UK waters as a type of MCZ under the MCAA. One of these HPMAAs, the North East of Farnes Deep HPMA, is located within the North Sea Region (the same region as the English Offshore Scheme) and is therefore included in the MCZ Assessment process. Additionally, as the English Offshore Scheme extends to the boundary between English and Scottish waters, any Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas (NCMPA) that could be impacted by the English Offshore Scheme components must also be considered under the MCAA and The Marine (Scotland) Act (2010). There are three stages to the process for assessing the effects of a project on a MCZ/HPMA/NCMPA, with the outcome of each staging informing whether the assessment progresses to the next stage, as follows:

- Screening: The process of identifying whether section 126 (6) should apply to the English Offshore Scheme. Screening identifies whether the licensable activity is taking place within or near to a MCZ/HPMA/NCMPA; and identifies whether the activity is capable of affecting (other than insignificantly) either the protected features of the MCZ or the ecological or geomorphological processes on which the protected features are dependent.
- Stage 1 assessment: This stage considers whether there is a significant risk of the licensable activity hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the MCZ/HPMA/NCMPA. It considers whether there are alternative options of undertaking the licensable activity that will create a substantially lower risk of hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives.
- Stage 2 assessment: This stage looks at whether there are benefits to the public of proceeding with the English Offshore Scheme that clearly outweigh the damage to the environment and what measures the applicant would take to provide equivalent environmental benefit to compensate for the damage which the English Offshore Scheme would have on the MCZ/HPMA/NCMPA.

17.6.2 The MCZ Assessment is undertaken by the competent authority, which for this Project is the Secretary of State, based on information provided by the Applicant, usually in the form of a MCZ Assessment Report.

Guidance

17.6.3 The Screening has been undertaken according to the following Guidance:

- Marine Conservation Zones and Marine Licensing (MMO, 2013) (Ref 17.13).
- Joint SNCB Guidance for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of Harbour Porpoise SACs (Joint SNCB, 2020) (Ref 17.9).
- Joint SNCB Interim Displacement Advice Note (Joint SNCB, 2022) (Ref 17.10).
- Natural England Offshore Wind Cabling: ten years' experience and recommendations (Natural England, 2018) (Ref 17.12).

Relevant MCZs

- 17.6.4 The principles outlined above in Section 4 have been used in this Screening assessment to identify relevant MCZs/HPMAs/NCMPAs. The North East of Farnes Deep HPMAs is a pilot HPMAs designated as a type of MCZ under the MCAA. HPMAs are under the highest level of protection in UK waters and are designated to protect the marine ecosystem of the area. To ensure that a full, comprehensive assessment of the site is conducted, the North East of Farnes Deep is automatically screened in to the Screening assessment.
- 17.6.5 It should be noted that for the English Offshore Scheme there are no MCZs/NCMPAs that list mobile fish or shellfish within the 40 km search area. For the EGL 3 English Offshore Scheme, there are no MCZs/NCMPAs within the search area for bird species (outlined in **Table 17-4**).
- 17.6.6 It should also be noted that North East of Farnes Deep MCZ overlaps entirely with the North East of Farnes Deep HPMAs. However, they are two distinct designations and are assessed separately. As explained above in paragraph 17.6.1, the North East of Farnes Deep is automatically screened into the Screening assessment. To ensure a full, comprehensive assessment, and to avoid any confusion between the two designations, the North East of Farnes Deep HPMAs is assessed separately from the MCZ.
- 17.6.7 GIS and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee marine protected area mapper, were used to identify relevant MCZs, HPMAs and NCMPAs.
- 17.6.8 Selection of relevant European sites in this screening follows the below principals:
- Holderness Offshore MCZ UKMCZ0078 (JNCC, 2021) (Ref 17.14); (JNCC, 2019) (Ref 17.15);
 - North East of Farnes Deep HPMAs UKEHPMA003 (JNCC, 2023) (Ref 17.16);
 - North East of Farnes Deep MCZ UKMCZ0024 (JNCC, 2023) (Ref 17.16) (JNCC, 2018a) (Ref 17.17);
 - Firth of Forth Banks Complex NCMPA (JNCC, 2018b) (Ref 17.18) (JNCC, 2017) (Ref 17.19);
 - Berwick to St Mary's MCZ UKMCZ0055 (DEFRA, 2019) (Ref 17.20);
 - Southern Trench NCMPA EU555703756 (NatureScot, 2024a) (Ref 17.21) (NatureScot, 2020a) (Ref 17.22);
 - Sea of the Hebrides NCMPA EU555703754 (NatureScot, 2024c) (Ref 17.23) (NatureScot, 2020c) (Ref 17.24); and
 - North-east Lewis NCMPA EU555703753 (Nature Scot, 2024b) (Ref 17.25) (NatureScot, 2020b) (Ref 17.26).

Screening Conclusions

- 17.6.9 The screening assessment reached the following conclusions, **Table 17-4** summaries the potential impact pathway supporting the conclusions:
- One HPMAs was screened in for Stage 1 Assessment for the EGL 4 Project; the North East of Farnes Deep HPMAs;
 - No NCMPAs were screened in for Stage 1 Assessment;

- No MCZs for the EGL 3 English Offshore Scheme were screened in for Stage 1 Assessment, as there is no source-receptor pathway for impacts to the features; and
- One MCZ was screened in for Stage 1 Assessment for the EGL 4 English Offshore Scheme; the Holderness Offshore MCZ.

Table 17-4 – Summary of MCZ Screening Conclusions

Site name	Cable Project (EGL 3/EGL 4)	Relevant Designated Feature	Potential Impact	Potential for in-combination impact
North East of Farnes Deep HPMA	EGL 4	Important marine mammal species: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbour porpoise • Minke whale • White-beaked dolphin • Grey seal • Harbour seal 	Underwater noise changes	Yes
Holderness Offshore MCZ	EGL 4	Geology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Sea glacial tunnel valleys. 	Temporary habitat loss/seabed disturbance	Yes
			Permanent habitat loss	Yes
		Habitats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subtidal coarse sediment. • Subtidal mixed sediments. • Subtidal sand. 	Water flow (tidal current) changes, including sediment transport considerations	Yes
		Species: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ocean quahog. 		
		Habitats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subtidal coarse sediment • Subtidal mixed sediments • Subtidal sand 	Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments	Yes

Stage 1 Assessment

- 17.6.10 The Stage 1 Assessment considers whether the EGL 4 English Offshore Scheme presents any significant risk to achieving the conservation objectives of the Holderness Offshore MCZ and the North East Farnes Deep HPMA. The Stage 1 Assessment is a 'likelihood' of risk rather than a 'certainty' of risk. The assessment of that risk is made in reference to the individual characteristics and environmental conditions of the MCZ/HPMA concerned.
- 17.6.11 If it is established that, in isolation, the proposed works have the potential to inhibit the conservation objectives (i.e., the general management approach for the protected features) of the site in question, it will be progressed to a Stage 2 Assessment, and the potential in-combination effects will not be considered.
- 17.6.12 Where a source-receptor pathway has been established which will not lead to the hinderance of the conservation objectives on its own, consideration is given to whether it could in-combination with a similar source-receptor pathway from another plan or project. If the in-combination effects result in the hinderance of the conservation objectives, it will be progressed to a Stage 2 MCZ Assessment.

Holderness Offshore MCZ

- 17.6.13 The EGL 4 Project is proposed to cross the Holderness Offshore MCZ for approximately 8.7 km. The Holderness Offshore MCZ supports numerous Protected Features that include broadscale subtidal habitats, a Species of Conservation Interest and a Feature of Geological Interest. A detailed description of the Holderness Offshore MCZ and the conservation objectives for this site is located below.
- 17.6.14 The preliminary MCZ screening assessment identified a pathway between the Protected Features of the Holderness Offshore MCZ and the following four impacts related to the EGL 4 Project:
- Temporary habitat loss/seabed disturbance;
 - Permanent habitat loss;
 - Water flow (tidal current) changes, including sediment transport considerations; and
 - Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments.

North East of Farnes Deep HPMA

- 17.6.15 The North East Farnes Deep HPMA is located approximately 0.5 km away from the EGL 4 draft Order Limits. A detailed site description and the conservation objectives for the North East Farnes Deep HPMA is found in **Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.A Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment Screening**. The initial screening identified a source-receptor pathway between five key important marine mammal species and the impact of underwater noise changes. However, **Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.17.A Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment Screening** concluded that the EGL 4 English Offshore Scheme would not have a significant effect on individuals outside of the HPMA during any phase of development. Therefore, the Stage 1 Assessment only considers the effects on marine mammals within the HPMA.

- 17.6.16 Underwater noise propagation modelling has been undertaken for the English Offshore Scheme. **Volume 2, Part 3, Appendix 3.22.A Underwater Noise Assessment**, the report uses sound propagation models to calculate the impact ranges of auditory injury (i.e., Permanent Threshold Shifts (PTS) in hearing) and disturbance (i.e., behavioral response to the onset of a Temporary Threshold Shifts (TTS) in hearing) to marine mammals from each phase of the English Offshore Scheme for three key modelled sources:
- Geophysical surveys - non-impulsive sound sources;
 - Vessels and equipment - non-impulsive sound sources; and
 - Clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) - an impulsive sound source.

Stage 1 Conclusion

- 17.6.17 The impacts of temporary habitat loss/seabed disturbance, permanent habitat loss, water flow changes and temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments, as results of the Proposed Works of the EGL 4 English Offshore Scheme, were assessed against the conservation objectives for the Holderness Offshore MCZ. This assessment concludes that there is no significant risk of these impacts, in-isolation or in-combination with other planned projects within/surrounding the MCZ, of hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives stated and a Stage 2 MCZ Assessment will not be required.
- 17.6.18 The impact of underwater noise from the EGL 4 English Offshore Scheme was evaluated against the conservation objectives for the North East Farnes Deep HPMa. The assessment concludes that there is no significant risk, either in isolation or in combination with other projects or plans, of hindering the achievement of these objectives. Therefore, a Stage 2 MCZ Assessment will not be required.
- 17.6.19 The assessment conclusions for each Protected Feature within the Holderness Offshore MCZ and North East Farnes Deep HPMa are summarised in **Table 17-5**.

Table 17-5 – Summary of Stage 1 MCZ Assessment Conclusions

Site Name	Protected Feature	Potential Impact	Assessment Conclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holderness Offshore MCZ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Sea glacial tunnel valley Subtidal coarse sediments Subtidal mixed sediments Subtidal sand Ocean quahog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary habitat loss/seabed disturbance Permanent habitat loss Water flow (tidal current) changes, including sediment transport considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EGL 4 Project would not hinder the conservation objectives of this Protected Feature alone or in-combination with other Projects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subtidal coarse sediments Subtidal mixed sediments Subtidal sand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary increase and deposition of suspended sediments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EGL 4 Project would not hinder the conservation objectives of this Protected Feature

Site Name	Protected Feature	Potential Impact	Assessment Conclusion
			alone or in-combination with other Projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North East of Farnes Deep HPMA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harbour porpoise White-beaked dolphin Minke whale Harbour seal Grey seal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underwater noise changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EGL 4 Project would not hinder the conservation objectives of this Protected Feature alone or in-combination with other Projects.

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