

25 November 2024

To the Planning Inspectorate

Application by GT R4 Limited (trading as Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind for the Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind project. The Examining Authority's written questions and requests for information (ExQ1) Issued on 6 November 2024

In response to the three questions asked of the UK Chamber of Shipping by the Planning Inspectorate, the Chamber provides the following responses.

Q1 SN 1.3:

- Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
- Trinity House
- UK Chamber of Shipping (CoS) and any other relevant IP

NRA methodology

Do you find the methodology used to assess the Proposed Development's shipping and navigational risks in the submitted NRA (Chapter 3 in [APP-171]) satisfactory? If not, what specific concerns do you have, and how might these be addressed?

The UK Chamber of Shipping is satisfied with the methodology used and submitted in the NRA, in line with the draft SOCG between the Chamber and applicant, believed submitted for Deadline 1.

Q1 SN 1.4

- MCA
- Trinity House
- CoS and any other relevant IP

NRA data sources

Are you satisfied that the NRA has utilized the appropriate data sources (Chapter 5 in [APP-171])? If not, what additional data do you believe should be considered to accurately assess the navigational and shipping risks associated with the Proposed Development?

The UK Chamber of Shipping is satisfied with the data sources used in the NRA, in line with the draft SOCG between the Chamber and applicant, believed submitted for Deadline 1.

Q1 SN 1.6

- The Applicant
- CoS

Offshore Cables after decommissioning

In draft SoCG between the Applicant and the CoS [REP1-033] Table 4, CoS13 states that the Chamber strongly advocates for the full removal of all infrastructure and cabling. Paragraph 197 under 7.12.3 of Chapter 7 [APP-062] indicates cables will be retained in situ.

To ensure clarity: Can the Applicant confirm if offshore cables will remain in situ after decommissioning? If necessary, update the draft SoCG between the Applicant and the CoS accordingly.

To the CoS: The ExA notes that the CoS advocates for the complete removal of all infrastructure and cabling. Please expand on this position with further information and reasoning, considering Chapter 7 of the Marine Physical Processes [APP-062], which indicates that cables will be retained in situ.

The UK Chamber of Shipping understands that the applicant will decommission the site in line with relevant legislation, regulation and guidance at the time, which may involve leaving cabling in situ. The UK Chamber is accepting that the development will be decommissioning in line with relevant legislation, regulation and guidance at the time nevertheless our base position is to strongly recommend full removal of all infrastructure, including of cables.

The Chamber strongly advocates for the reuse of “brownfield” sites at sea and so is supportive of repowering or repurposing. Where the wind farm is to be fully decommissioned, the Chamber strongly advocates for the full removal of all infrastructure above and below the seabed, acknowledging BATNEEC when it comes to turbine foundations which penetrate deep into the seabed.

The Chamber believes that the leaving of cabling in situ fails to meet the Guidelines and Standards for the Removal of Offshore Installations and Structures on the Continental Shelf and in the Exclusive Economic Zone – Resolution A.672 (16) adopted on 19 October 1989.

The resolution specifies that an installation or structure need not be entirely removed if:

- *It is no longer technically feasible (however, the design and construction should be such that entire removal would be feasible);*
- *It would involve extreme cost;*
- *It would involve an unacceptable risk to personnel or the marine environment; and*
- *If the structure can be left without causing unjustifiable interference with other uses of the sea*

The Chamber asserts that it is unlikely that the above conditions would be met and so if following the IMO Resolution should see full removal. The Chamber also raises the specific reasoning for recommending full removal of cabling:

Firstly, the Chamber has concerns that buried cables left in situ may become exposed and therefore pose a hazard to anchoring activity, especially in an emergency when such activity is most likely to take place. This has been highlighted by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) who at their Assembly meeting held at Monaco in April 2017 highlighted:

“Mariners are also warned that the seafloor where cables were originally buried may have changed and cables become exposed; therefore particular caution should be taken when

operating vessels in areas where submarine cables exist especially where the depth of water means that there is a limited under-keel clearance”

Such risk is minimised during the economic life of the wind farm, as navigational traffic through the development will be reduced and it is expected that regular monitoring of the cabling and its protection will be carried out with any necessary remedial works. However once decommissioned, the site will be open to a greater extent to surface navigation and other activity. The Chamber is not aware of commitments by developers post commissioning to regularly monitor and rebury or remove cabling which has become exposed.

Secondly, it is widely recognised that ships’ anchors pose a significant hazard to submarine cables as they are designed to penetrate the seabed. The depth of penetration will depend on the size and type of anchor and the nature of the seabed. Hence, the Chamber is concerned that cable burial at typical depths does not fully safeguard against anchor fouling and snagging risk. This was exemplified through the incident of the Stema Barge II incident in the English Channel when emergency anchoring led to the IFA interconnector being fouled and cut through. Passing the cost of potential fouling and disentanglement to the shipping company, authorities, insurers and any Search and Rescue (SAR) services required is not desirable.

Thirdly, through the leaving of cabling in situ, future seabed activity in the area is constrained, either rendered unfeasible, or costly for the next seabed user to remove or work around such cabling.

To conclude, should the appropriate legislation, regulation and guidance at the time of the decommissioning programme permit the applicant to leave cabling in situ then the Chamber acknowledges and accepts this, however may endeavour to lobby for a change in legislation.

The Chamber hopes these responses meet with the Planning Inspectorate’s expectations but would be happy to discuss further where appropriate.

Robert Merrylees

Policy Manager (Safety & Nautical) & Analyst