Eastern Green Link 3

Marine Environmental Appraisal

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Prepared for: Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (SHE-T)

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
TRANSMISSION

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Date: August 2025
Document Reference: C01494a_NGET_REP_D0574
Version Number: 0

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Record of Changes

Rev #	Date	Description	Approved
0	29/08/2025	Issued for submission	Anna Farley
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

Responsible for	Job Title	Name	Date	Signature
Content	Technical Director	Julie Drew Murphy	29/08/2025	[Redacted]
Checked	Principal	Patricia Elder	29/08/2025	[Redacted]
Approved	Director	Anna Farley	29/08/2025	[Redacted]
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This document has been checked in line with internal quality control requirements.

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Abbreviations/Glossary

DCO	Development Consent Order
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EGL	Eastern Green Link
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPS	European Protected Species
GES	Good Environmental Status
GW	Giga Watt
HND	Holistic Network Design
HRA	Habitat Regulations Appraisal
HVAC	High Voltage Alternating Current
HVDC	High Voltage Direct Current
km	Kilometre
LSE	Likely Significant Effect
MCA	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
MCAA	Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009
MD-LOT	Marine Directorate - Licensing Operations Team
MEA	Marine Environmental Assessment
MEAp	Marine Environmental Appraisal
MHWS	Mean High Water Spring
MLA	Marine Licence Application
MLWS	Mean Low Water Spring
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MPS	Marine Policy Statement
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
NESO	National Energy System Operator
NETS	National Electricity Transmission System
NM	Nautical Miles
NMP	National Marine Plan
NOA	Network Options Assessment
NRA	Navigation Risk Assessment
PAC	Pre-Application Consultation
RYA	Royal Yachting Association
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEPA	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
SHE-T	Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
UK	United Kingdom
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
WFD	Water Framework Directive

1. Introduction to Eastern Green Link 3

1.1. Proposed Development Background

The Eastern Green Link 3 (EGL 3) (herein after referred to as 'the Project') comprises a 2 GW High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) link between Aberdeenshire in Scotland, and King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Norfolk, with a landfall on the Lincolnshire coastline, England. The Project comprises approximately 700 km of subsea and underground HVDC cables between new converter stations at each end of the electricity transmission link. These in turn are connected to the existing National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) via High Voltage Alternating Current (HVAC) cables between the new converter stations and new substations. For the purposes of seeking the necessary consents, the Project has been split into different 'Schemes' i.e. English Onshore Scheme, English Offshore Scheme, Scottish Onshore Scheme and the Scottish Offshore Scheme (with the latter hereinafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development'). Collectively all components of EGL 3 are referred to as 'the Project'.

To assist in bringing Scotland's vast reserves of renewable energy to the rest of the United Kingdom, the National Energy System Operator (NESO) Network Options Assessment (NOA) (NESO, 2022a), and the Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design (HND) (NESO, 2022b) recommended four new HVDC Links, further details of which are provided in **Chapter 2**: **Project Need and Alternatives**. The Project represents the third of these links.

This Marine Environmental Appraisal (MEAp) has been produced specifically for the Proposed Development, which comprises the components proposed from the Mean High Water Spring (MHWS) mark at the proposed landfall in Sandford Bay, Peterhead to the border between the limit of the Scottish offshore waters and the adjacent English offshore waters. The Proposed Development is being developed by Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (SHE-T), operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission) ('the Applicant'). A Red Line Boundary (RLB) is proposed as the anticipated maximum extent of the seabed in which the construction and operation of the Proposed Development may take place. A full project description is provided in **Chapter 3: Project Description** comprising the Proposed Development connecting from the sea border with England, a 145 km subsea HVDC cable up to MHWS at Sandford Bay in Aberdeenshire. From landfall the Scottish Onshore Scheme continues inland to the point of interconnection with the Scottish transmission system.

A schematic diagram shown below in **Figure 1-1** illustrates the concept and main infrastructure of the end-to-end Project.

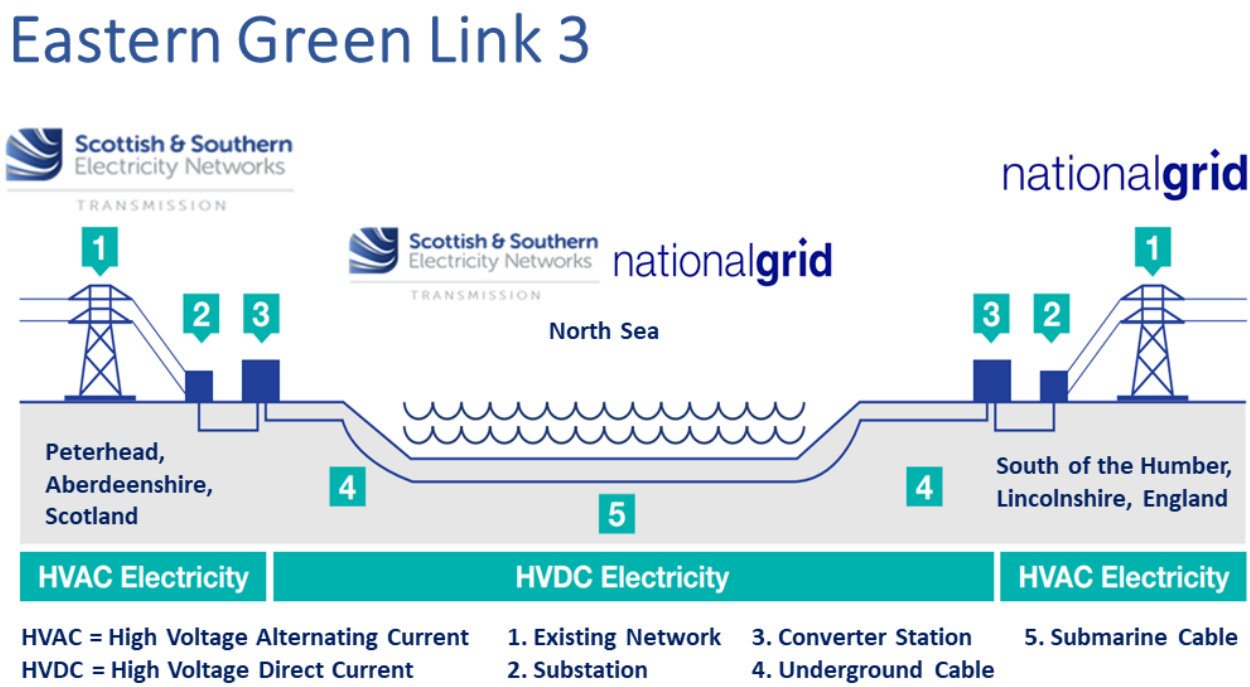

Figure 1-1: Project Schematic

1.2. Legislative Context

This section provides an overview of the policy and legislation that governs the Proposed Development. Whilst the Proposed Development would be developed and constructed within the UK, as it crosses between English and Scottish waters there are slight differences in the governing legislation due to the two devolved administrations. Eastern Green Link 4 (EGL 4) is a separate but adjacent 2 GW link, connecting Fife in Scotland to a shared landfall in Lincolnshire, England. A single Development Consent Order (DCO) with separate deemed Marine Licences under the Planning Act 2008 are being sought for both EGL 3 and EGL 4 in English waters. The DCO regime is not applicable in Scotland and therefore a Marine Licence will be sought for the Proposed Development. A separate Marine Licence will be sought for EGL 4. It should be noted that as well as a Marine Licence, the Proposed Development will require other permits, licences and approvals from other consenting bodies. This is further discussed in **Section 1.2.1**.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is equally applicable in England and Scotland within territorial waters and provides levels of protection at an international level for all international submarine cables. Amongst other provisions UNCLOS provides the freedom to lay, maintain and repair cables on the continental shelf (beyond 12 Nautical Miles (NM)). Article 79 of UNCLOS provides this freedom and states that the coastal States (i.e. Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Marine Directorate - Licensing Operations Team (MD-LOT), when exercising their licensing functions) may not impede the laying or maintenance of such cables or pipelines. To ensure compliance with this provision of UNCLOS, section 81 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA), applicable in relation to both English and Scottish waters beyond 12 NM, sets out an exemption for such projects.

1.2.1. Marine Licensing in Scotland

A Marine Licence is required for certain activities that are carried out within the UK marine area (i.e. from MHWS out to the limit of UK continental shelf; 200 NM). MD-LOT is the regulator responsible for determining Marine Licence Applications (MLAs) in Scottish waters.

A review of current marine licencing policy indicates:

- Laying and burial of submarine cables within territorial waters (i.e., within 12 NM) requires a Marine Licence under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.
- Within the Scottish offshore region (between 12 and 200 NM), licensing falls under the MCAA 2009, and within offshore waters the installation of an international electricity cable is exempt from requiring a Marine Licence under Section 81 of the MCAA. However, the placement of cable protection material e.g., concrete mattresses or rock would still qualify as licensable activities under the MCAA and would therefore require a Marine Licence.

Under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, when determining a Marine Licence, MD-LOT has a responsibility to ensure that the application complies with the requirements of a range of Scottish legislation. Whilst the laying of a cable beyond 12 NM is exempt from requiring a Marine Licence, the cable within 12 NM still requires a licence from MD-LOT. It is however noted that, MD−LOT are obliged to grant a Marine Licence for the part of the cable within Scottish territorial waters. In granting the licence MD-LOT can place conditions on any Marine Licence issued, with which the Applicant must comply. To ensure compliance with necessary UK legislation, environmental information can be requested in order to determine the MLA. The relevant regulations and types of assessment that MD-LOT are obliged to consider are described in **Table 1-1**.

Table 1-1: Relevant Regulations and how the Applicant has considered them

Regulations	Description	Actions to be taken by the Applicant
The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 (as amended)	These regulations cover the area within 12 NM of the Scottish coastline and from 12 NM to the edge of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). They require that certain types of projects with the potential to significantly affect the environment are subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before a Marine Licence decision is made. MD-LOT checks all applications to assess them for the potential to require an EIA. The installation of cables or the deposit of cable protection is not listed in Schedule 1 or 2 of the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 (as amended) or The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 as a project that would require a statutory EIA.	As a responsible developer, the Applicant has chosen to fulfil its obligations by preparing a MEAp and submitting it alongside the MLA.
Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) - Marine Spatial Plans	As in England, under Section 58 of the MCAA, MD-LOT is required to make decisions in accordance with marine policy documents, and as such, is responsible for implementing the Scottish National Marine Plan (NMP) through existing regulatory and decision-making processes. In assessing MLA, MD-LOT must determine whether the	Information to demonstrate that the Proposed Development is in accordance with the UK MPS and the Scottish NMP have been provided by the Applicant with the MLA as

Regulations	Description	Actions to be taken by the Applicant
	activities of the Proposed Development are compatible with the objectives of the UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS) and the Scottish National Marine Plan. Much of the offshore cabling will lie beyond UK territorial seas (12 NM) within the EEZ. UNCLOS provides the freedom to lay, maintain and repair cables on the continental shelf and further states that the coastal State (MD-LOT in this case) may not impede the laying of such cables. The MCAA therefore includes a number of provisions to ensure the rights conferred by UNCLOS are maintained within the marine licensing regime. Section 81(1) of the MCAA 2009 sets out that nothing in Part 4 of the MCAA applies to any activity done in the course of laying or maintaining an offshore stretch (defined in Section 81(4) as being beyond the seaward limits of the territorial sea) of an 'exempt cable'. Section 81(5) sets out a handful of exceptions to the applicability of the exemption; the Proposed Development does not fall within any of these categories. Furthermore, Section 81(2)(a), of the MCAA states that where subsection 81(1) of the MCAA has effect in relation to part (but not the whole) of an 'exempt cable', MD-LOT must grant any marine licence application to lay any inshore stretch (within the seaward limits of the territorial sea (12 NM) of the cable. The placement of cable protection however does not fall within the definition of the exemption and therefore a MLA is required for cable protection beyond 12 NM.	**Appendix 2A: National Marine Plan Compliance Assessment.** This takes the form of a table setting out each policy objective with a description of how the features of the Proposed Development comply with the objectives.
MCAA - Shipping & Navigation	The requirements of the MCAA in relation to shipping and navigation apply in Scotland as well as in England. To inform their decision on whether to grant a Marine Licence, MD-LOT will consult with navigational bodies. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is the primary UK advisor on navigational safety issues, but representations are also sought from the Northern Lighthouse Board, the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) and any port authority within the area of the Proposed Development (which for the Proposed Development includes Peterhead Port Authority).	A Navigation Risk Assessment (NRA) has been used to inform the Marine Environmental Assessment (MEA) presented in **Chapter 11: Shipping and Navigation** and is provided with this MEAp.
MCAA - Marine Archaeology	The requirements of the MCAA in relation to marine archaeology apply in Scotland as well as in England. To inform their decision MD-LOT will consult with Historic Environment Scotland on the findings of the assessments to inform their licensing decision.	Marine archaeological assessments have been undertaken by a qualified marine archaeologist to inform the MEA process, the conclusions of which are presented in this MEAp. Please refer to **Chapter 14: Marine Archaeology** for further details.
Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 – Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)	The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the Act") provides a statutory framework for the management of the marine environment in Scotland's inshore waters (up to 12 NM from the coast). The Act allows for the designation of marine protected areas (MPAs) for nature conservation purposes in Scottish waters. MPAs are areas of the marine environment established to protect habitats, species and processes essential for functioning marine ecosystems, this may include declining and/or vulnerable species and habitats.	The Applicant has provided the following Appendix to support MD-LOTs decision making: ▪ **Appendix 5C: Marine Protected Area Assessment Stage 1 Initial Screening**. Please refer to **Chapter 5: Designated Sites** for further details.
The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Conservation	Within Scottish waters, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) are designated under the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) in the offshore area (>12 NM and <200 NM from the coast) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) within the inshore area (<12 NM) which are collectively referred to as the Habitats Regulations. Under the	The Applicant has provided the following Appendices to support MD-LOTs decision making: ▪ **Appendix 5A: Habitats Regulations Appraisal Stage 1 Screening**

Regulations	Description	Actions to be taken by the Applicant
(Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended).	Habitats Regulations, where screening has identified the potential for a Likely Significant Effect (LSE), the competent authority is required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) to determine whether there is potential for a plan or project to have an adverse effect on the integrity of a European Site, alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. In Scotland, the competent authority is MD-LOT. In addition, a European Protected Species (EPS) Licence and Basking Shark Licence may be required to allow certain activities such as geophysical surveys, to take place.	▪ **Appendix 5B: Habitats Regulations Appraisal Stage 2 Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment** Please refer to **Chapter 5: Designated Sites** for further details. Post consent, the Applicant will apply for an EPS Licence and Basking Shark Licence if required once final details of proposed surveys and construction activities are known.
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004	The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 sets out the legal framework for protecting wildlife and natural habitats in the UK, including the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England and Wales. However, in Scotland, SSSIs are designated under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and are regulated by the statutory nature conservation body, NatureScot. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, Part 3 and Schedule 6 make amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981 as amended), strengthening the legal protection for threatened species to include protection from 'reckless' acts. Within each SSSI, NatureScot have identified activities that may damage the designated features and which need written consent before they can proceed. These are known as "Operations Requiring Consent". To arrive at a decision, NatureScot will assess whether proposals to carry out operations within a SSSI have a positive or negative effect on the condition of a site. Where the proposed development overlaps with a SSSI, MD-LOT will consult NatureScot on the proposed plans and activities. NatureScot's assessments and conclusions inform MD-LOT's decision, and the Marine Licence forms the necessary consent to undertake operations within the SSSI.	The Proposed Development does not lie within any SSSI. The nearest SSSI, Bullers of Buchan SSSI, lies 1.77 km to the South of the Proposed Development and is designated for coastal morphology of Scotland and maritime cliffs. Please refer to **Chapter 6: Marine Physical Processes** for further details.
The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is implemented through The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011	The sea from mean low water springs (MLWS) to 3 NM from shore is protected under The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 which aim to protect the quality of the water, and, where necessary and practicable, improve the status of those that are under pressure. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is the competent authority for the above referenced regulations however under 'the Act' 2010, Scottish Ministers are responsible for marine licensing and enforcement in the inshore and offshore region of Scottish waters. MD-LOT carry this responsibility on behalf of Scottish Ministers in determination of marine licence applications. SEPA are identified as a statutory consultee with whom MD-LOT must engage prior to licensing decision (Marine Scotland, 2015).	A WFD compliance assessment has been completed as part of the MEA process and is provided with this MEAp as **Appendix 6B: Water Framework Directive Assessment Report**.
Marine Strategy Regulations 2010	The UK Marine Strategy consists of a simple 3-stage framework for achieving Good Environmental Status (GES) in UK seas. Achieving GES is about protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources. The strategy covers 11 elements (known as descriptors) including: biodiversity; non-indigenous species; commercial fish; food webs; eutrophication; sea-	As described above the information to demonstrate that the Proposed Development is in accordance with the relevant Marine Plans has been provided by the Applicant in **Appendix 2A: National Marine Plan Compliance Assessment.**

Regulations	Description	Actions to be taken by the Applicant
	floor integrity; hydrographical conditions; contaminants; contaminants in seafood; marine litter and underwater noise. The UK Marine Policy Statement clearly identifies the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC (MSFD)) as one of the environmental legislative provisions that should be considered in the marine planning process and, where appropriate, reflected in marine plans. The MSFD requires Member States to take measures to achieve or maintain GES for their seas by the end of 2020. It came into force on 15 July 2008 and was transposed into UK law by the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010. Marine plans will contribute to meeting the objectives of the MSFD, particularly in relation to any measures which have a spatial dimension. MD-LOT will consider how marine plans may shape activities within the relevant marine area to support the goals of the MSFD, as well as those of other relevant pieces of legislation. Marine plans set the direction for the licensing and consenting process. Public authorities must take any authorisation or enforcement decision in accordance with the UK Marine Policy Statement 2011 and marine plans unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise.	

1.3. Aims and Objectives of the Marine Environmental Appraisal

This MEAp provides the approach taken and presents the findings and conclusions of the MEA process to enable robust and consistent consideration of the significant of effects, including cumulative impacts.

The MEA is supported by additional assessments including a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA), Marine Protected Area (MPA) Screening Assessment and Water Framework Directive (WFD) assessment. The key findings of the supporting assessments are also presented in this MEAp.

The technical chapters are informed by the MEA Non-Statutory Scoping Opinions that were provided by MD-LOT in response to the MEA Non-Statutory Scoping Report that was submitted in January 2024.

1.4. Marine Environmental Appraisal Structure

This MEAp is structured as follows:

- MEAp Chapter 1: Introduction
- MEAp Chapter 2: Project Need and Alternatives
- MEAp Chapter 3: Project Description
- MEAp Chapter 4: Marine Environmental Appraisal Scope and Methodology
- MEAp Chapter 5: Designated Sites
- MEAp Chapter 6: Marine Physical Processes
- MEAp Chapter 7: Intertidal and Subtidal Benthic Ecology
- MEAp Chapter 8: Fish and Shellfish
- MEAp Chapter 9: Intertidal and Offshore Ornithology
- MEAp Chapter 10: Marine Mammals and Marine Reptiles
- MEAp Chapter 11: Shipping and Navigation
- MEAp Chapter 12: Commercial Fisheries
- MEAp Chapter 13: Other Marine Users and Activities
- MEAp Chapter 14: Marine Archaeology
- MEAp Chapter 15: Schedule of Mitigation
- MEAp Chapter 16: Conclusions
- Technical Appendices

- Appendix 2A: National Marine Plan Compliance Assessment
- Appendix 3A: Electric and Magnetic Field Assessment
- Appendix 3B: Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)
- Appendix 3C: Heat Calculations
- Appendix 5A: Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) Stage 1 Screening
- Appendix 5B: Habitats Regulations Appraisal Stage 2 Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment
- Appendix 5C: Marine Protected Area Assessment Stage 1 Initial Screening
- Appendix 6A: EGL 3 Sediment Dispersion Assessment, Scottish MEA, Spreadsheet-Based Modelling Tool
- Appendix 6B: Water Framework Directive Assessment Report
- Appendix 7A: Scotland Environmental Baseline Report – EGL 3
- Appendix 10A: Underwater Noise Modelling Technical Report
- Appendix 11A: Navigation Risk Assessment (NRA)
- Appendix 12A: Fisheries Management and Mitigation Plan (FMMP)
- Appendix 14A: Marine Archaeology Technical Report
- Appendix 14B: Written Scheme of Investigation and Protocol for Archaeological Discoveries

Each technical topic chapter is structured as follows:

- Introduction
- Data Sources
- Consultation
- Baseline Characterisation
- Potential Pressure Identification and Zone of Influence
- Key Parameters for Assessment
- Embedded Mitigation Measures
- Significance Assessment
- Project Specific Mitigation Measures
- Residual Effects
- Cumulative Effects

1.5. Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholder engagement has been undertaken on the Proposed Development from early feasibility stage, including on the scope of surveys required to inform the environmental appraisal. An MEA Non-Statutory Scoping Report was submitted to MD-LOT in January 2024 with responses received back July 2024. The responses received have informed the assessment undertaken within each of the topic specific chapters.

Since scoping, adhoc informal consultation has taken place with various stakeholders including NatureScot, JNCC, shipping stakeholders and fisheries organisation to support the ongoing marine survey campaign and to inform the environmental appraisal process.

Formal Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) took place from 22nd May 2025 to 6th July 2025, with an in-person event held on 22nd May 2025. Response to PAC have informed the MEA process and a copy of the PAC Report is provided within this MLA (CEA, 2025).

1.6. Need for the Project

The UK is a world leader in offshore wind energy and the targets for becoming net zero nations by 2045 for Scotland and 2050 for England and Wales are enshrined in law. The Energy White Paper (2020) (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2020) sets out UK Government's target of increasing offshore wind capacity to 40 GW by 2030 to accelerate the transition to net zero. This target has since been increased to 50 GW by 2030, as detailed in the UK Government's Energy Security Strategy (2022) (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2022). In addition, the Scottish Government, in its Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (Scottish Government, 2023), has set a new target for an additional 20 GW of new low carbon renewable electricity generation by 2030; including 12 GW of new onshore wind and potentially increasing the current offshore wind target of 11GW by 2030 on which it has consulted. The final Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan was originally expected to be published in 2024 but is still awaiting publication.

North Sea developments, including offshore wind, interconnectors and transmission system reinforcements, will be essential in meeting these climate change targets and driving economic growth across the UK. The Project will form an integral part of the UK transmission network as a HVDC link.

Further details are provided in **Chapter 2: Project Need and Alternatives**.

1.7. Project Objectives

When developing a new project, it is important to establish what the key objectives of the project are. These are then used to establish whether the alternative solutions proposed during the feasibility and development stages are viable solutions that fulfil the desired outcomes. The objectives for the Project have been derived from the UK Government net zero targets, the objectives of the NESO, NOA and the UK Holistic Network Design (HND), the MPS and the relevant regional and local marine plans.

Further details on the objectives of the project are provided in **Chapter 2: Project Need and Alternatives**.

1.8. Project Alternatives

Several alternative solutions were discounted immediately because they either were not supported by UK or Scottish Government policy, or they will not achieve the core project objectives, these areas outlined in detail in **Chapter 2: Project Need and Alternatives**. In summary these were:

- Do nothing
- Alternative transmission options
- Reduce electricity demand

Feasible alternative solutions were assessed including:

- Alternative Technology
- Alternative National Connection Points
- Alternative Landfall Sites
- Alternative Offshore Cable Routes
- Alternative Construction Techniques

Details of these alternative solutions are provided in **Chapter 2: Project Need and Alternatives**.

References

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