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Your ref: Norfolk Projects Offshore Wind Farms BIMP



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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Sir/Madam

Norfolk Projects Offshore Wind Farms Benthic Implementation and Monitoring Plan (BIMP) Version 2 (V2). Norfolk Vanguard and Norfolk Boreas offshore wind farms (collectively known as The Norfolk Projects)

Thank you for consulting Natural England on 28th March 2024 on the updated Norfolk Boreas/Vanguard (“the Norfolk Projects”) Offshore windfarm benthic compensation measures included with Version 2 of Benthic Implementation and Monitoring Plan (BIMP) and associated documents.

In providing this response we have reviewed the following documents:

- Benthic Implementation and Monitoring Plan V2
(Document Reference: PB5640.009.0006)
- V2 Annex 2 Benthic Compensation Consultation Report
(Document Reference: PB5640.009.0007)
- Annex 3 Marine Debris Search Area Identification Desk Study
(Document Reference PB5640.008.0075)

As previously, Natural England provides no comment on the Funding statement (Document Reference: PB5640.009.0062) and Annex 4 Further Information to Support Education, Awareness and Facilities to Limit Further Marine Debris (Document Reference: PB5640.009.0006).

Summary

As indicated by the Consultation Report, Natural England continues to advise that Vattenfall, through the commitments included in the BIMP, has made every effort to deliver what is required by the Development Consent Order (DCO), whilst managing down environmental impacts in doing so. However, Natural England’s advice on Marine Debris removal and Marine Awareness Campaign’s being insufficient to compensate for the predicted lasting habitat change/loss from the placement of cable protection remains unchanged from that submitted to the Secretary of State for Hornsea Project Three (HOW03) ([21 January 2022](#)) and the Norfolk Projects ([26 May 2023](#)).

Subsequently, we refer you to Natural England’s letter to your Department dated 28th March 2024 in regard to the inadequacy of the Hornsea Project Three (HOW03) Marine Debris Removal Campaign as a compensation measure. Within that letter we conclude that despite the efforts of HOW03, the Field and Summary Reports of the Marine Debris Removal Campaign confirm the proposed measure

does not provide meaningful compensation, and supports the [SNCB paper](#) regarding the ineffectiveness of marine debris removal as a compensation measure in offsetting AEoI from the placement of cable protection.

Main concerns

1. Effectiveness of Debris Removal Campaigns

Natural England agrees with Vattenfall that there is a high probability that there will be insufficient marine debris to meet the Norfolk Projects DCO requirements of 10.7 ha within Haisborough Hammond and Winterton Special Area of Conservation (HHW SAC), and we welcome Vattenfall's approach to thoroughly consider other locations for such recovery. We note that in Version 2 of the BIMP, Vattenfall have committed to contributing to or collaborating with the following projects/schemes/groups to achieve this:

- The Ocean Cleanup - location with oceanic waters
- Stichting Duik de Noordzee Schoon – location at Brown Bank (unclear if within Dutch or English part of the sandbank system)
- Ghost Fishing UK – location North-East England and English Channel
- Norfolk Beach Clean and Keep Britain Tidy (beach cleans) - location Norfolk and South Coast of England

Natural England acknowledges that these debris removal collaborations have both the potential to remove debris exceeding the 10.7 ha as required by the DCO; and are likely to have a positive impact on the wider marine environment. However, we continue to advise that the proposed marine litter removal predominantly from the coastline, wrecks and water column (within and outside of UK waters), does not provide the necessary compensation to offset the impacts of habitat disturbance and/or loss of Annex I sandbank and reef features of HHW SAC. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence presented to demonstrate that the proposed measures will maintain the coherence of the National Site Network.

Equally, we do not believe that the proposed measures align with DEFRA's [Best practice guidance for developing compensatory measures in relation to Marine Protected Areas \(July 2021\)](#) and recent policy consultation to inform updates to said guidance (March 2024).

2. Adaptive Management

Natural England advises that the adaptive management outlined in the Norfolk Projects BIMP V2 does not meet our interpretation of compensation requirements for adaptive management i.e. should it be demonstrated that the primary measure/s have been unsuccessful in offsetting the impacts and maintaining network coherence then alternative mechanisms should be implemented.

Natural England notes that the proposed trigger included within the BIMP V2 is for adaptive management and is two-fold – firstly, whether or not 10.7 ha of marine debris has been collected, and secondly, whether or not there has been a greater impact than what was predicted for cable installation within the Environmental Statement. It is proposed that the adaptive management will be delivered through the further removal of marine debris from other places and spaces, and then to potentially contribute to more strategic compensation opportunities such as the marine recovery fund.

Natural England advises the first proposal for adaptive management in BIMP V2 may increase the amount of debris removed from the wider marine/coastal environment, but doubt in regard to its effectiveness as a compensation measure would remain.

And whilst we welcome the inclusion of contributing to strategic compensation, we advise that given the likely ineffectiveness of debris removal in offsetting the impacts and maintaining the network, it would not be appropriate for adaptive management in form of strategic compensation to only

compensate for any shortfall in hectareage of debris removed by the primary measure. Therefore, there is a likely expectation that that the adaptive management would be for the full 10.7ha.

3. Monitoring

Natural England advises that monitoring the success of the compensation proposed in BIMP V2 is likely to be challenging because of the position that debris removal is not compensation. Normally monitoring associated with compensation measures includes exploring the success criteria in offsetting the identified impact to the designated site. Therefore, we agree with Vattenfall that the only monitoring that can take place is assessing quantity, material and type of debris that has been removed and the state of the environment before and after the activity.

In addition, Natural England questions whether it is scientifically possible to back up the conversion rates from weight to area for all types of marine debris in order to demonstrate success of removing the required 10.7 ha area of marine debris by measuring weight. We highlighted that for marine debris removed from the seabed this type of conversion would not be acceptable given only a proportion of the debris would be protruding from the seabed and that would be considered the area of impact/seabed recovery.

4. Alternative compensation measures

Given our advice on the inadequacy of Marine Debris removal as compensation, Natural England suggests that compensation measures with ecological merit proposed within the Norfolk Vanguard and Boreas examinations are revisited. It is noted that those measures align with the benthic strategic compensation measures for new site designation and/or extension of existing designated sites currently being progressed by DEFRA for the Round 4 and Extensions projects. However, we note that Vattenfall has raised timing constraints in relation to adopting strategic compensation measures for the Norfolk Projects. But it should be recognised that as with all largescale compensation measures, which have secured compensation measures, that there remains a risk of impacts occurring prior to compensation fully delivering. This is something which has been raised for further consideration in development of the strategic compensation measures to determine if this scenario can be accommodated for. For example, through amendment of the DCO or potentially through written agreement under paragraph 30, Schedule 19 of the DCO, if deemed appropriate.

Yours sincerely

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