

## **APPENDIX 1.2: ACHANY WIND FARM EXTENSION GRID CONNECTION WORKS: ELECTRICITY ACT (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2017: SCREENING OPINION**



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By email only to:  
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**Our Reference:** ECU00004847  
**Your Reference:** 122010-R-SCR-1.0.0

Dear Mr Harris

## **ELECTRICITY ACT 1989**

### **THE ELECTRICITY WORKS (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2017**

#### **SCREENING OPINION**

On 28 June 2023 the Scottish Ministers received a request under regulation 8(1) of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (“the EIA Regulations”) from Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (“the Applicant”) for an EIA screening opinion to install and keep installed a new 132 kV single circuit Overhead Line (“OHL”) approximately 17 km in length supported on trident H-wood poles between the consented Achany Wind Farm Extension on-site substation and the operational Shin substation (“the proposed Development”) within the Highland Council planning authority area.

Under regulation 9 of the EIA Regulations, the Scottish Ministers are required to adopt a screening opinion for the proposed Development. This letter contains such a screening opinion.

#### **Information Requirements**

The EIA Regulations set out (at 8(2)) the information that must accompany any request for a screening opinion. The Applicant submitted a comprehensive description of the infrastructure to be installed and the works to be undertaken; a description of the location, surrounding area and of the area of land on which the proposed Development is proposed, and of environmental sensitivities of such areas; as well as a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be affected. A description of proposed mitigation measures were included in the scoping report and taken into account by the Applicant’s own conclusions regarding the potential for significant environmental effects. A plan was submitted outlining the route plan for the proposed Development, and plans were also submitted detailing landscape and nature designations and landscape character types.

The proposed Development will comprise:

- Approximately 17 km of 132 kV single circuit OHL
- OHL supported on Trident H-wood poles between 10 and 16 m in height
- Cable sealing end (CSE) compounds or structures
- Creation of temporary and permanent access tracks

Under permitted development a section of underground cable (UGC) of approximately 500 m in length would also be required close to the consented Achany Wind Farm extension substation in order to maintain a minimum separation distance from the OHL and wind infrastructure.

### **Consultation**

Regulation 8(5) of the EIA Regulations sets out that the Scottish Ministers must consult the planning authority as to the planning authority's views on whether the proposed Development is EIA development, unless the planning authority's views have already been conveyed to the Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Ministers consulted the Highland Council on 4 July 2023. At the time of this Screening Opinion no consultation response has been received from the Highland Council.

### **Scottish Ministers' Screening Opinion**

EIA development is defined in the EIA Regulations, in respect of an application for consent under the Electricity Act 1989, as Schedule 1 development or Schedule 2 development likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location.

The proposed Development falls under Schedule 2 development.

In adopting a screening opinion as to whether the proposed Development is EIA development, the Scottish Ministers must in all cases take into account such of the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations as are relevant to the proposed Development, and the available results of any relevant assessment.

The Scottish Ministers have taken into account the selection criteria, all of the information submitted in respect of the request for a screening opinion and adopt the opinion that **the proposed Development does not constitute EIA development and any forthcoming application for consent (under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989) does not require to be accompanied by a full Environmental Impact Assessment report.**

In accordance with Regulation 7(2), this screening opinion is accompanied by the following written statement with reference to the selection criteria within Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations as are relevant to the proposed Development. In accordance with the EIA Regulations, a copy of the screening opinion has been issued to the planning authority.

## **Written Statement**

### **Characteristics of the Proposed Development**

The proposed Development is as described above. Having taken into consideration the screening request and information provided by the applicant, The Scottish Ministers do not consider that there are likely significant effects with regards to the production of waste, pollution and nuisances, risk of accidents or risk to human health. The proposed development would be screened in areas by existing tree cover by alignment design and would be in keeping with existing infrastructure.

### **Location of the Proposed Development**

The proposed development is situated on land comprising of Class 4.1 or lower agricultural land. It would enter inside the boundary of the Reay – Cassley Wild Land Area (WLA 34) at the consented Achany Wind Farm substation and would continue within its edge for approximately 2.5 km.

It would sit mostly within the Landscape Character Type (“LCT”) 135: Rounded Hills-Caithness and Sutherland. This area contains coniferous forestry, wind farm and OHL infrastructure. On its approach to the Shin substation the OHL would enter onto LCT 142: Strath – Caithness and Sutherland which includes the Kyle of Sutherland tributary glens, Glen Cassley and Achany Glen. The OHL within this LCT would be located within the forest on the glen slopes.

The proposed development would cross 3 principal water catchments being River Cassley, Allt Mor and the Kyle of Sutherland. The OHL would cross a floodplain associated with the Allt an Rasail.

The OHL would pass through areas of commercial forestry with native pinewoods located at the eastern end of the proposed development. It would not enter any areas of woodland which is included within the Ancient Woodland Inventory (“AWI”).

The proposed development would go through areas of peat the majority of which being class 2 within the exception of crossing 2 smaller areas of class 1 peat.

There are no statutory designated sites within the area of the proposed development, however The Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (“SAC”), Special Protection Area (“SPA”), Ramsar and Site of Special Scientific Interest (“SSSI”) is within approximately 220 m at its closest point. The River Oykel SAC and Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI lie approximately 1 km to the south at its closest point.

There are no cultural heritage assets within the location of the proposed Development. The Invershin Primary School and Settlement Scheduled Monument (“SM”) is located approximately 1 km to the east. The Invershin Farm Standing Stones and Settlement SM is approximately 1.5 km to the southeast. Further SM which include Achinduich Stone Circle, Achany Chambered Cairn, Achany Glen Settlement, Druim Baile, The Ord and Chambered Cairns are approximately 4.5 km northeast of the proposed development. There are non-designated assets susceptible to potential impact being 3 sites of multiple hut circles with

associated field systems. They are MHG12803 Doir a'Chatha, MHG 12800 Allt a'Ghlughern and MHG12891 Linsidemore Wood.

Part of the proposed development would sit within 150 m of the village of Inveran, Linsidemore would be located to the southeast as well as other small in scale settlements.

The larger settlement areas around the proposed development are Lairg, situated approximately 5.5 km to the east at its closest points and the village of Rosehall being approximately 3 km to the southwest. Achany is located approximately 2.5 km to the east.

Otter and water vole are likely to be within the northern and western ends of the proposed development. Within the central and southern and eastern parts the habitat would support pine marten, badger, red squirrel and bat. The proposed development could result in the loss of small areas of woodland and scrub habitat which supportive of breeding birds.

### **Characteristics of the Potential Impact**

Given the required land take for the proposed development it is unlikely there would be any significant impact on the class 4.1 agricultural land. It is not anticipated to have any significant effect on the WLA 34 with this infrastructure being significantly smaller in scale to the existing turbines already present and consented turbines to follow.

The impact on LCT's 135 and 142 are likely to be localised with the route of the OHL following the edges of the forest areas. The OHL is not anticipated to be a notable feature within the landscape.

The proposed Development would avoid the larger flood extents associated with the Allt an Rasail with particular care being taken at the water course crossings with extra attention paid to the Allt an Rasail floodplain. This work would be carried out in accordance with the applicants General Environmental Management Plan ("GEMP").

The proposed Development would pass through an area of class 2 peatland for approximately 7.5 km and 2 small areas of class 1 peat. With peat probing surveys being carried out by the applicant throughout the area as well as the implementation of a Peat Management Plan ("PMP"), the use of micro-siting and the required land take, no likely significant effect is expected.

Through good practice construction, pollution prevention and water quality control measures the proposed development is not expected to have any significant effect on the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC, Ramsar, SSSI, River Oykel SAC and Kyle Sutherland Marshes SSSI. The Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA is designated for supporting breeding populations of birds including Black-throated diver, Wigeon, Common Scoter, Red-throated diver, Hen harrier, Golden Eagle, Golden Plover, Dunlin, Greenshank, Wood sandpiper, Short-eared owl and Merlin. The applicant is undertaking ongoing bird surveys in the area of the proposed development following NatureScot guidance and in consultation with them. The applicant would employ best practice methods and the adherence to the Species Protection Plans ("SPP's") in order to minimise any potential impact.

With pre construction surveys and monitoring carried out by an Environmental Clerk of Works ("ECoW"), micro-siting and again the adherence to SPPs GEMPs and the Construction Environmental Management Plan ("CEMP") there is unlikely to be a significant effect on any protected species.

There would be no direct impact on any designated heritage asset and the topography, buildings and vegetation would screen views from heritage assets further afield.

**Proposed Mitigation Measures to Avoid or Prevent Significant Adverse Effects:**

The Company have proposed the following mitigation measures in order to prevent or avoid any significant adverse effects:

- Micro-siting of infrastructure;
- General Environmental Management Plan;
- Construction Environmental Management Plan;
- Environmental Clerk of Works;
- Protected Species surveys;
- Species Protection Plans;
- Pollution prevention and water quality control measures;
- Construction Traffic Management Plan; and
- Peat Landslide Hazzard Risk Assessment.

This screening opinion does not constitute pre-application advice and is provided without prejudice to the assessment of any future application under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Yours sincerely

Lee Stirrat

**Energy Consents Unit  
(A member of the staff of the Scottish Ministers)**