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Your Ref: TR030001
Our Ref: RC.LH.A.L12-0593
Date: 1st November 2012

For the attention of Mike Harris

Dear Mr Harris

APPLICATION FOR THE PROPOSED ABLE MARINE ENERGY PARK BY ABLE HUMBER PORTS LTD

THE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING (EXAMINATION PROCEDURE) RULES 2010 – RULE 17 FURTHER INFORMATION

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd October regarding the above. We respond as follows:-

BACKGROUND

1. The Examining Panel has asked for comments on the relevance of the two published documents listed below on black-tailed godwits. Both these documents have their origins in an International Wader Study Group Conference (IWSG) workshop in 2007 which included discussions on the contrasting fortunes of the continental (nominate - *Limosa limosa limosa*) and Icelandic (*Limosa limosa islandica*) races of black-tailed godwit (Gill *et al*, 2007 ¹).
 - European Commission (2007) *The Management Plan for Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa) 2007-2009: Technical Report 019*. EC (DG ENV B2)1; and
 - The International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Black-tailed Godwit AEWAs 2008.

REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS

2. Both of the above documents focus primarily on the declining nominate race *Limosa limosa limosa*, which prior to this (*ie* before 1990) had large populations spread over a wide geographical area. It has adapted to nesting in heavily managed agricultural landscapes and undertakes long distance migration to sub-Saharan Africa, where it is again dependant on a changing agricultural landscape. However, a combination of agricultural intensification and climate change has resulted in populations contracting by up to 5% per annum since the 1990s in core breeding areas such as the Netherlands. Reduced chick survival in these Dutch breeding areas has been linked to

¹ Gill, J.A., Langston, R.H.W., Alves, J.A., Atkinson, P.W., Bocher, P., Cidraes Vieira, N., Crockford, N.J., Gélinaud, G., Groen, N., Gunnarsson, T.G., Hayhow, B., Hooijmeijer, J., Kentie, R., Kleijn, D., Lourenço, P.M., Masero, J.A., Meunier, F., Potts, P.M., Roodbergen, M., Schekkerman, H., Schröder, J., Wymenga, E. & Piersma, T. (2007). Contrasting trends in two Black-tailed Godwit populations: a review of causes and



earlier annual mowing dates since 1980, with these earlier mowing dates reportedly driven by climatic change rather than agricultural intensification (Kleijn *et al*, 2010²).

3. In contrast, the population of Icelandic godwits (*Limosa limosa islandica*) (estimated in the AEWA document to be 2000-3000 birds in 1900) has expanded considerably, particularly post 1960 to reach an estimated population of 50 - 75,000³. The main reasons behind this expansion are linked to climatic changes which have benefited them, together with an ability to exploit new habitats both on the breeding grounds (eg haymeadows) and on the wintering grounds (eg wet grassland). Although not referenced in the report the availability of very large estuarine resources of Great Britain and Ireland (a quarter of all the Estuarine resource of Europe⁴), which is also close to its breeding grounds, may have contributed to the rapid expansion. Icelandic black-tailed godwit has therefore demonstrated considerable flexibility in response to climate change, with arrival dates in Iceland advancing by c.0.55 days/year over the last two decades (Gunnarsson, 2010⁵). These earlier return times to Iceland may also be linked to density dependant factors such as greater competition for nesting sites, which causes birds to arrive earlier to establish territories (Gunnarsson, 2010).

ICELANDIC BLACK-TAILED GODWITS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

4. Within Great Britain and Ireland only 11 sites held national or internationally important numbers of black-tailed godwits based on the wildfowl and wader counts for 1990-91⁶. By 2008/09 this had increased to 42 sites of national importance, of which 32 were of international importance, with the maximum count at the Wash exceeding the total count for the whole of Great Britain and Ireland in 1990/91⁷. This wintering expansion coincided with an expansion of Icelandic black-tailed godwit on their Icelandic breeding grounds, where the expansion had resulted in birds colonising less productive inland birch bogs rather than the most productive coastal breeding marshes. Gunnarsson *et al* (2005)⁸ suggested that birds breeding in poorer quality inland sites in Iceland also use poorer quality wintering sites, and that birds breeding in the best quality sites continue to use the traditional 'old' south coast wintering sites in Great Britain and Ireland where wintering populations have remained stable⁹. The range expansion in Great Britain, which has been into areas such as the Humber Estuary Gunnarsson *et al*

² Kleijn, D., Schekkerman, H., Dimmers, W. J., Ruud, J., Van Kats, M., Melman, D. & Teunissen, W. A. (2010). Adverse Effects of Agricultural Intensification and Climate Change on Breeding Habitat Quality of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa l. limosa* in the Netherlands. *Ibis* **152** 475-486.

³ http://blacktailedgodwit.aewa.info/species_info.

⁴ Davidson, N.C., Laffoley, D. d'A., Doody, J.P., Way, L.S., Gordon, J., Key, R., Drake, C.M., Pienkowski, M.W., Mitchell, R. & Duff, K.L. (1991). *Nature Conservation and Estuaries in Great Britain*. Peterborough, Nature Conservancy Council.

⁵ Gunnarsson, T.G. (2010). Contrasting the flexibility of schedules in related species with different migration strategies: Black-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels breeding in Iceland. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 117(1): 46-50

⁶ Kirby, J., Ferns, J.R., Waters, R.J. & Prys-Jones, R.P (1991). *Wildfowl and Wader Counts 1990-91*. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

⁷ Holt, C.A., Austin, G.E., Calbrade, N.A., Mellan, Mitchell, C., Stroud, D.A., Wotton, S.R. & Musgrove, A.J. (2011). *Waterbirds in the UK 2009/10: The Wetland Bird Survey*. BTO/RSPB/JNCC in association with WWT, Thefford

⁸ Gunnarsson, T.G., Gill, J.A., Newton, J, Potts, P.M. & Sutherland, W.J. (2005). Seasonal Matching of Habitat Quality and Fitness in a Migratory Bird. *Proc. R. Soc. B* **272**, 2319-2323.

⁹ Gill, J.A., Newton, J., Potts, P.M., Gunnarsson, T.G., Austin, G.E. & Sutherland, W.J. (2005). The Buffer Effect of Land-use Change on Population Regulation in

(2005), suggests that the extensive estuarine resource available in Great Britain and Ireland is not currently a factor limiting the expansion of the wintering population.

5. Much of the discussion in the reports centres on issues of importance for the continental race (eg a need to secure agri-environment programmes, management of hydrology and disturbance on the breeding grounds, and reduce hunting mortality, and secure stopover and wintering sites). The threats to Icelandic black-tailed godwits on the wintering grounds identified in the reports are therefore, focused on the birds being confined to only a few sites in winter (although note the recent geographic expansion referred to in *Paragraph 1.4*), and the need to ensure that favourable conservation status is maintained.
6. Threats to the Icelandic breeding population do exist and these were recognised as far back as 2001¹⁰, and include issues such as afforestation, drainage, changes in livestock, hydroelectric schemes, and agricultural intensification (Gunnarsson *et al*, 2006¹¹). Neither of the documents makes reference to constraints on the Icelandic breeding population, however, effects on breeding populations of continental black-tailed godwits are a critical component of their decline, and may be equally relevant to the Icelandic sub-species.

SUMMARY

7. The two documents focus primarily on the need to halt the decline of continental populations of black-tailed godwit, where the main threat is to productivity on the breeding grounds. The reports do not, however, consider the threats to the breeding population of Icelandic black-tailed godwit, despite clear evidence that such threats exist (see *Paragraph 1.6*).
8. There is a possibility that the expansion of breeding black-tailed godwit in Iceland may be exhibiting density dependence. Deterioration of breeding grounds through forestry (the Icelandic government is seeking to establish 5% forestry cover by 2040), agricultural and hydrological changes would increase this pressure. Rates of population decline can be rapid as demonstrated by the effects on the continental populations of black-tailed godwit.
9. The reports also state that black-tailed godwits are confined to only a few sites in Great Britain and Ireland, but this does not fully reflect the considerable and continued expansion of the wintering population out of its original core area in the south-east. Range expansion suggests that the British and Irish estuarine resources are not currently a factor limiting the expansion of the wintering population.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD CRAM
Design Manager

¹⁰ Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and Habitats Standing Committee 21st meeting. Afforestation of Low Land in Iceland. Council of Europe.

¹¹ Gunnarsson, T.O., Gill, J.A., Arnason, O.F., Ólafsson, H., Ólafsson, A., Waltham, A.D. & Sutherland, J.W. (2006). *European Wetland Association of*