Volume 5: Appendix 8.3 – Native Broadleafed Woodland Management Strategy

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1. NATIVE BROADLEAFED WOODLAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Appendix presents information relevant to the proposed Kintore to Tealing 400 kV Overhead Line (OHL). It should be read in conjunction with **Volume 1, Chapter 2: Established Need for the Proposed Development**, **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** and **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry** of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) for full details of the Proposed Development.

1.1.2 Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission), hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant', owns and maintains the electricity transmission network across the north of Scotland. Due to the growth in renewable electricity generation in the north and north-east of Scotland, upgrade of the transmission network is required in order to provide the necessary increase in transmission capacity.

1.1.3 The Applicant is proposing to apply for consent under Section 37 of the *Electricity Act 1989* (as amended) to construct and operate a new double circuit 400 kV overhead transmission line (OHL), between Kintore and Tealing (hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development').

1.1.4 This Native Broadleafed Woodland Management Strategy sets out the methodology and process that will be followed to limit the removal of ancient and native woodland.

1.1.5 Areas of ancient and native woodland have been identified along the Proposed Development (see **Volume 3, Figures 8.1.1 to 8.1.15: Forestry Study Area)** and a commitment has been given to further assess these areas in relation to the OHL design and safety requirements, to identify possible woodland/tree retentions**.**

1.1.6 Prior to felling within areas of ancient and native woodland/tree areas, further mitigation measures will be assessed to identify if further retention is possible, where safe and practical within the Proposed Development Operational Corridor (OC). During the assessment of further mitigation measures, emphasis will be placed on the ancient and native woodland/tree retention objective.

1.1.7 The Applicant's Forestry Manager will co-ordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the project team and relevant stakeholders.

1.2 Purpose of Woodland Report

1.2.1 As part of the EIA process, it was identified that the Proposed Development including the access tracks required to construct the Proposed Development would cross a number of woodland areas within private or state owned landholdings. The landholding property boundaries are identified in relevant Woodland reports within **Volume 5, Appendices 8.2.1 to 8.2.34.**

1.2.2 During the EIA process, areas of ancient and native woodland classification affected by the infrastructure felling have been identified in **Volume 3, Figures 8.1.1 to 8.1.15: Forestry Study Area**. A commitment has been included in the EIAR to assess the possible mitigation measures that can be established to minimise the felling of these areas (see mitigation measure F5 in **Table 8.8: Applied Mitigation** in **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry**. Assessment and prescription of any tree felling mitigation measures such as retention, must ensure the safety during OHL construction and that the subsequent operation and maintenance of the Proposed Development is not compromised.

1.2.3 This Native Woodland Management Strategy explains the management strategy that will be undertaken by the Applicant prior to and during the construction phase, to assess what can be implemented to minimise the felling/removal of the ancient and native woodland areas.

1.3 Legislation

1.3.1 The *Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002* (ESQCR, 2002)[1] (the regulations) specify safety standards to protect the general public and consumers from danger of overhead electricity powerlines. These

[1] UK Government, 2002. *Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations*. [Online] Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2665/contents/made

standards outline minimum safety clearances and the Distribution Network Operator's (DNO's) duty to maintain these safety clearances.

1.3.2 The regulations also contain requirements on quality and continuity of electricity supply to ensure an efficient and economic service to customers and consumers.

1.3.3 Further legislation arrived in 2006 with the ESQCR, 2006: Amendment[2], which extended the above duties of the DNO to make their overhead powerlines resilient to the effect of major storms. This includes reducing the risk of falling trees and branchwood hitting the electricity network.

1.3.4 The result of this legislation is that the DNOs, in addition to maintaining the vegetation to minimum safety clearances, now must seek to achieve further clearances for trees which may be affected by storm weather conditions.

1.4 Native Woodland Areas and Mitigation

1.4.1 The permanent loss of ancient and native woodland areas as part of the Proposed Development has been mitigated by the appropriate assessment of these woodland/tree locations to ascertain the safe OC width required (see **Volume 3, Figures 8.1.1 to 8.1.15: Forestry Study Area**). An OC width of 90 m has been identified, which will be maintained through areas of commercial conifer woodland. Prior to the Proposed Development construction phase, areas within ancient and native woodland will be further assessed for opportunities to reduce the OC width to reflect the structure, type, species, age and height of the woodland to identify tree retention opportunities, selective felling, crown and tree height reduction to reduce the OC width whilst maintaining OHL operational resilience.

1.4.2 As stated in **paragraph 8.7.8** of **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry**, the identified woodland categories that will be left unstocked are:

- 0.94 ha is forestry categorised as 2a Ancient Woodland (of semi-natural origin);
- 0.48 ha is woodland identified as 2a Ancient (of semi-natural origin) through site surveys but not officially categorised as such in the AWI;
- 0.19 ha is woodland categorised as 1b Long-Established (of plantation origin);
- 36.17 ha is woodlands categorised as 2b Long-Established (of plantation origin);
- 15.61 ha is considered to be Native Woodlands as per the definition in **paragraph 8.1.12** of **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry**; and
- 85.44 ha is uncategorised.

1.4.3 Considering the native tree species relevant to the Proposed Development:

- certain native tree species such as Willow, Hazel and Alder usually coppice well, although success can be limited if large numbers of deer are present due to browsing and this should also be considered;
- the growth heights and structure of the native tree species Oak, Birch, bring an increased risk to overhead powerline safety. Generally, Oak is quite windfirm, dependent on ground conditions and tree health. Crown reduction is often possible, whilst maintaining a healthy tree; and
- rather than a blanket approach to fell all native trees within the OC, surveys will be conducted to identify possible greater tree retention. Tree pruning to reduce crown height will also be considered where appropriate and dependent on tree species, it is generally accepted that tree species such as Birch, Aspen, Scots Pine are not easily reduced aesthetically.

1.5 Construction Requirements and native Woodland Survey

1.5.1 The construction phase of the Proposed Development requires various work zones of differing area dimensions to be devoid of tree and shrub vegetation to allow the safe access and undertaking of the construction works and provide the necessary land area to install the Proposed Development project infrastructure.

[2] UK Government, 2006. Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity (Amendment) Regulations. [Online] Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1521/made

1.5.2 The work zone categories are:

- upgrading of existing access track corridors with passing places;
- new build access track corridors with passing places;
- tower build worksite compounds;
- conductor winches worksite compounds;
- OHL conductor wiring corridor; and
- OC worksite zone.

1.5.3 Prior to tree felling, operations assessments will be conducted and documented of the ancient and native woodland/tree areas in relation to the construction phase works. Tree health, quality and habitat will be visually surveyed and risk assessed in relation to the construction works and OHL dimensions. Where possible further mitigation measures will be identified in the effort to achieve greater ancient and native woodland retention.

1.5.4 The assessment of mitigation measures will include:

- the minor re-routing within project parameters of new access track builds, to avoid the felling of mature native tree species where possible;
- identify the minimal requirements/width of the OHL wiring corridor and review work methods in relation to maximising ancient and native woodland retentions;
- the assessment of new build OHL heights across native woodland areas, to identify possible ancient and native woodland/tree retentions and minimise tree felling through tree pruning and crown reduction where suitable.

1.5.5 The Applicant's Forestry Manager will co-ordinate the ancient and native woodland assessments in liaison with the project team and relevant stakeholders.

1.6 Conclusion

1.6.1 The implementation of the management items as detailed in this Native Woodland Management Strategy, will allow a balanced and practical approach to identifying further suitable mitigation measures in relation to ancient and native woodland/tree retention and the Proposed Development construction, operation and maintenance.

1.6.2 Following completion of the Proposed Development, a set of plans will be produced and submitted to the Scottish Ministers. These plans will show the areas of ancient and native woodland locations of the OC and detail any areas of greater retention that may have been achieved, with those areas that have been retained clearly delineated.