Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind

Offshore Restricted Build Area and Revision to the Offshore Export Cable Corridor

Appendix E Collision Risk Modelling

Procedural Deadline 19 September

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

1. GT R4 Limited (trading as Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind) hereafter referred to as the 'Applicant', is proposing to develop The Project. The Project will be located approximately 54km from the Lincolnshire coastline in the southern North Sea. The Project will include both offshore and onshore infrastructure including an offshore generating station (windfarm), export cables to landfall, Offshore Reactive Compensation Platforms (ORCPs), onshore cables, connection to the electricity transmission network, ancillary and associated development and areas for the delivery of up to two Artificial Nesting Structures (ANS) and the creation of a biogenic reef (if these compensation measures are deemed to be required by the Secretary of State) (see Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description (APP-058) for full details.

1.2 Overview

- 2. This document is part of a suite of documents which introduces two changes which have been made by the Applicant to the proposed Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind (the Project):
	- the introduction of an Offshore Restricted Build Area (ORBA) over the northern section of the Project array area; and
	- **the removal of the northern section of the offshore Export Cable Corridor (ECC).**
- 3. As a result of continuing engagement with stakeholders, and enabled by progress on engineering design, the area within which the Wind Turbine Generators (WTGs) and Offshore Platforms (OPs) will be positioned has been refined. The proposed ORBA has been introduced to reduce the impact from the presence of the WTGs on auk species (specifically common guillemot), informed by a consideration of geophysical and geotechnical data.
- 4. The proposed ORBA covers the northern section of the array area and would restrict the installation of WTGs and OPs. For the avoidance of doubt, this area may still be used for cable installation and ancillary operations during construction (and decommissioning) and operations and maintenance. Additionally, Project parameters including number of structures, foundation types, and cable parameters will remain unchanged. As such, no change is being proposed to the extent of the array area, as defined within the draft Development Consent Order (DCO).
- 5. Further engineering design and procurement work, informed by additional geophysical, geotechnical and environmental survey work, undertaken post-consent (if granted), will confirm the final layout of infrastructure. Final details will be set out in a design plan to be submitted to and approved by the MMO, following consultation with Trinity House, the MCA and UKHO prior to commencement of the licensed works, in line deemed Marine Licence condition 13 (see condition 13(1)(a), Part 2, Schedule 10 of the dDCO [document 3.1].

- 6. The location and size of the ORBA was decided using various factors. MRSea based analysis was used to generate estimates of distribution and abundance, underpinned by observations of guillemot recorded in the DAS imagery (Scott -Hayward et al., 2014). This produced month by month density distribution mapping for the period March 2021 to August 2023 that identified hotspots within the EA Array area plus 2 km buffer.
- 7. There were some commonality in the hotspots between the 2021 and 2022 surveys with denser concentrations of guillemots recorded in the north and east of the area of interest (Figures 3.1 - 3.4 Appendix 15.9G) particularly within the months of April and August both in 2021 and 2022.
- 8. The MRSea data (document 15.9G) strongly agreed with the design based density estimates, which also show a general pattern of higher densities of guillemot and razorbill to the north of the array area (see Figures 12.33 - 12.35 and 12.39 - 12.41 of the Offshore Restricted Build Area and Revision to the Offshore Export Cable Corridor Ornithology Baseline Summary (document 15.9D)).
- 9. The introduction and size of the ORBA has been made possible through continued engagement with the relevant oil and gas operators who have interests which overlap with the Project, i.e. due to the presence of oil and gas platforms within or adjacent to the array area. Since the Application, the Applicant has been able to agree the principles for co-existence between the Project and access arrangements to the Malory platform with Perenco, specifically for helicopter transfers to and from this platform. Confidence in the likely final protective provisions for this operator within the DCO for the Project has therefore allowed further engineering work to be undertaken to support additional mitigation of the impact to auk species through a reduction in the area within which WTGs and OPs may be placed.
- 10. The introduction of the ORBA has resulted in a reduction in the summed mean seasonal peak abundance of guillemot from 27,653.3 birds in the array area plus 2 km buffer (Appendix 12.1 Offshore and Intertidal Ornithology Technical Baseline AS1-064) to a summed mean seasonal peak abundance of 23,586 guillemot in the array area minus the ORBA plus 2km buffer (Appendix 15.9D).
- 11. The offshore ECC presented within the Environmental Statement (ES) that supported the DCO Application included two routeing options within the inshore area of the cable route, a northern and a southern route. The northern route was included as it is situated north of the Inner Dowsing sandbank and thus avoided impacts to this designated feature. The southern route was also included as the northern route passes through aggregates Area 1805 which has an option and exploration area agreement with The Crown Estate, although this was due to expire on 31st August 2024. In the event that the option agreement was not taken up by the holder, this seabed area would have become available, thus allowing the Project to avoid crossing the Inner Dowsing sandbank.

12. It has now been confirmed that the option on this area has been extended by TCE until 2025 (pers. comms. Hansons via email 1st May 2024), with a Marine Licence Application (MLA/2024/00227) having been made by the agreement holder on 25th April 2024 to permit aggregates extraction within the site. As such, it is clear that the agreement holder intends to take up the option over this area of the seabed for aggregate extraction, and therefore it is no longer a viable option for the Project to pursue. Consequently, the Project has excluded the northern route from the offshore ECC.

1.3 Document Purpose

- 13. This technical annex has been produced to provide the methodology and results of the collision risk modelling (CRM) which has been used to inform the consideration of the environmental implications of the ORBA. A separate report (Offshore Restricted Build Area and Revision to the Offshore Export Cable Corridor Ornithology Baseline Summary (document reference 15.9D)) provides the updated density and abundance estimates for the array area minus the ORBA and associated buffers, which has been used to inform the densities and abundances for the purposes of the CRM.
- 14. The methodology and input parameters used within the modelling have been updated to follow the recent JNCC (2024) guidance.

2 Collision Risk Modelling

- 15. There is a potential risk that birds flying through the array area could collide with the operational WTGs. The risk of collision with WTG blades is increased if they are located in areas of higher bird densities and in areas in which there is a high level of flight activity. High levels of flight activity can be associated with locations where food supplies are concentrated or with areas where there is a high turnover of individuals (possibly commuting daily between nesting and feeding areas or passing through the area on seasonal migrations).
- 16. The CRM undertaken to inform the Development Consent Order (DCO) Application [APP-163] considered the following six seabird species:
	- **Kittiwake, Rissa tridactyla:**
	- Greater black-backed gull, Larus marinus:
	- **Herring gull, Larus argentatus;**
	- Lesser black-backed gull, Larus fuscus;
	- **Sandwich tern, Thalasseus sandvicensis;**
	- **Gannet, Morus bassanus.**
- 17. The same species are considered herein for the array area minus the ORBA.
- 18. The design assumptions for this updated CRM match that as set out within [APP-163], applied to an area with a slightly higher density of turbines (due to the introduction of the ORBA).

2.1 Methodology

2.1.1 Guidance and Models

19. CRM was undertaken using the Marine Science Scotland Stochastic Collision Risk Model Shiny Application ("sCRM App"; Donovan, 2018), as recommended by the latest Natural England guidance (Parker et al., 2022c; JNCC et al., 2024). The sCRM builds on the Band (2012) offshore CRM, together with code written by Masden (2015) to incorporate variation or uncertainty surrounding the input parameters into calculations of collision frequency. The sCRM was accessed via the "Shiny App" interface, which is a user-friendly graphical interface accessible via a standard web-browser or within R statistical software (R Core Team, 2021) that uses an R code to estimate collision risk (Caneco, 2022). The advantage of the sCRM over the Band (2012) model is that it provides a clear and transparent audit trail for all modelling runs, which enables regulators and stakeholders to easily access and reproduce the results of any modelling scenario. A full report on the sCRM was published by Marine Scotland in 2018 to accompany the User Guide (McGregor et al., 2018).

- 20. The sCRM, as with Band (2012), can generate collision estimates using two different methods (basic and extended models), with both methods having two further options based on flight height data. The basic model (Options 1 & 2) assumes the flight height distribution across the rotor swept heights is uniform, whilst the extended model accounts for variation in flight height distributions by using species-specific modelled flight height distributions (Band, 2012; Johnston et al., 2014). Since seabird flight height distributions tend to be skewed towards lower rotor swept heights, and extended models (Option 3) gives rise to considerably lower collision estimates than Option 2 (Band, 2012). Latest guidance from SNCB's (JNCC et al., 2024) does not recommend use of either of the extended models and therefore current SNCB guidance is to use Option 1 or 2.
- 21. Both the basic and extended models can also be run using either site-specific flight height data (i.e. collected from the proposed array area minus the ORBA), or generic flight height data derived from pre-construction surveys for wind farm developments across 32 sites in the UK and Europe (Johnston et al., 2014). This produces four model options: Option 1 (site-specific flight height data) and 2 (generic flight height data) for the basic model, and Option 3 (generic flight height data) and 4 (site-specific flight height data) for the extended model (Band, 2012).
- 22. Due to the lack of sufficient site-specific flight height data for all species, large uncertainties in the height calculation methodology, and the lack of guidance on using Option 3 within the latest tool, results are only presented for Option 2 at this stage as agreed at ETG (AS1-040).

2.1.2 CRM Input Parameters

- 23. Models were run stochastically for each species. Uncertainty in each relevant parameter was incorporated into the model using distributions set by standard deviations (SD). A total of 1000 simulations were run for each scenario, as per Natural England guidance, to ensure that any outputs were robust. The latest Joint advice note from the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) regarding bird collision risk modelling for offshore wind developments (JNCC et al., 2024), was used to determine model input parameters for each species. The mean density of flying birds within The Project array area minus the ORBA formed the basis of the modelling. SNCB advocated seabird parameters, including biometrics, nocturnal activity factors (NAF) and avoidance rates, were used throughout based on the latest guidance (JNCC et al., SNCB advocated seabird parameters, including biometrics, nocturnal activity factors (NAF) and avoidance rates, were used throughout based on the latest guidance (JNCC et al., 2024).
- 24. The stochastic model output provides a mean, median and an upper and lower 95% Confidence intervals (CI) as a measure of variance in the outputs.

2.1.3 Turbine Parameters

25. The WTG and windfarm parameters used within the CRM are summarised in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2. These values are based on the maximum design scenario (MDS) parameter values, as described in [APP-058]. The values for revolutions per minute (RPM) and pitch have a standard deviation (SD) associated with them.

Table 2.1. Offshore wind farm and WTG parameters used for CRM. HAT = Highest Astronomical

Table 2.2: Operational parameters used within the CRM

2.1.4 Density of Birds in Flight

- 26. Density of birds in flight within the array area +4km buffer were provided by DAS data collected between February 2021 and August 2023 (Offshore Restricted Build Area and Revision to the Offshore Export Cable Corridor Ornithology Baseline Summary (document 15.9D). For the purposes of collision modelling the density of flying birds was used within the area that will contain WTGs. Therefore, the relevant area is the array area minus the ORBA.
- 27. In December 2023 Natural England provided updated advice to developers for entering seabird density and associated standard deviations for use in collision risk modelling. Following this advice, corrected bootstrap density estimates for birds in flight, derived from Project DAS data, were used as an input to the sCRM tool (as opposed to using a monthly mean and SD). This approach ensures that the full distribution of abundance estimates from each monthly survey can be sampled in sCRM simulations. One thousand bootstrapped samples, corrected by apportioning any unidentified species within relevant groups, were produced for each survey. Where more than one survey was conducted per month the densities were combined. A density of zero was used in the model for surveys when densities of birds were too low for bootstrapped estimates to be produced. Given that 30 months of surveys were conducted and there were two monthly surveys during the 2022 breeding season some months had up to 4,000 bootstrapped samples, while some winter months contained 2,000 samples.

28. A comparison of the results based on the old methodology of using a mean monthly density and associated SD was provided in Appendix B of the application collision risk modelling report (APP-163).

2.1.5 Avoidance Rates

29. Most birds exhibit some avoidance of WTGs, and the inclusion of this behaviour is a key element of CRM. Avoidance behaviour can occur at three scales (Cook et al., 2014); macroavoidance (avoiding the whole wind farm), meso-avoidance (avoiding WTGs but not the rotorswept area), and micro-avoidance (last-second changes to avoid collision with WTG blades). Different species exhibit varying degrees of avoidance behaviours towards offshore wind farms and therefore species-specific avoidance rates are used within the CRM (Table 2.3). The most recent guidance on avoidance rates, provided by SNCB's (JNCC et al., 2024) based on a review of the latest evidence bases (Cook, 2021), and a re-analysis of avoidance rates (Ozsanlev-Harris et al. 2023), were used within the CRM as agreed through the ETGs (document 6.1.12, Section 12.3). However, there is further evidence that the standard CRM avoidance rates used within assessments are precautionary; for example the findings from the recent Vattenfall (2023) study indicated that seabirds were exposed to very low risks of collision and no collisions or narrow escapes were recorded.

Table 2.3: Species-specific mean avoidance rates and associated standard deviation (SD) used for CRM.

2.1.6 Species Biometrics

30. Physical and behavioural biometric input parameters were determined for each species and used to inform the CRM (Table 2.4). Biometric data (bird length and wingspan) were derived from Snow & Perrins (1987) for each species as displayed in the latest guidance (Natural England, 2022). SDs have been considered within the model as advised by the latest SNCB guidance (JNCC et al., 2024).

Table 2.4: Species-specific mean biometrics parameters and associated standard deviations (SD)

used for CRM of anticipated key species.

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2.1.7 Nocturnal Activity

- 31. The NAFs used within the models followed the latest Joint SNCB guidance (Table 2.5; JNCC et al., 2024). This recent guidance is supported by Natural England and supersedes the previous agreements made at ETGs.
- 32. It should be noted that data presented by Cook et al. (2023) from FFC SPA show that for kittiwake, nocturnal activity is generally much lower in birds from this colony than the others sampled, although nocturnal activity fluctuated annually. In five of the six years studied, nocturnal activity ranged between 0.25 and 0.37, averaging at 0.30. One year presented a nocturnal activity proportion of 0.61 but this is so far outside the rather consistent range demonstrated for other years that it is considered an outlier.
- 33. The potential for strong variation between years, and the difference between the relatively low proportions demonstrated by birds from FFC SPA compared to more northerly colonies, suggest that standard rates used for nocturnal activity may not be representative of nocturnal activity in birds from FFC SPA, and as such, use of these recommended rates should be considered a precautionary approach.

Table 2.5: Mean nocturnal activity factor and associated standard deviation (SD) used within the

CRM assessment.

2.1.8 Seabird Flight Speeds

34. Flight speed is an important parameter in CRM because both the flux of birds (derived from predicted density of birds in flight) and probability of collision are sensitive to it. Notably, sensitivity acts in opposite directions i.e. increased speed increases flux and consequently the number of collisions, while increased speed also reduces the probability of collision for birds passing through the rotor swept area. These two contrasting effects of flight speeds do not necessarily balance out (Masden et al. 2021), and, in general, increased flight speeds increase the predicted number of collisions.

- 35. There is mounting evidence that flight speed is influenced by seabird behaviour. For example, lower flight speeds are recorded during foraging activity in comparison with commuting flight (Cook et al. 2023). However, the current models do not yet incorporate information on different behaviours and therefore only one flight speed can be inputted.
- 36. Mean flight speeds for species included in the CRM were taken from the latest SNCB guidance (JNCC et al., 2024) which supersedes previous advice (Table 2.6)). The guidance uses flight speeds derived from Pennycuick (1997) for gannet, Fijn and Gyimesi (2018) for sandwich tern and Alerstam et al. (2007) for all other species. However, some flight speeds are considered to be precautionary. For kittiwake, the flight speed recommended for use in CRM by Natural England of 13.1 m/s is taken from a study that uses data for two birds and presents speed through the air rather than speed over the ground. The speed recommended (13.1 m/s) is substantially higher than the mean ground speed measured over eight studies of kittiwake ground speed (10.8 m/s). As such use of this flight speed for kittiwake is likely to overestimate collisions.

Table 2.6: Species-specific mean flight speeds and associated standard deviations (SD) used for

2.1.9 Other Parameters

37. Following the JNCC et al. (2024) guidance it was assumed that all birds were flapping while flying and that an even proportion (50%) of flights occurred in the upwind and downwind directions.

2.2 Results

CRM.

38. This section presents the outputs from the CRM analysis for each of the six seabird species considered. A summary of the monthly breakdown of collisions for each species is presented in Table 2.7. The 95% CIs provide an indication of the level of certainty or uncertainty in the results.

Table 2.7: Summary of average monthly collisions by species based on the High scenario.

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Table 2.8: Summary of average monthly collisions by species based on the Low scenario.

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2.2.1 Kittiwake

39. The kittiwake collision rate (High scenario) for Band Option 2 estimated a mean of 33.16 annual collisions (Table 2.8). The monthly distribution of collision estimates for kittiwake (High scenario) are displayed in Figure 2.1, with the error bars displaying the upper and lower 95% CIs.

Table 2.8: Summary of annual kittiwake collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2.

Figure 2.1: Monthly kittiwake collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2 (High scenario).

2.2.2 Greater black-backed gull

40. The greater black-backed gull collision rate (High scenario) for Band Option 2 estimated a mean of 3.98 annual collisions (Table 2.9). The monthly distribution of collision estimates for greater black-backed gull (High scenario) are displayed in Figure 2.2, with the error bars displaying the upper and lower 95% CIs.

Table 2.9: Summary of annual great black-backed gull collisions following SNCB guidance for Option

2.

Figure 2.2: Monthly great black-backed gull collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2 (High scenario).

2.2.3 Herring gull

41. The herring gull collision rate (High scenario) for Band Option 2 estimated a mean of 2.94 annual collisions (Table 2.10). The monthly distribution of collision estimates for herring gull (High scenario) are displayed in Figure 2.3, with the error bars displaying the upper and lower 95% CIs.

Table 2.10: Summary of annual herring gull collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2.

Figure 2.3: Monthly herring gull collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2 (High scenario).

2.2.4 Lesser black-backed gull

42. The lesser black-backed gull collision rate (High scenario) for Band Option 2 estimated a mean of 2.43 annual collisions (Table 2.11). The average monthly collision rates for lesser blackbacked gull (High scenario) are displayed in Figure 2.4 with the error bars displaying the upper and lower 95% CIs.

Table 2.11: Summary of annual lesser black-backed gull collisions following SNCB guidance for

Option 2.

Figure 2.4: Monthly lesser black-backed gull collisions follow SNCB guidance for Option 2 (High scenario).

2.2.5 Sandwich tern

43. The Sandwich tern collision rate (High scenario) for Band Option 2 estimated a mean of 0.41 annual collisions (Table 2.12). The monthly distribution of collision estimates for Sandwich tern (High scenario) are displayed in Figure 2.5, with the error bars displaying the upper and lower 95% CIs.

Figure 2.5: Monthly Sandwich tern collisions follow SNCB guidance for Option 2 (High scenario).

2.2.6 Gannet

44. The gannet collision rate (High scenario) for Band Option 2 estimated a mean of 1.65 annual collisions (Table 2.13). The monthly distribution of collision estimates for gannet (High scenario) are displayed in Figure 2.6, with the error bars displaying the upper and lower 95% CIs. Collisions include 70% macro-avoidance.

Table 2.13: Summary of annual gannet collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2.

Figure 2.6: Monthly gannet collisions following SNCB guidance for Option 2 (High scenario).

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