



THE PLANNING ACT 2008

THE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING (EXAMINATION PROCEDURE) RULES
2010

Rampion Two Offshore Wind Farm

Appendix C3 to the Natural England Deadline 3 Submission

**Natural England's advice on 8.42.1 Applicant's Response to Action Points
Arising from Issue Specific Hearing 1: Marine Mammals**

For:

The construction and operation of the Rampion 2 Offshore Windfarm located
approximately 13km off the Sussex coast in the English Channel.

Planning Inspectorate Reference EN010117

25 April 2024

Appendix C3 to the Natural England Deadline 3 Submission - Natural England's advice on 8.42.1 Applicant's Response to Action Points Arising from Issue Specific Hearing 1: Marine Mammals

In formulating these comments, the following document has been considered:

- REP2-019 - Deadline 2 Submission - 8.42.1 Applicant's Response to Action Points Arising from Issue Specific Hearing 1: Marine Mammals

1. Summary

Natural England welcomes the Applicant's bottlenose dolphin baseline characterisation; however, we do not currently agree with the conclusions of the updated assessment. We advise consideration is given to how existing mitigation proposals may be applicable to reducing impacts on the bottlenose dolphin population.

2. Main Comments

2.1 Bottlenose dolphin baseline characterisation

The Applicant has included three new recent publications in their updated bottlenose dolphin baseline characterisation (as outlined in Table 2-3). We advise that of these publications, Corr *et al.* (2023) is most relevant to the inshore bottlenose dolphin population.

The Applicant has specifically updated the bottlenose dolphin Management Unit (MU) boundaries, to align with the latest MU report from 2023. We note the assessment now reflects that the Rampion 2 area overlaps with the Coastal West Channel (CWC) MU, and that the assessment uses the appropriate values for this MU.

The Applicant has presented additional density estimates for Rampion 2 area and overlapping bottlenose dolphin MUs, based on the most recent published literature. Natural England previously advised that one of the densities presented was an assumed uniform density across the CWC MU, and we note that this has now been included as suggested.

In summary, we advise that the Applicant has used the best and most recent published literature to characterise the density and abundance of bottlenose dolphin in the Rampion 2 area. We advise that this addresses comments C4, C28 (partially) and C29 of our Relevant Representations, and partially addresses comment C14 in the Risk and Issue Log.

For future applications, Natural England recommends inclusion of up-to-date NGO/citizen observer data from coastal sites in the region. This data would provide information on the current distribution of the species, which could be more up-to-date than the published literature (e.g. Corr *et al.* (2023), which captures data up to 2020) and will provide additional context for the assessment.

2.2 Bottlenose dolphin impact assessment

The Applicant has revised their assessment relative to the updated CWC MU. Based on this update the worst-case scenario is that 4 bottlenose dolphin may be disturbed per day of concurrent piling. This comprises 10% of the CWC MU. The Applicant has assessed the Magnitude of this impact as **Medium**, "where temporary changes in behaviour and/or

distribution of individuals are at a scale that could result in potential reductions to lifetime reproductive success to some individuals although not enough to affect the population trajectory over a generational scale". We note that the Applicant has not provided any evidence to support their assertion that this percentage of the population disturbed correlates to the definition of **Medium** impact magnitude. Therefore, we advise that based on the information currently provided, we cannot agree with this impact magnitude, and the subsequent impact assessment conclusion.

We advise that the Applicant should therefore present evidence to support their assessment of **Medium** impact magnitude. We advise that this should include iPCoD population modelling, as this would provide evidence on the population trajectory following the disturbance impact. We advise that if population modelling is done for this population, both project-alone and cumulative impacts should be modelled.

2.3 Further consideration of mitigation and monitoring

Regarding the baseline, Natural England is aware that bottlenose dolphin distribution has changed in the CWC MU since 2020, though this change is not currently captured in the published literature. We understand that the inshore population of bottlenose dolphin associated with the CWC MU is now seen less frequently in the southwest. In the Sussex region, where Rampion 2 is located, there has been a significant increase in the sightings of bottlenose dolphins since 2018. This may reflect a shift in the home range of the inshore CWC MU population. We are also aware that there is no evidence of successful reproduction in this population in the last 5 years, which may be reflective of a declining population, given it is known that the population faces many cumulative threats (Corr *et al.* 2023).

We are aware that noise mitigation is being proposed in relation to fish and shellfish impacts. We advise that such mitigation could also have positive benefits for bottlenose dolphin, however, the Applicant has not taken marine mammals into account during the design of mitigation, nor have any benefits been factored into the assessment. We advise that due to the concerns identified in relation to the bottlenose dolphin population, the Applicant should further consider how the mitigation proposed may reduce the possibility of negative impacts on this population.

We advise that the conclusions of the assessment of impacts to bottlenose dolphin are validated through post-consent monitoring. As noted above, the updated impact assessment predicts that up to 10% of the inshore CWC population could be impacted by Rampion 2 (through disturbance from simultaneous piling). We note that this is ten times larger than the predicted impact to any other species MU population from Rampion 2, making it the most significant impact. Therefore, we advise that post-consent monitoring is appropriate to test the conclusion of not significant in EIA terms.