Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Link Project

Pre-Application Consultation Report

Document Classification | **Internal**

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

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Introduction

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission) requires submission of a Marine Licence Application (MLA) to the Scottish Government Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team (MD-LOT) under guidance provided by the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 for the marine elements of the proposed Spittal to Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project.

A project-specific consultation programme was designed to engage with Local Planning Authorities (Caithness and Aberdeenshire Council), MD-LOT, statutory and non-statutory consultees, local communities, landowners and individual residents and to invite feedback on the proposal.

This Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) Report describes the key responses received and actions taken in response to any issues raised relating to the marine aspects of the Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Link Project.

Document Structure

This PAC Report is comprised of six parts as follows:

1. Introduction – outlines the purpose of the PAC Report;
2. Proposed Development – details the project background and provides a description of the key elements;
3. The Consultation Process – describes the framework for consultation and methods which have been employed;
4. Responses and Key Issues – summarises the range of responses and key comments and issues arising through the consultation process;
5. Project Responses to Consultations – describes how the comments and issues raised during consultation will be addressed; and
6. Conclusions and Next Steps – provides a summary of the conclusions reached and actions going forward.

The main body of this PAC Report is supported by a series of appendices.

Proposed Development

Project Background

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission), operating under licence as Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (SHE Transmission plc), is a wholly owned subsidiary of the SSE plc group of companies. SSEN Transmission is the licensed electricity Transmission Owner in the north of Scotland, owning a >5,000 km network of high voltage underground cables and overhead lines, that provides electricity across northern Scotland, and connects northern Scotland to central and southern Scotland and the rest of Great Britain.

As part of the UK and Scottish Governments' 2030 net zero energy targets, the recent increase in renewable power generation across the north of Scotland has significantly increased demand on the transmission infrastructure across the country, and its ability to accommodate new connections, predominantly from the offshore wind market, and transfer this generation to demand centres. The Electricity System Operator's (ESO) Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design (HND) has identified the necessary transmission network reinforcements required to facilitate this increase in generation, further confirmed through the recent National Grid Network Options Assessment (NOA) refresh and HND publications.

Through this process, SSEN Transmission is looking to develop a HVDC electricity transmission link between Caithness (Spittal) and Aberdeenshire (Peterhead), collectively known as the Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Link Project.

The project proposal for the 2GW bi-pole, 525 kV high voltage direct current (HVDC) link will consist of:

- A HVDC link, including approximately 172 km of subsea cable;
- A new HVDC Converter Station at Spittal; and
- A new HVDC Converter Station at Peterhead.

To ensure efficiency when connecting into the existing transmission network, the sites of the new HVDC converter stations (onshore) will be located within close proximity to:

- New Spittal 400 kV Substation; and
- New Peterhead 400 kV Substation.

The Consultation Process

Overview

This Section describes the methods employed during the consultation process and provides information on meetings and exhibitions held with stakeholders to obtain feedback on the application prior to submission of the MLA.

The consultation process began with early non-statutory consultation in 2023, followed by an advertisement and notification period in July/August 2024, with the Pre-Application Consultation events taking place in September 2024.

Advertisement and Promotion

A public notice containing details of the proposed project was advertised in the Aberdeenshire and Highland editions of the Press and Journal on Monday 22 July 2024.

Colour adverts were placed in the Early General News (EGN) sections of the following publications:

- Buchan Observer – 27 August 2024;
- John O'Groats Journal – 23 and 30 August 2024;
- Caithness Courier – 21 and 28 August 2024; and
- Press & Journal Highland and Aberdeenshire editions – 20 and 26 August 2024.

A maildrop postcard was distributed to over 27,000 properties from 19 August 2024, around the two landfall sites and the route of the onshore cable and converter stations.

The project webpage was maintained during the consultation period, which houses all the consultation material that was available to those attending the events. The material is available from the Documents tab of the website[1]. A link to the webpage was included in all the material, adverts and booklet **Appendix 1**: and **Appendix 2:**.

An animated video showing a virtual marine cable-laying process was shown at each event and included prominently on the project webpage.

Stakeholders and members of the public were encouraged to email the project's Community Liaison Manager with questions or feedback. Contact details were provided in all of the consultation and promotional materials.

Stakeholder Notification

The Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils were emailed a copy of the public notice and an event information poster two weeks prior to the public consultation events between February and June 2024. They were also provided with links to the project webpage and invited to attend the events or request further information if required.

Statutory consultees and community councils were provided a copy of the Pre-Application Notice (PAN) consultation on 27 July 2024. The PAN outlined the approach to consultation including the timing of the events and a list of the parties that had received a copy of the PAN.

[1] https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/spittal--peterhead-subsea-cable-link/

The following community councils were notified:

Caithness:

- Watten;
- Bower
- Sinclair's Bay; and
- Halkirk.

Aberdeenshire:

- Buchan East;
- Longside;
- Fraserburgh;
- Peterhead;
- Invercairn; and
- Rathen, Memsie and Cortes.

Discussion with Statutory Consultees

Statutory consultees notified of the pre-application consultation were:

- East Grampian Coastal Partnership;
- Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team;
- Moray Firth Partnership;
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency;
- Northern Lighthouse Board;
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency; and
- NatureScot.

Consultation Material

A consultation booklet was created containing all the key information about the marine HVDC cable to support the consultation process. The booklet was available online prior to the event and could be downloaded from the Documents tab of the project webpage[2].

Hard copies of the booklet were distributed to attendees along with supporting material on SSEN Transmission's broader Pathway to 2030 context. Information pop-up banners showing key information from the booklet, and a large format banner available showing the route of the marine cable and location of the landfalls were also displayed at the events. Attendees were encouraged to annotate paper maps with local information.

Copies of consultation material from previous events held in May and June 2023 are also available from the Documents tab of the project webpage[3].

Additional material relating to the onshore land cable element of the project, including a booklet, maps, and information banners, were provided on an informational basis alongside the marine cable information. It was made clear to attendees on entry that the land cable element was separate to the marine HVDC

[2] https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/spittal-to-peterhead/pac-1-documents/spittal--peterhead-hvdc-marine-cable-consultation-booklet.pdf

[3] https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/spittal-to-peterhead/pac-1-documents/spittal-to-peterhead-hvdc-link-maps.pdf

cable and was not part of the current statutory consultation process for the MLA to MD-LOT The land cable information material is also available on the project website under the Documents tab.

Public Consultation Events

Early Non-Statutory Consultation

In May and June 2023, potential subsea cable corridors between various landfall locations in Caithness, Aberdeenshire and Moray were presented, informing the route selection process. Further detail is provided in Section 3 Stakeholder Engagement of the Marine Environmental Assessment (MEA). Statutory PAC consultation

Formal statutory marine consultation events were held across seven venues in Caithness and Aberdeenshire in September 2024:

- Tuesday 3 September, 3–7pm Dalrymple Hall, Fraserburgh, AB43 9BD – **18 attendees**
- Wednesday 4 September, 3–7pm St Fergus Village Hall, Peterhead, AB42 3QD – **25 attendees**
- Thursday 5 September, 3–7pm Longside Parish Church Hall, Peterhead, AB42 4XN – **40 attendees**
- Monday 9 September, 3–7pm Keiss Village Hall, Wick, KW1 4XB – **12 attendees**
- Tuesday 10 September, 3–7pm Norseman Hotel, Wick, KW1 4NL – **8 attendees**
- Wednesday 11 September, 11–1pm Spittal Village Hall, Wick, KW1 5XR – **16 attendees**
- Wednesday 11 September, 3–7pm Watten Village Hall, Watten, KW1 5XN – **24 attendees**

Responses and Key Issues

Formal Feeback

The formal feedback period closed on 15 October 2024, 6 weeks after the first statutory PAC consultation events were held in September 2024. A feedback form was included in the PAC consultation booklet, and an online version of the form was also available via the project website.

Following the PAC events, a meeting was held with NatureScot on 10th October to provide feedback on the contents of the MEA and a meeting was also held with JNCC on similar topics on 11th October. This was followed up with formal advice from Nature.Scot. Feedback was received from the MCGA about what they would expect in the MEA and requested to be consulted on all ML applications. Further feedback is envisaged from statutory consultees upon submission of the MLA.

Only five pieces of feedback were received from members of the public via the formal channels in relation to the marine cable (**Table 1**). One was submitted via the online feedback form, three were emailed directly to the Community Liaison Manager, and one was submitted in hard copy.

Table 1 Formal Consultation Feedback

Comment	Applicant Response	Where comment has been considered in the project
Two positive comments about our consultation efforts and the level of information provided about the project.	Noted	Noted
Suggestion to set up a forum to coordinate and share schedules among other renewable energy developers in the North East, and also with the ports to allow the safe passage of marine traffic.	SSEN Transmission project teams representing EGL2, EGL3, Spittal-Peterhead HVDC Link and Netherton Hub are active members of the Peterhead Developers Forum, established in 2023 to facilitate discussions and ways of working between developers who have an interest in and around the Peterhead area.	This has been considered and discussed in Section 3 Stakeholder Engagement of the MEA.
The strandings of pilot whales and other marine life should be fully understood before further disturbance of the seabed takes place.	Understanding any potential impacts of our project on marine life is of substantial interest to SSEN Transmission. We are required to undertake a marine environmental assessment as part of the marine licensing process for our subsea cables. We have consulted with nature conservation bodies such as Nature.Scot and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee on the contents and conclusions of this assessment to ensure that they reflect the current scientific evidence base. In the marine environmental assessment, we set out the potential environmental impacts of our project on the marine environment, and the steps we are taking to avoid, minimise, and mitigate those impacts, based on the latest scientific evidence. This assessment includes impacts on marine mammals such as pilot whales, and other marine life.	Marine Megafauna have been considered and discussed in Section 7.4 Marine Megafauna of the MEA. Embedded mitigation including a Marine Mammal Protection Plan (MMPP) will be incorporated into the project to minimise the potential for impacts on marine mammals occurring in the area.

Comment	Applicant Response	Where comment has been considered in the project
	In addition to assessing any impacts that we may have, we are also required to follow all relevant guidance, including the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee guidelines on or minimising the risk of injury to marine mammals from geophysical surveys (seismic survey guidelines) 2017. More widely, as part of our sustainability strategy, SSEN Transmission has committed to becoming industry leaders in marine habitat monitoring and restoration, and as such will invest in projects to monitor and restore the marine environment.	
Consideration for fishermen and claims that they could potentially lose income. Potential for impacts on food security due to fishing areas reducing.	The project team, via our Fisheries Liaison Officers (FLOs), are in communication with any fishers affected by the potential subsea cable route. The project team will ensure advanced notice is given to all affected fishermen before any installation works are undertaken. Once the cable is suitably protected, fisheries access will be fully restored. Exclusions and reinstatements will be indicated to the fishing industry ahead of time. Several desktop studies and environmental surveys have already been undertaken by SSEN Transmission to ensure that the cable route will have as little impact on the marine environment as practicably possible. This includes avoiding sensitive habitats and protected areas wherever possible. The project team are in contact with the appropriate regulatory bodies and are committed to ensuring that works adhere to applicable UK and Scottish regulations, as well as industry best practice.	This has been considered and discussed in Section 7.6 Commercial Fisheries of the MEA, including outlined embedded mitigation measures.

Comment	Applicant Response	Where comment has been considered in the project
	Minimising environmental impacts was a key driver in selecting our subsea cable corridor. This includes avoiding sensitive areas and protected habitats wherever possible. We have also prioritised a corridor that maximises subsea cable burial in the seabed, rather than surface laying and protecting it. While there may be some impacts on the seabed from the installation of the subsea cable, it is expected that these impacts will be short term and transient. We are working closely with our consultants' contractors to ensure that we identify any potential environmental impacts to the seabed, so that we can avoid, mitigate, and/or minimise them.	
Who is paying for the infrastructure? Tax payers?	It is electricity bill payers and generation developers, rather than tax payers, who share the costs of constructing, operating and maintaining the transmission network. We are closely regulated by the independent energy regulator, Ofgem, for the work we do constructing, operating, and maintaining the transmission network in the north of Scotland. The costs are shared between all those using the transmission system, including generation developers and electricity consumers. Ofgem set how much money we invest, what return we make on this investment and how these costs are recovered from users of the electricity transmission system.	This has been considered and discussed in Section 1 Project Need and Background of the MEA.

Comment	Applicant Response	Where comment has been considered in the project
The whole project seems unsustainable. Are there enough precious metals in the world to make all the cables required?	This project will contribute to our country and the world's sustainable future. The Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Link project, along with our other Pathway to 2030 projects, will play a significant role in unlocking the abundant renewable energy capacity of Scotland, increasing the UK's capacity to deliver clean energy to more households. Delivery of this project will help Scotland and the UK meet net zero targets and support the shift to a cleaner and more sustainable future. We are already engaging with our supply chains to ensure a coordinated approach to delivering the Pathway to 2030 projects. Last November our supply chain and contractors gathered in Glasgow to commit to a delivery charter which commits all those working on the 2030 programme to a series of key working principles, including a focus on leaving a legacy and positive impact in the communities where infrastructure will be hosted.	This has been considered and discussed in Section 1 Project Need and Background of the MEA.
Will the project have any interaction with the MOD Crimond Radio Site, given the cable landfall is south of the Crimond site? Is there any plans for any above ground works, or interactions with existing national power services within the area?	There is no perceived interaction with any of the operation of the Crimond Radio Site. All assets are laid underground and use of craneage is temporary and limited only where eg. cabins need to be lifted to accommodate cable jointing. No tower cranes are planned, however. This would be using mobile cranes.	Noted

Comment	Applicant Response	Where comment has been considered in the project
Why is the Spittal to Peterhead HVDC marine link necessary as well as the 400kV overhead line from Spittal to Beauly? Why can't you use the existing Caithness to Moray HVDC cable?	Given the volume of power needing to be transmitted having just one of these solutions would be insufficient. Having two alternate solutions, i.e. one overhead line on land and one subsea cable, also gives resilience to our network. If for example we suffered high winds that could damage the overhead lines, we still have the subsea link available to us. The existing Caithness to Moray HVDC cable is at full capacity hence the need for additional circuits to export the renewable power from the area of Caithness. One of the biggest changes to the renewable growth in the area is the introduction of Scotwind, offshore renewable projects that need to connect to the GB Grid, some of them in Caithness. More information on the planning behind our Pathway to 2030 projects including the national government policies and targets behind them can be found on SSEN Transmission's website.	This has also been considered and discussed in Section 1 Project Need and Background of the MEA.

Consideration of Stakeholder Feedback

The project team has considered the comments received during the PAC phase.

Concerns were raised relating to the potentially negative project impacts on pilot whale strandings, safe passage of marine traffic and potential impacts on the commercial fishing industry. These have been considered within the context of the project design process (**Table 1**) and have been addressed in the MEA; which sets out the potential environmental project impacts on the marine environment, and the steps being taken to avoid, minimise and mitigate those impacts, based on the latest scientific evidence.

These concerns are deemed to have been adequately considered and addressed with sufficient baseline information, impact assessment and mitigations proposed, provided within the project MLA and MEA.

Conclusions

Conclusions

The approach to public consultation has ensured that the local community have been given the opportunity to comment on the proposals and provide feedback. This has enabled locally important issues and concerns to be identified and subsequently considered. Consultation feedback has been pivotal in the selection of the proposed cable corridor.

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Public Notices

YING'S RESTAURANT LIMITED

On 4 July 2024, a petition was presented to Aberdeen Sheriff Court by the Advocate General for Scotland for and on behalf of the Commissioners for His Majesty's Revenue and Customs craving the Court inter alia to order that YING'S RESTAURANT LIMITED, 29a Crown Terrace, Aberdeen, AB11 6HD (registered office) (company registration number SC629111) be wound up by the Court and to appoint a liquidator. All parties claiming an interest must lodge Answers with Aberdeen Sheriff Court, Castle Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1WP within 8 days of intimation, service and advertisement.

A Rooney Officer of Revenue & Customs
HM Revenue & Customs Solicitor's Office and Legal Services Queen Elizabeth House, Edinburgh for Petitioner
Ref: Scotland/1223475/DBS

Public Notices

Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Plc
MARINE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010
THE MARINE LICENSING (PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2013

Notice is hereby given that Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission (SHE Transmission) plc, (No. SC213461) Inveralmond House, 200 Dunkeld Road, Perth, PH1 3AQ is planning to hold a pre-application consultation event regarding a proposed licensable marine activity, the installation of a subsea HVDC cable between Sinclair's Bay in Caithness and Rattray Head, near St Fergus, in Aberdeenshire (WGS84 UTM30N: 58.517899, -3.131507 & 57.602784, -1.824709).

The activity consists of:
- Pre lay cable route survey
- Route clearance
- Installation of ducts at landfalls
- Cable lay
- Cable burial
- Additional cable protection
- Post lay survey

Further information, can be obtained concerning the proposed subsea cable installation from:

Gillian Doig
Community Liaison Manager
Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission
M: [Redacted]
E: gillian.doig@sse.com
Grampian House, 200 Dunkeld Road, Perth PH1 3AQ

The pre-application consultation events will be held at:

Aberdeenshire:

Dalrymple Hall, Fraserburgh,
Tue 3 September 2024, 3-7pm

St Fergus Village Hall, St Fergus,
Wed 4 September 2024, 3-7pm

Longside Parish Church Hall, Longside,
Thu 5 September 2024, 3-7pm

Caithness:

Keiss Village Hall, Keiss,
Mon 9 September 2024, 3-7pm

Norseman Hotel, Wick,
Tue 10 September 2024, 3-7pm

Watten Village Hall, Watten,
Wed 11 September 2024, 3-7pm

Persons wishing to provide comments on the proposed installation of a subsea cable can do so by writing to the prospective applicant at:
gillian.doig@sse.com

Or by post to

Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc,
(No. SC213461), Inveralmond House, 200 Dunkeld Road, Perth PH1 3AQ not later than 15/10/2024.

Further information can be viewed on the project website at ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/spittal--peterhead-subsea-cable-link/

Comments should be dated and should clearly state the name (in block capitals) and full return email or postal address of those making comment. Comments made to the prospective applicant are not representations to the Scottish Ministers. If Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc submits an application for a marine licence to the Scottish Ministers, an opportunity will be given for representations to be made to the Scottish Ministers on the application.

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Cut is 'unfair' on pensioners

Pensioners in Caithness and Sutherland face higher energy bills to heat their homes, a report found.

By John Davidson
john.davidson@hnmedia.co.uk

FAR north MP Jamie Stone is calling for a rethink on the "unfair" changes to winter fuel payments after the universal benefit for pensioners was scrapped.

The move to withdraw the automatic payment was announced by the Scottish Government last week after a decision by the UK government left a funding shortfall for a proposed Holyrood-run alternative.

The payment to pensioners, worth between £100 and £300, will now be means-tested, only going to those who qualify for pension tax credit.

With more pensioners in Caithness and elsewhere in the Highlands suffering from fuel poverty than across the rest of Scotland, calls have been made to broaden the eligibility criteria for the payments so that people in need are not missing out.

> **It is the sheer unfairness of it that is upsetting to my constituents.**
> Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross MP Jamie Stone

Jamie Stone says he will raise the issue when parliament returns.

Mr Stone, the Liberal Democrat MP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, said: "Again and again, people have raised this issue with me. It is the sheer unfairness of it that is upsetting to my constituents.

"The far north is already one of the coldest parts of the UK and the government really must see that pensioners on the margins of qualifying for pension credit should not lose out.

"I shall be raising this matter when parliament returns, in the hope that the government will reconsider the qualifying criteria."

A previous report showed that residents in Caithness and Sutherland pay 25 per cent more for fuel than the rest of Scotland.

The report by environmental charity Changeworks showed it cost an estimated £3132 per year to heat an average three-bedroom property in the far north compared to £2450 in other parts of Scotland.

Simon Francis, coordinator of the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, said of the decision to restrict access to the payment: "This is a decision made in Westminster by the Chancellor, but it is pensioners in the Highlands and across the rest of the UK that will pay the price.

"We urge the Chancellor to broaden the targeting of the winter fuel payment which would enable a more generous scheme to be introduced by Scottish ministers.

"The Highlands has one of the highest rates of fuel poverty and unless we see urgent action to keep people warm this winter, one of the first actions of the new UK government will be to condemn more vulnerable Scottish households to cold damp homes this winter."

Caithness, Sutherland and Ross MSP Maree Todd urged constituents to check their eligibility for pension credit.

"The decision by the Labour UK government to means test the winter fuel payment ensures that pensioners in Highland will face the brunt of Westminster economic chaos," the SNP member said.

"This decision, made in Westminster, has resulted in the Scottish Government's budget being cut by an estimated £160 million."

She added: "My constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross already faces some of the highest levels of fuel poverty in the country.

"The Labour UK government's shameful decision to reduce support will only exacerbate fuel poverty rates and push vulnerable households in my constituency and across the Highlands further into hardship during the harsh winter months.

"I am strongly encouraging pensioners to check if they are eligible for pension credit to ensure that, if they are, they will still receive the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment that they are entitled to."

Caithness Citizens' Advice urged people to contact them on 01847 894243 and 01955 605989 or email THUBureau@caithnesscab.casonline.org.uk, to ensure they are not missing out on payments.

■ Maree Todd: Highlands will bear the brunt of winter fuel payment chop – page 14

Ofgem price cap predicted to rise significantly in October

THE cost of energy is set to rise again, according to the latest prediction from energy consultancy Cornwall Insight.

It is forecasting a significant rise in the Ofgem price cap from October 1, with a further increase likely to follow in January.

Coming on the back of the news that pensioners are set to be means-tested for the winter fuel payment, it means households could be left struggling again this winter.

Scotland's national advice service says it will come as a shock to households still struggling with debts built up last winter.

The analysis from Cornwall Insight found that the typical household faces paying an extra £146 per year, with average bills rising from £1568 per year at present to £1714. Ofgem is due to announce the exact level of the price cap on Friday.

Conor Forbes, policy director at Advice Direct Scotland, said: "This predicted rise in Ofgem's energy price cap will come as an unwelcome shock to households preparing for what looks set to be another long and difficult winter.

Conor Forbes of Advice Direct Scotland.

"The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is still being felt across the country and many people are struggling under the burden of energy debts they built up last winter.

"Customers who are worried about the coming price rises should contact their supplier in case support is available.

"Now is also a good time to start comparing energy deals.

"We urge people across Scotland not to struggle alone – our expert advisers can provide free advice on the support available and ensure that households are claiming all the benefits they are entitled to."

Advice Direct Scotland runs the energyadvice.scot service, which provides free, impartial, and practical advice on energy bills for anyone in Scotland and can be contacted on 0808 196 8660.

Cornwall Insight said that, over the past few months, gas and electricity wholesale prices have rebounded from their 30-month lows in February.

Dr Craig Lowrey, principal consultant at Cornwall Insight, said: "The government will need to adopt a two-pronged approach to tackle rising energy bills. Immediate action is needed to ease the financial burden on households.

"We must also develop a long-term strategy to secure our energy future. This means a fundamental overhaul of our energy system, with a strong emphasis on increasing domestic energy production."

Bomb test plans in Flow Country axed

By Alan Hendry
alan.hendry@hnmedia.co.uk

PLANS to test anti-personnel bombs in the Flow Country have been scrapped, it has emerged.

The Guardian reported that a British defence company, Overwatch, had proposed the tests in an area including part of the protected Strathmore peatlands.

The story was published a matter of weeks after the Flow Country was granted Unesco World Heritage Site status. The newspaper claimed its intervention had led to the plans being abandoned.

The 4000-square-kilometre Flow Country is home to a complex and fragile ecosystem with a vast array of plants that act as an important defence against climate change.

The Guardian reported that Overwatch had asked the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) for permission to carry out "live fire testing" of anti-personnel bombs dropped by drones onto land owned by Lord Thurso.

Lord Thurso later told Highland News & Media that there was a long-standing arrangement with another company to allow controlled live testing in a safe environment in old quarries on estate land. He described the Guardian report as "a complete non-story".

The Strathmore peatlands Site of Special Scientific Interest includes an extensive area around Loch More. Picture: Alan Hendry

Overwatch describes itself on its website as "an independent British defence company pioneering design, engineering and manufacture of unmanned systems and payloads".

The Guardian reported that the tests had been cancelled after it told Overwatch that the area earmarked for them included part of the Strathmore peatlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), noted for its peatland habitats and breeding birds.

According to the newspaper, "Overwatch's chief operating officer, Mark Melhorn, said the firm had no idea that the area it planned to use was in the Flow Country World Heritage Site or included part of the Strathmore peatlands".

It added: "Melhorn said Overwatch would immediately cancel its application to the CAA and postpone all further testing of its bombs in the UK."

The newspaper quoted him as saying: "We had been put on to the area in question through the third-party provider we are using [and] at no time had it been flagged to us that the area had any protections in place."

The nature agency NatureScot is reported to have said it was surprised Overwatch had not realised the area was so heavily protected.

Lord Thurso told Highland News & Media: "We have had a long-standing arrangement with a company called OCS to test munitions in an entirely safe way. It has never involved SSSIs and it has never involved dropping anything.

"The great thing about these quarries is they've got 20ft high walls, so anything that goes off is held in the quarry. It is incredibly safe.

"As far as we are concerned, we are very happy to do very safe, controlled live testing in old quarries which are not on an SSSI and where we have people monitoring at each end, so that the public can't go wandering up."

Regarding the Overwatch plans, he added: "We had an enquiry. We were told in June that they didn't want to go ahead.

"As confirmed in the Guardian, the site we use is not an SSSI. It's a disused quarry, and there is no question of us ever having permitted any form of bomb or anything else being detonated in the Flow Country – so as far as I'm concerned this is a complete non-story."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Arrest over north thefts

A 37-YEAR-old woman has been arrested and charged following a series of thefts across Thurso and Wick.

Police confirmed property had been stolen from houses and sheds.

A Police spokesperson said: "We'd like to thank the members of the public who assisted us during the investigation."

Boat ropes cut

ROPES securing fishing boats at Thurso have been cut by vandals. Police are appealing for information about two incidents of vandalism at the harbour.

The first occurred between 6am and 10.10am on Tuesday, August 20, with a second incident taking place between 9.30pm on Tuesday, August 20, and 8.30am on Wednesday, August 21.

Anybody with information is asked to contact police in Caithness on 101. People can also use the contact us form on the Police Scotland website or report anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 55511. The reference number is PS-20240820-1026.

Huge challenge to transform housing across the Highlands

CENSUS figures recently released show the scale of the housing transformation needed across the Highlands and Islands to address the housing emergency, an MSP has said.

For the first time, the figures show that more people own their own homes outright in Scotland than rent or have a mortgage. This is mostly due to the country's ageing population.

There has also been a sharp increase in the number of detached homes and the number of homes that are under-occupied.

Ariane Burgess, Scottish Green MSP for the Highlands and Islands, has highlighted the under-occupancy figures saying they point to a particular challenge for addressing the housing emergency in rural communities.

> **We urgently need to think creatively about better use of our existing housing stock.**
> Ariane Burgess

Many Highland homes would struggle to meet new demands on energy efficiency.

"Nationally, just under a third of homes have more bedrooms than needed but in my region those figures are substantially higher," she said.

"I often speak to constituents who feel trapped in homes that are too big for them to maintain and heat but who feel unable to move due to a lack of suitable smaller properties in their local area. This in turn makes it difficult for young people and families to find affordable homes."

Ms Burgess believes that this, combined with the latest figures on short-term lets and second homes, points to the complex challenges facing councils when seeking to address the housing emergency.

According to Scottish Government figures released last month, island authorities have almost a third of new short-term lets but only 9.6 per cent of the population – islands themselves make up two per cent of the population.

Less than one per cent of homes in Scotland are registered as second homes, yet in island authorities the figure is consistently higher.

"We urgently need to think creatively about better use of our existing housing stock, rather than solely focusing on building more new homes," Ms Burgess said. "Green policies implemented while we were in government, like bringing in registration of short-term lets and giving councils new powers over taxation on empty homes, has helped us to see the scale of the challenge; it's vital the government uses this data to support the creation of more rural homes."

ROADTEST Honda e:Ny1

This Honda's impressive but also frustrating

By Alan Douglas
newsdesk@hnmedia.co.uk

IT'S probably the daftest name ever conceived for a car, with the possible exception of Toyota's electric bZ4X.

The gossip is Honda's e:Ny1 was never meant to be called that but it was down to an administrative error.

The story goes that someone within the depths of Honda's HQ accidentally copied-and-pasted part of a secure password onto the online trademark application. By the time it was noticed, it was too late to be changed.

Whatever the truth, Honda's second venture into the electric car arena has a distinctive tag, which is only a slight departure from its CR-V, ZR-V and HR-V brothers.

When I got hold of the e:Ny1 I put aside all thoughts of its name and looked in more detail at the impressive package.

Like every other Honda, the build quality is first-class with some attractive styling which isn't common in cars from the land of the Rising Sun.

There's increasing competition in the electric car market in all segments and in this case it's up against similarly-sized models from Hyundai, Kia, Nissan Peugeot, Renault, VW and Volvo.

What it offers apart from Honda's superb reputation for reliability is a stack of equipment as standard and a more conventional package than their first EV venture, the Honda e city car which was discontinued at the start of this year.

It was quirky with among other unique features, door-mounted rear-view cameras rather than traditional door mirrors.

But it failed to capture buyers largely because it was pretty expensive and had a low range of only just over 100 miles on a full charge which would have been fine for urban commutes but not much use for longer journeys.

The e:Ny1 is slightly better on range but the claimed 256 miles is pretty optimistic unless the weather and conditions are just right and you don't need to switch on the lights or wipers or cool down with the aircon or turn up the heater all of which do a fine job of draining the battery's reserves.

Having said that, the regeneration system does well to keep the battery topped up when decelerating and braking so if you drive sensibly you should get the most from the technology.

Because of its bigger battery, the charging time is quite good too, taking about 45 minutes if you can find a rapid charger and about six hours through a domestic wallbox.

The test car was the top spec Advance model which as well as a comprehensive list of standard equipment, including 18-inch alloys, synthetic leather seats and a rear-view camera, adds a panoramic roof, heated steering wheel, additional parking sensors, powered tailgate and a higher quality audio system which I found particularly good.

I was impressed by the car's performance on the road with great stability and firm ride thanks to the weight of the underfloor battery and like all EVs, the power to the front wheels is instant and seamless to accelerate to 62mph from a standing start in just seven-and-a-half seconds.

I kept it in Eco mode for most of the time for efficient performance and that was quite sufficient for everyday use on a range of roads and surfaces.

There's plenty of storage space and leg and headroom for everyone board even with the panoramic roof.

The rear seats fold flat for extra storage as the boot isn't the biggest in its class but it'll still hold most of what you'll carry during the week.

I was impressed with the car but once again got frustrated at all the controls being contained within the 15-inch central touchscreen, even if it is split into three sections, with the lower one only for the air-con and heating.

I know it's to save space and clutter on the dash but means a bit of fiddling just to do simple tasks and I worry that's creating a distracting safety hazard.

carfacts

Honda e:Ny1 Advance
PRICE: £42,195 (£42,845 as tested)
ENGINE: Electric Motor with 68.8 kWh battery, front wheel drive
POWER: 204 PS
TORQUE: 310 Nm
TOP SPEED: 99mph
0-62mph: 7.6 secs
RANGE: 256 miles
CHARGING TIME: 45 mins (rapid charger) 6 hours (home wallbox)

Autism training offered by group

Encompass Caithness has received a £500 donation from Wick-based North Coast Competitions. Raquel and Shaun Macmillan (right) handed over the cheque to Sarah Scollay, the group's chairperson, alongside other office-bearers and members. The presentation took place in Wick Youth Club. Picture: Robert MacDonald / Northern Studios

By Alan Hendry
alan.hendry@hnmedia.co.uk

MEMBERS of Encompass Caithness say they have been rendered "speechless" by the level of local support for their campaigning efforts.

The group, which is pushing for new and improved social care services for people with autism, neurodivergent conditions and additional support needs, has raised almost £5000 over the summer – including a £500 donation from North Coast Competitions that was handed over this week.

Backing has also come from local councillors and political figures.

Meanwhile, the group has been carrying out a three-month survey of its stakeholders and the findings are likely to be issued in the coming weeks. The group says these will highlight "an isolated and marginalised group of vulnerable people who feel they have been forgotten about and badly let down by the authorities".

Encompass Caithness held its first meeting in October 2023, spurred on by a lack of respite care in the county following the termination of this service previously provided at Thor House in Thurso.

> **We are heartened by the council's commitment to resume respite care for children and their families.**
> Sarah Scolley

The group had stalls at community events during the summer months to help raise its profile and to raise money.

It wants to be seen as a "solutions-based organisation", working positively and constructively with others.

Chairperson Sarah Scollay said: "We have offered Highland Council to provide three days of free training to school staff across the county. The training, for up to 30 people per day, will be presented by Dr Tanya Tenant, a leading national autism trainer."

There are plans to deliver a one-stop shop in Mackays Hotel, Wick, on November 7, giving information about rights, entitlements and the support that is available.

Ms Scollay also said: "The group is pleased to be working closely with Councillor Raymond Bremner, the Highland Council leader, to see improvements in services in the county, many of which, including the Wellington Centre [in Wick], have been closed in recent years.

"We are heartened by the council's commitment to resume respite care for local children and their families and are now asking NHS Highland for a similar commitment to support adult respite care.

"We also have a huge fundraising raffle – the Big One – that we are working towards. In the long run we would like to see some form of day centre provision that can provide meaningful activities and person-centred support.

"Encompass Caithness continues to have an amazing year. The generosity of this county leaves us speechless at times, but it certainly inspires us to achieve our objectives."

Erin Shearsmith, left, will be supplying her products to Ellen Dawe from Georgia. The two are pictured at Melvich.

First US deal for Halkirk firm

A HALKIRK-based company is delighted to have secured a wholesale American stockist for a range of its home fragrances.

After stocking local outlets such as the Heat Centre, River Bothy, Old Pulteney and North Point Distillery, Erin Shearsmith from The Caithness Aromatics Company has recently gained her first international wholesale orders in America with FarmHouse PoundCakes Artisanal Bakery and Cafe.

Erin said: "I'm over the moon that my products are available in America and so grateful to Ellen for the opportunity. Looking forward to continuing to grow my small business and see where it goes next."

Caithness Aromatics will be supplying handcrafted home fragrances to the American market for use in its Luxury Reed Diffusers.

Ellen Dawe from Farmhouse PoundCakes met up with Erin at Melvich while on a trip to Scotland this week but the wholesale deal had already been sealed some weeks in advance. Ellen first discovered Caithness Aromatics at the Halkirk Highland Games a couple of years ago and has been a regular customer since. She will now be a wholesale stockist of Erin's products at her shop in Cornelia, Georgia.

Caithness Aromatics creates a range of luxury home fragrance products, hand-crafted in Halkirk. Established in 2020, the company says it is "inspired by the scenery and scents of the beautiful Scottish Highlands".

Buchan Observer
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Advertiser: SSEN Transmission Page: 9/32

NEWS

(ISC Vice Chair), Cllr Alan Turner, and Cllr Jim Gifford (SC Vice Chair).

vices Committee Cllr Alan Turner said: "By extending the lifecycle of these items we support a shift towards a more circular economy. Recycling is good, but it is even better to rehome our pre-loved items so that they can be reused again and again.

"Initiatives of this kind reduce the need to extract new raw materials for new product – and avoid the emissions generated from doing so – while also preventing goods from needlessly ending up in landfill or being incinerated."

Sustainability Committee (SC) Chair Cllr Sarah Dickinson, who was nominated to be a champion for re-use at the time of the project's feasibility study, said: "None of this would be possible without the charities. I am grateful for their help in providing more and more opportunities for reuse across Aberdeenshire.

"Choosing to reuse quality pre-loved items is an effective way to protect natural resources, reduce our carbon impact, and save money."

It is estimated that the reuse containers will save around 293 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2e) per year. That is the equivalent of taking 156 cars off the road for a full 12 months or growing around 14,000 trees for a year.

Aberdeenshire Council welcomed £37,095 in funding for the new containers through the Scottish Government's Recycling Improvement Fund Small Grant Scheme, administered by Zero Waste Scotland.

David Gunn, Recycling Improvement Fund Manager at Zero Waste Scotland, said: "It's fantastic to see improved reuse infrastructure now in place in Aberdeenshire.

"Opting for second-hand, and donating goods once they're no longer needed is a great way for residents and visitors to protect the environment and support local good causes at the same time.

"A total of 40 projects across Scotland have now benefitted from Recycling Improvement Fund grants, helping hundreds of thousands of people to live more sustainably and create Scotland's circular economy. We are proud to work with Aberdeenshire Council to successfully embed reuse at its recycling centres, benefitting both people and planet."

Aberdeenshire Council was the first local authority in Scotland to develop and approve a carbon budget, aligning itself with the Scottish Government's ambitious targets.

The council supported this effort through the creation of a carbon toolkit that analyses the potential costs and savings to be made through its various carbon reduction projects, ensuring that emissions are reduced in the most cost-effective manner.

For more information about Aberdeenshire Council's Household Recycling Centres opening times to access the reuse containers, please visit aberdeenshire.gov.uk/RecyclingCentres.

Difficult winter

Households are facing another "extremely long and difficult" winter after Ofgem confirmed that the energy price cap is due to rise.

The amount suppliers are able to charge will rise from £1,568 to £1,717, effective from October 1. This is a 10 per cent increase on the current level and will see the average bill rise by around £149 per year.

Andrew Bartlett, chief executive of Advice Direct Scotland, said: "For many Scottish households, the winter ahead will be extremely long and difficult, with no respite in the form of cheaper prices likely to arrive until spring 2025 at the earliest. To make matters worse, many are still struggling with the cost of living and are saddled with energy-related debts that they built up last winter and have been unable to pay off. Anyone experiencing difficulties should visit www.energyadvice.scot or call 0808 196 8660 for assistance."

CERTAIN SONG: Baccara will be performing at next year's MacMoray Easter festival.

Music festival set to boogie with Baccara

BY ENA SARACEVIC

Festival-goers should get ready to boogie as Spanish duo Baccara are set to take to the stage at what will probably be the last MacMoray Easter festival.

Baccara, known for their 1977 disco anthem Yes Sir, I Can Boogie, are the first act announced for next year's MacMoray Easter festival.

The news, which was announced on the official MacMoray Facebook page yesterday, has received hundreds of comments from festival-goers excited to see the duo perform next year.

Recorded in the Netherlands and released in 1977, the song was an enormous pan-European hit that eventually became the unofficial anthem of Scotland football fans.

Yes Sir, I Can Boogie was first linked to Scottish football in 2015 when a video of Aberdeen and international defender Andy Considine singing the song with others during his stag do was leaked on YouTube.

The hit track reached number three in one UK singles chart in mid-November 2020 when Scotland defeated Serbia in a Euro 2020 play-off, with footage of Considine and his team-mates dancing and singing along to the track going viral on social media.

The song, which has since been covered by Goldfrapp, The Fratellis and Sophie Ellis-Bextor, was heard being sung loudly and proudly by Scotland fans throughout the tournament in 2021.

The song was heard again as Scotland headed to Germany after qualifying for Euro 2024.

One of the original members of Baccara, Maria Mendiola, passed away in 2021. After Mendiola's passing, Cristina Sevilla decided to continue with the formation as a homage to her legacy.

Joining up with experienced singer Helen De Quiroga, the pair have toured internationally and released new music.

The pair are now making their way to Elgin next April to perform for the festival-goers at MacMoray.

Earlier this month, thousands descended on Cooper Park for the first-ever MacMoray summer festival.

Award-winning acts like Status Quo, Bonnie Tyler and Aqua performed for music-lovers during the weekend.

The Press and Journal previously reported that MacMoray would end next year after founder Andy Macdonald announced he was stepping down as he welcomes a new addition to his family.

However, there has been an influx of calls from local and big businesses alike to continue the festival which has left music-lovers wondering whether there is still a chance MacMoray could find a way to endure beyond next year's offerring.

The last MacMoray music festival is scheduled for Saturday April 19 and Sunday April 20.

Moray Cup craze continues as drink hits eBay – with massive mark-ups

It's fizziness as usual after a seven-year wait.

Moray Cup is already being resold on eBay for a mark-up, only 24 hours after its long-awaited comeback.

Fans queued from 7.30am on Friday to get the first taste of the limited-edition soft drink, seven years after it was originally discontinued, at Deveron Direct's Macduff warehouse.

Police were even called because the volume of cars threatened to get out of hand in the Banffshire industrial estate.

The red, "fruit-flavour" fizzy drink is exclusively available from the wholesaler in person. However, another avenue to purchase the drink has become available.

Several eBay listings for Moray Cup have now appeared, giving those further afield a chance to buy – at a price.

The drink is being sold at large mark-ups, with bidding on one listing reaching £17 per bottle.

Deveron Direct was selling Moray Cup on Friday at £15 for a 12-pack – working out at around £1.25 per bottle.

The P&J was present as hundreds queued for hours to get their hands on bottles.

Excitement was building as loyal fans have awaited Moray Cup's comeback for the better part of a decade.

The soft drink was originally produced by Macduff-based Sangs then later by Cott Macduff.

The business was then bought out in 2018 by Refresco, the company which now makes the new product.

It made its long awaited return, going back on sale exclusively via Deveron Direct in MacDuff's Station Brae.

COMING SOON: Work starts at the site of the drive-thru. Pictures by Kath Flannery.

New Popeye's branch under construction

BY BEN HENDRY

Work on a £1 million Popeye's fried chicken drive-thru has started at Altens in Aberdeen.

The new takeaway is being built in the car park of the Wellington Circle retail complex, meaning scores of spaces are being done away with.

And, amid the chain's rapid expansion, it could well be that AI is used to take orders at the Aberdeen premises.

Building papers reveal the development will cost £1m, and the Popeye's website lists the Altens branch as "coming soon".

It comes following the success of a Starbucks drive-thru at the retail park, which also boasts an Ikea and a Pure Gym.

A survey indicated there would still be ample parking despite the loss of 84 spaces.

Plans for a drive-thru at the spot date back years, but progress was hit by the pandemic.

Popeye's has started using artificial intelligence at some of its English drive-thru branches following a successful pilot.

It means that customers could be greeted by an AI voice called "Al" when they arrive to place an order.

And don't worry about it suffering a malfunction if faced with a bit of broad Doric. According to the firm, it has been developed to handle accents from "the length and breadth of the UK".

It can answer questions about the dishes on offer, while taking orders "in a conversational way".

Popeye's bosses say it will "revolutionise the drive-thru experience for the better".

However, McDonald's last month pulled the plug on using AI to take drive-thru orders, after issues left American customers frustrated. One reported that the technology tried putting bacon on some ice cream.

What do you think of the prospect of AI ordering? Let us know by emailing letters@pressandjournal.co.uk.

It comes months after the New Orleans-inspired chain opened their first north-east branch on Aberdeen's Union Street.

The firm is in the midst of a major expansion all over the UK, with 40-50 openings planned per year.

The takeaway is being built in the car park of the Wellington Circle retail complex.

Discovery of old hidden staircase waylays building's revamp plans

Plans to breathe new life into the former Aberdeen Youth Hostel have been upended by the discovery of a staircase hidden for almost 100 years.

The Queen's Road institution was originally built as a double villa in the late 19th Century.

It became a Hostelling Scotland venue in 1957 until its closure during the pandemic. The 65-bed site then spent two years lying empty, and was put up for sale for £1.5 million.

The plans to bring it back to life have been submitted by businessman Mark Cavanagh.

Initially, he wanted to divide it back into a pair of homes – with work planned to revamp both 8 and adjoining 8 1/2 into different properties.

But some early work threw these plans into turmoil.

A structural engineer was sent to check out some defects in the basement area.

The former Aberdeen Youth Hostel on Queen's Road.

Architects explained: "During the stripping out works it has been revealed that the original staircase built in 1895 is still intact – and located beneath the stair inserted in 1933.

"The client is now keen to reuse the original staircase and this requires further discussion with the planning service."

Separate plans will need to be sent to the council detailing the proposals for the basement, and the old staircase.

Historic stairs uncovered.

1.C Maildrop Postcards

Spittal to Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
TRANSMISSION

Marine pre-application consultation events

We are holding statutory pre-application consultation events for the marine elements of our proposed Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Link Project. The pre-application process is undertaken in advance of our Marine Licence application to the Marine Directorate.

During this consultation process, you will be able to meet the project team and view information on our proposal to install a 165km subsea HVDC cable between Sinclair's Bay in Caithness and Rattray Head, near St Fergus, in Aberdeenshire, and provide feedback via details on the back.

Non-statutory land cable information sharing

In addition to consultation on the subsea cable route, information will be shared on the preferred alignments of the land cable element of this project, which stretch between the landfall point at Sinclair's Bay and Banniskirk Hub, and the landfall at Rattray Head and Netherton Hub. Land cables are classed as Permitted Development and do not form part of the marine pre-application consultation process.

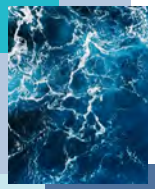
You are invited to attend your nearest consultation event:

Aberdeenshire:

Tuesday 3 September, 3–7pm
Dalrymple Hall, Fraserburgh, AB43 9BD

Wednesday 4 September, 3–7pm
St Fergus Village Hall, St Fergus, AB42 3QD

Thursday 5 September, 3–7pm
Longside Parish Church Hall, Longside, AB42 4XN



Caithness:

Monday 9 September, 3–7pm
Keiss Village Hall, Keiss, KW1 4XB

Tuesday 10 September, 3–7pm
Norseman Hotel, Wick, KW1 4NL

Wednesday 11 September, 11–1pm
Spittal Village Hall, Spittal, KW1 5XR

Wednesday 11 September, 3–7pm
Watten Village Hall, Watten, KW1 5XN

Please contact our Community Liaison Manager if you have any questions:

Gillian Doig
200 Dunkeld Road, Perth, PH1 3GH

Tel: [Redacted]
Email: gillian.doig@sse.com

Find out more, register for project updates and provide feedback by scanning the QR code or visit **www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link**

@ssentransmission @SSETransmission

Appendix 2: Consultation Materials

2.A Pre-Application Consultation Booklet

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

Spittal to Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Subsea Cable Pre-Application Consultation

September 2024

ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/

Contents

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Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Powering change together

The time has come to further enhance Scotland's energy infrastructure, providing power for future generations as we move towards net zero.

The shift to a cleaner, more sustainable future is about more than climate change. It's about ensuring future generations have the same opportunities to thrive as we have all had.

Countries around the world are investing in their energy infrastructure to support the demands of modern economies and meet net zero targets. The UK is leading the way in building a modern, sustainable energy system for the future.

We all have a part to play

When it comes to net zero, we have to be in it together. The UK and Scottish governments have ambitious net zero targets, and we're playing our part in meeting them.

We work closely with the National Grid Electricity System Operator to connect vast renewable energy resources—harnessed by solar, wind, hydro and marine generation—to areas of demand across the country. Scotland is playing a big role in meeting this demand, exporting two thirds of power generated in our network.

But there's more to be done. By 2050, the north of Scotland is predicted to contribute over 50GW of low carbon energy to help deliver net zero. Today, our region has around 9GW of renewable generation connected to the network.

At SSEN Transmission, it is our role to build the energy system of the future.

We're investing £20 billion into our region's energy infrastructure this decade, powering more than ten million UK homes and 20,000 jobs, 9,000 of which will be here in Scotland.

More information about the policies and documents driving the need for the energy system for the future can be found here:

Who we are

We're responsible for maintaining and investing in the electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland. We're part of SSE plc, one of the world's leading energy companies with a rich heritage in Scotland that dates back more than 80 years. We are also closely regulated by the GB energy regulator Ofgem, who determines how much revenue we are allowed to earn for constructing, maintaining and renovating our transmission network.

What we do

We manage the electricity network across our region which covers a quarter of the UK's land mass, crossing some of the country's most challenging terrain.
We connect renewable energy sources to our network in the north of Scotland and then transport it to where it needs to be. From underground and subsea cables and overhead lines to electricity substations, our network keeps your lights on all year round.

Working with you

We understand that the work we do can have an impact on communities. So we're committed to minimising our impacts and maximising all the benefits that our developments can bring to your area. We're regularly assessed by global sustainability consultancy AccountAbility for how we engage with communities. That means we provide all the information you need to know about our plans and how they will impact communities like yours. The way we consult is also a two-way street. We want to hear people's views, concerns, or ideas and harness local knowledge so that our work benefits their communities: today and long into the future. You can share your views with us at: **ssen-transmission.co.uk/talk-to-us/contact-us/**

The Pathway to 2030

Building the energy system of the future will require delivery of significant infrastructure over the next few years. In partnership with the UK and Scottish governments, we're committed to meeting our obligation of connecting new, renewable energy to where it's needed by 2030.

Achieving Net Zero

By 2030, both the UK and Scottish governments are targeting a big expansion in offshore wind generation of 50GW and 11GW respectively. The Scottish Government has also set ambitious targets for an additional 12GW of onshore wind by 2030.

Across Great Britain, including the north of Scotland, there needs to be a significant increase in the capacity of the onshore electricity transmission infrastructure to deliver these 2030 targets and a pathway to net zero.

Securing our energy future

And it's not just about net zero. It's also about building a homegrown energy system, so that geopolitical turmoil around the world doesn't severely impact the UK and push up energy prices.

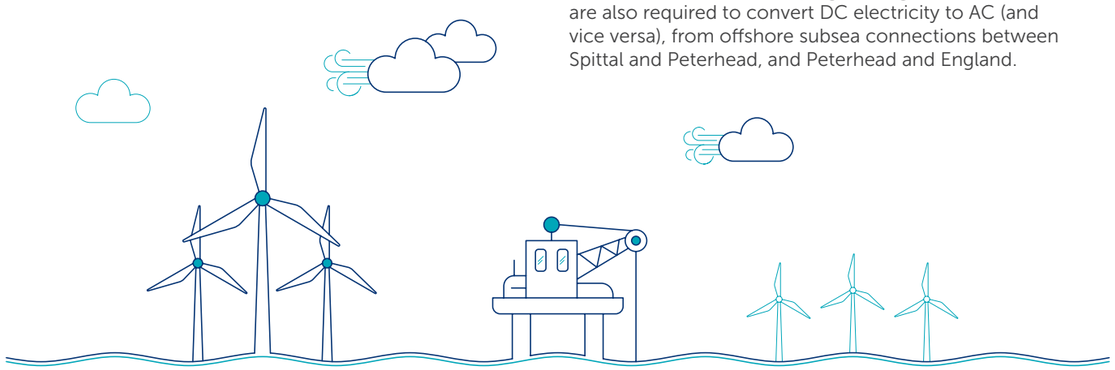
The UK Government's British Energy Security Strategy further underlines the need for this infrastructure, setting out plans to accelerate homegrown power for greater energy independence. The strategy aims to reduce the UK's dependence on and price exposure to global gas wholesale markets through the deployment of homegrown low carbon electricity generation supported by robust electricity network infrastructure.

Meeting our 2030 targets

In July 2022, National Grid, the Electricity System Operator (ESO), published the Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design (HND). This set out the blueprint for the onshore and offshore transmission infrastructure that's required to support the forecasted growth in the UK's renewable electricity. It's an ambitious plan that will help the UK achieve net zero.

What does this mean for the north and north-east of Scotland?

The north and the north-east of Scotland will play a key role in meeting these goals. The extensive studies that informed the ESO's Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design confirmed the requirement to reinforce the onshore corridors between Beauly and Peterhead, Beauly and Spittal in Caithness, and for an offshore subsea cable between Spittal and Peterhead. Providing a 400kV overhead line and high voltage subsea cable (HVDC) connection between these sites provides the significant capacity required to take power from large-scale onshore and offshore renewable generation to the north-east of Scotland. From there, it will be transported to demand centres via HVDC subsea cables. To support these developments, new 400kV substations are also required at key locations. At Spittal, Beauly, and Netherton near Peterhead, high voltage converter stations are also required to convert DC electricity to AC (and vice versa), from offshore subsea connections between Spittal and Peterhead, and Peterhead and England.

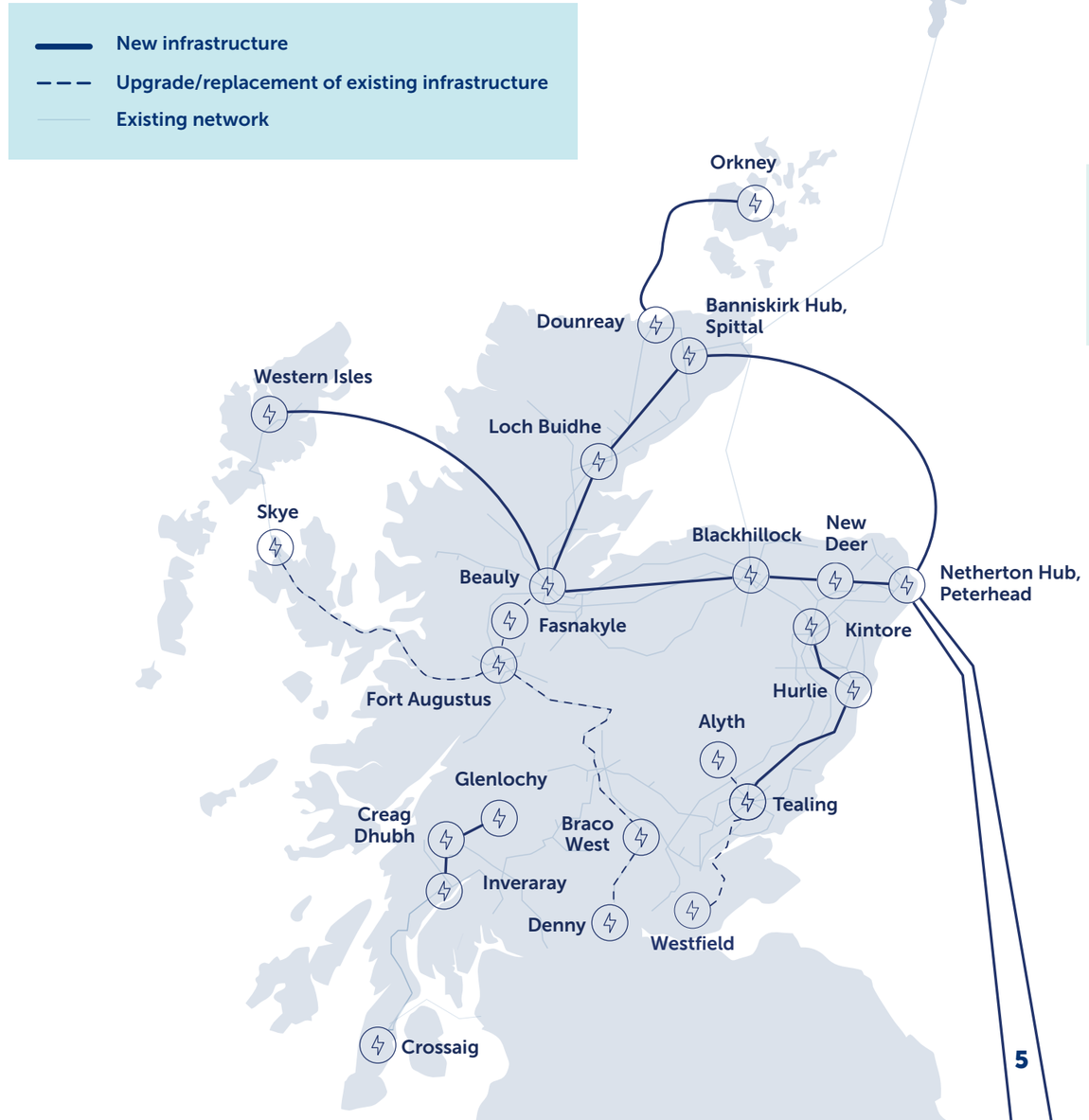


Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Future network investment requirements

Our 2030 targets are the first step on the transition to net zero. The UK Government has a target to decarbonise our electricity system by 2035 and fully decarbonise our economy by becoming net zero by 2050, with the Scottish Government committing to net zero five years earlier, by 2045.

To achieve these targets, further investment in new low carbon electricity generation and the enabling electricity transmission network infrastructure will be required. The next stage of strategic network planning across Great Britain has now been outlined in the independent Electricity System Operator, National Grid ESO's, 'Beyond 2030' report, published in March this year. For the north of Scotland, the ESO's plan recommends several new and upgraded onshore and offshore reinforcements that the ESO has assessed are required to help deliver net zero targets. These projects, which will be subject to extensive public consultation, are at the very early stages of development and further details will be set out in due course.



Project overview

We're leading some exciting projects to power change in the UK and Scotland. To support the delivery of 2030 offshore wind targets set by the UK and Scottish Governments, and to power local communities, we need to upgrade our existing network. In some key areas, we need to develop entirely new infrastructure, and quickly.

This project will provide a 2GW bi-pole, 525kV HVDC link between Spittal in Caithness and Peterhead in Aberdeenshire.

At each end of the HVDC link, 400kV AC substations will supply power to (or receive power from) newly constructed high voltage AC/DC converter stations at Spittal (Banniskirk Hub) and Peterhead (Netherton Hub), depending on the directional flow of the power. Consultation for the converter station sites has already occurred, and planning applications will be submitted later this year.

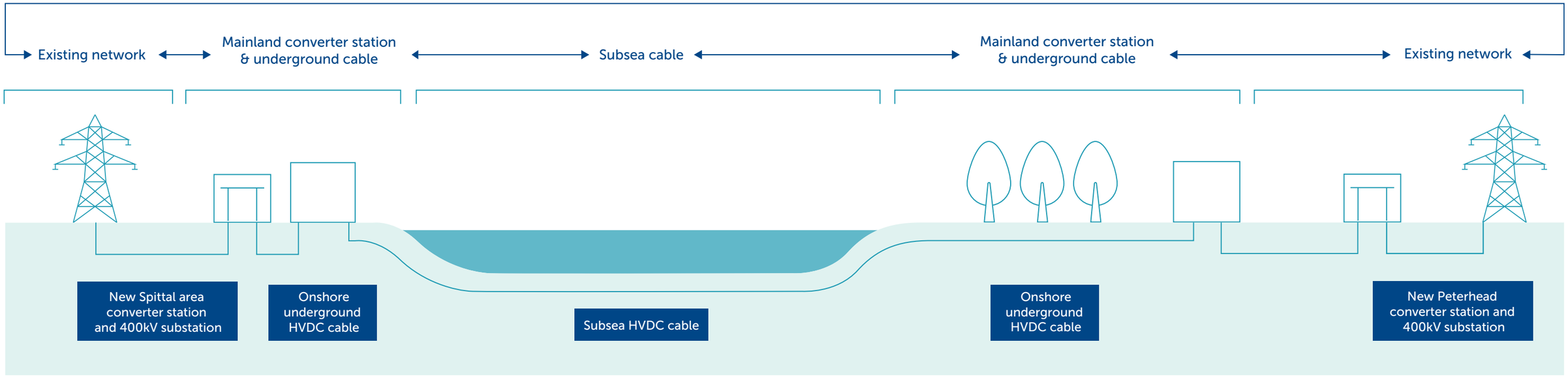
Connections between these assets will be via HVDC cables buried either underground or below the seabed. In Caithness, the land cable corridor is likely to stretch approximately 20 km between the Spittal converter station and the area of Sinclair's Bay where it will transition to the subsea cable.

Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

The subsea cable route will extend from horizontally directionally drilled (HDD) landfalls between Sinclair's Bay in Caithness, and Rattray Head in Aberdeenshire. The subsea portion of the cable will be approximately 165km in length, through the Moray Firth and the North Sea.

The cable route in Aberdeenshire extends to approximately 16km between Rattray Head and the converter station at Netherton, near Longside.

Unlike previous projects, the design of this system requires the inclusion of an additional cable to reinforce the network in the event of a cable or other equipment fault. This additional cable is referred to as the Dedicated Metallic Return (DMR) and will be installed alongside the standard bi-pole arrangement of two HVDC cables and a fibre optics cable for communications.



Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Help shape our plans

The work we have planned is significant and has the potential to deliver massive benefits in your community, Scotland, and beyond. Yet we know that achieving our goals will require a lot of work that will impact your lives. That's why we want to work with you every step of the way throughout the planning and delivery stages of these essential and ambitious works.

We're committed to delivering a meaningful consultation process that actively seeks the views of everyone affected by our plans. That means making our plans clear and easily accessible, so that you can give us input throughout each stage of the development process.

Throughout the consultation, we'll present our approach to developing the project, including changes made since we last consulted with you. We will also provide some visualisations and maps to show you where everything will be located.

We want you to share your thoughts and opinions on our plans, where you think we can make improvements, concerns about the impact of our work and what you think of any changes and refinements we've made. By telling us what you think, you will help shape our proposals. We want to harness your local knowledge so that we spot any unforeseen challenges early and maximise the potential benefits and opportunities for your communities.

Because, ultimately, we want you to work with us to ensure that the energy infrastructure we build will be the best it can possibly be.

The marine pre-application process

We are holding public consultation events in Caithness and Aberdeenshire to provide information about the proposed subsea cables in Scottish waters, prior to submitting Marine Licence applications to the Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team.

These events comply with the Marine Licensing (Pre-Application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, which apply to Marine Licence applications in the Scottish Territorial Waters, from Mean High Water Springs out to 12 nautical miles from the shore. You are invited to comment on the material presented in this document and the proposed development prior to the submission to the Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team. Consultation responses must be returned before the **15 October 2024.**

What we're consulting on

We are holding public consultation events in Caithness and Aberdeenshire to provide information about the proposed subsea cables in Scottish waters, prior to submitting Marine Licence applications to the Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team.

Who we're consulting with

As well as communities, we are keen to hear feedback from a broad range of other stakeholders including but not limited to landowners, businesses, non-statutory consultees and statutory consultees such as Marine Directorate, NatureScot, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), The Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and The Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses.

What next?

Following today's event, a Pre-Application Consultation Report will be prepared which will be submitted to support the Marine Licence application. The report will describe the comments received during these events and how we have responded to those, including any additional mitigation or amendments to the project.

Marine Licensing in Scotland

Scotland's National Marine Plan sets out how developments in Scottish inshore waters (out to 12 nautical miles) and offshore waters (12 to 200 nautical miles) will be managed, including objectives and marine planning policies for subsea cables.

Subsea power cables in Scottish waters require a marine licence to be granted by the Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team (MD-LOT), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. Cables longer than 1853m and which cross the intertidal boundary are also subject to pre-application consultation requirements, hence our current consultation on the subsea cable elements of this project.

Although subsea electricity transmission cables are not subject to a formal Environmental Impact Assessment process, the Marine Scotland Act requires that we consider the scale and nature of the project, and provide a proportionate environmental assessment. With this in mind, a non-statutory marine environmental appraisal (MEA) will accompany our application for a marine licence. The MEA will detail the assessments that we have carried out, including our subsea cable routing studies and assessments of our potential impacts on the environment, cultural heritage, navigation, and other maritime activities.

We have also engaged with Crown Estate Scotland to obtain an option to lease agreement for the subsea cable installation corridor within Scottish territorial waters. Closer to the time of cable installation, the project will step from an option to lease to the full lease agreement, which provides SSEN Transmission with the seabed rights required to install and maintain the cable.

Note that consultation on the converter stations at Banniskirk Hub and Netherton Hub has already been completed and is not part of this consultation. You can find more information about Netherton Hub and Banniskirk Hub at:

ssen-transmission.co.uk/banniskirk
ssen-transmission.co.uk/Netherton-hub

The onshore underground cable elements of this project are classed as 'Permitted Development' and are not subject to consultation. We are sharing details on our preferred alignment of the underground cable for information only and feedback will not be sought as part of this consultation process. Information on the underground cable can be found in the Project Documents tab on our project page at:

ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/

Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Project timeline

2023
- Consultations with stakeholders and statutory consultees.
- Onshore, offshore and engineering surveys commence.

2024
- Marine Licence Pre-Application Consultation.
- Marine Environmental Assessment.
- Onshore Voluntary Environmental Assessment completion.

2025
- Marine Licence Application submission.
- Project receives Marine Licence.
- Commencement of cable manufacture.

2026
- Commence onshore cable installation.
- Marine pre-installation activities.

2027-2028
- Continue onshore cable installation.
- Marine cable installation.

2029-2030
- Marine cable installation completed.
- Onshore cable installation complete.
- Commissioning and energization.

How we selected our proposed subsea cable route and landfalls

In our previous consultation in May and June 2023, we presented potential subsea cable corridors between various landfall locations.

Several subsea cable corridors were developed and considered as part of the selection process. These options were based on identifying pairs of landfalls linked by a subsea cable corridor.

The process of identifying subsea cable corridors followed the stages below:

The process for selecting our proposed landfall and marine cable corridors:

Stage.1

Preliminary landfall option identification, focussing on identifying potential landfall locations meeting essential construction characteristics.

Stage.2

Constraints identification, identifying environmental, social, and technical constraints associated with each landfall.

Stage.3

Corridor Optioneering, identifying potential subsea cable corridors based on relative impacts on constraints identified in Stage 2.

Stage.4

Corridor Development and Selection, including a multi-disciplinary review of constraints and interactions between them to develop a suitable subsea cable corridor.

Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

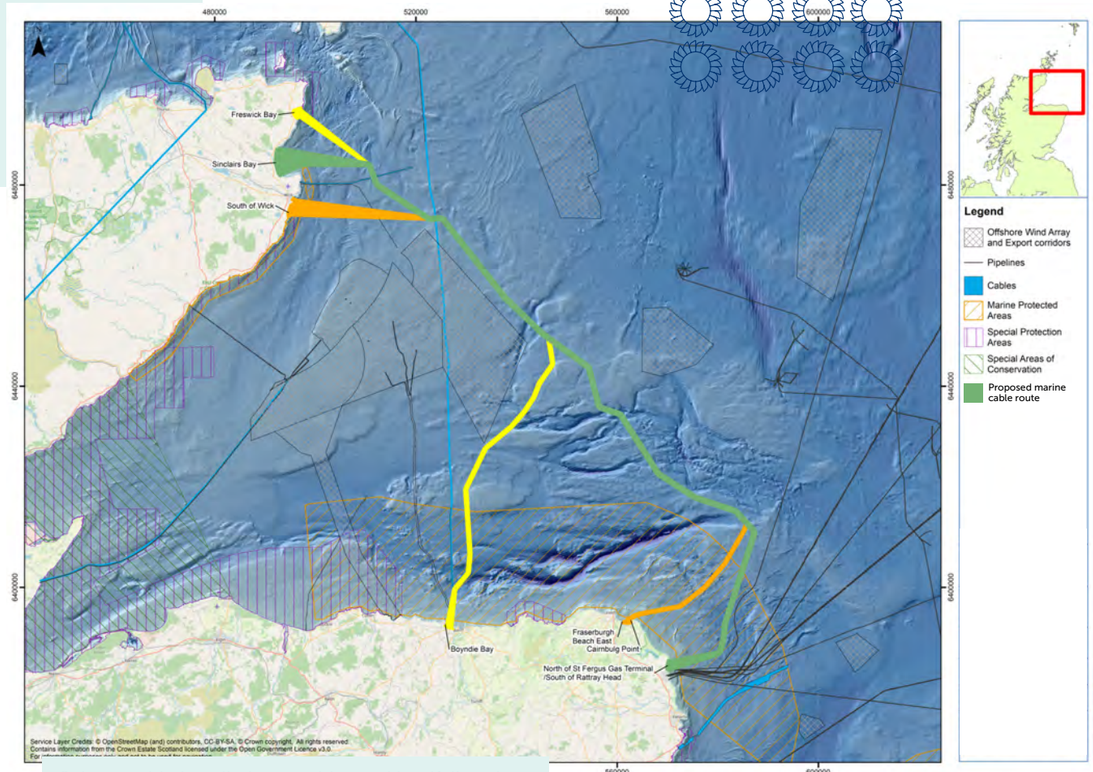
The landfall options in Caithness were:

- Freswick Bay
- Sinclair's Bay
- South of Wick

The landfall options in Moray and Aberdeenshire were:

- Boyndie Bay
- Fraserburgh Beach East
- Cairnbulg Point
- Rattray Head, north of the St Fergus gas terminal

The subsea cable installation corridor options we presented joined each of the landfall options in Caithness to each of the landfall options in Moray and Aberdeenshire. Refer to map below.



Subsea cable installation corridor and landfall options

Selecting a corridor between Sinclair's Bay and Rattray Head

The following key assessment principles were used during the preliminary corridor development process:

- Minimising subsea cable length, subject to avoiding important constraints
- Engineering factors that may affect cable laying feasibility and cost effectiveness have been considered as much as possible
- Avoidance (wherever possible) of interactions with designated sites, sensitive habitats and wrecks. Where avoidance is not possible, optimisation of the corridor to minimise impacts.
- Minimising disruption/interactions with other marine infrastructure and sea users including shipping, commercial fisheries, cables, pipelines and oil and gas stakeholders.

Following our previous consultation, a subsea cable installation corridor between Sinclair's Bay in Caithness and Rattray Head in Aberdeenshire was selected as the least constrained option because:

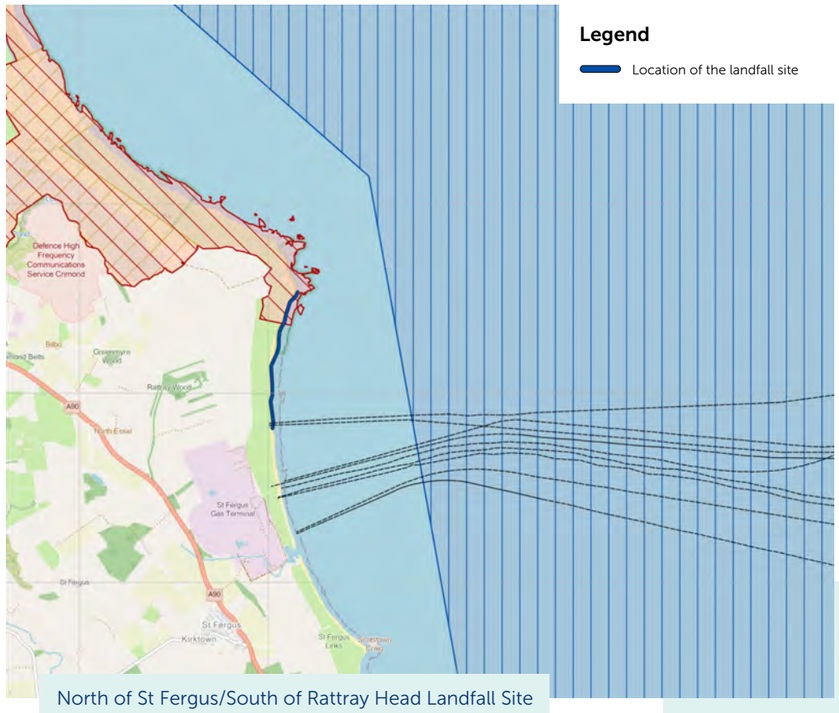
- It minimised interactions with protected areas and sensitive habitats and species to the greatest extent
- It minimised interactions with recreational use of the coastline, particularly in Moray and Aberdeenshire
- It maximised the potential for subsea cable burial throughout the cable corridor and minimised the number of crossings of 3rd party assets required.
- It minimised the length of onshore underground cable required to connect to substations at each end

Since our last consultation in May and June 2023, we have carried out a marine survey campaign to gather additional data on the proposed subsea cable corridor between Sinclair's Bay and Rattray Head. We have used this data to refine our cable installation corridor to maximise cable burial and to quantify and minimise the potential environmental impacts of our works.

We are preparing to apply to Marine Directorate for a marine licence for the installation and operation of the proposed subsea cable.

Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Sinclairs Bay Landfall Site



North of St Fergus/South of Rattray Head Landfall Site

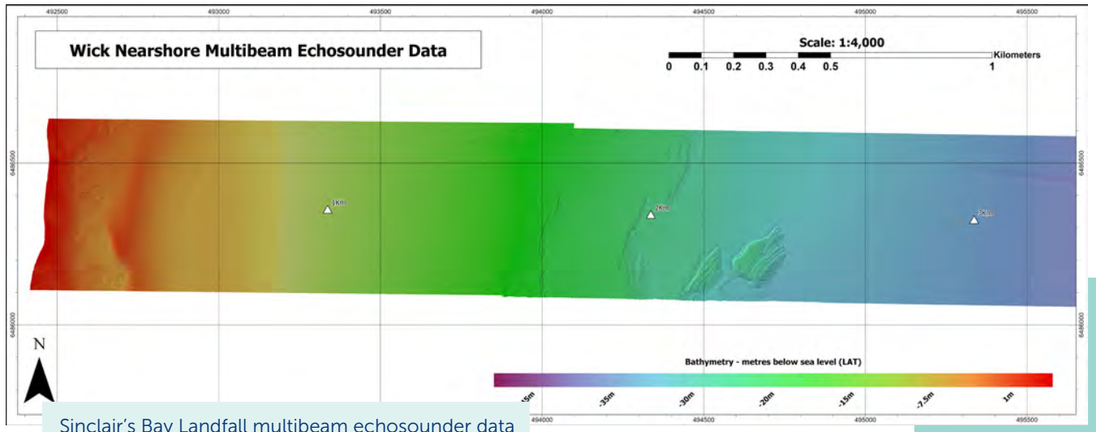
Marine surveys

To support development of the subsea cable installation corridor, we carried out a series of intertidal, nearshore, and offshore surveys during 2023 and 2024. The purpose of these surveys was to gather detailed information about the seabed and any technical constraints or sensitive features. This included:

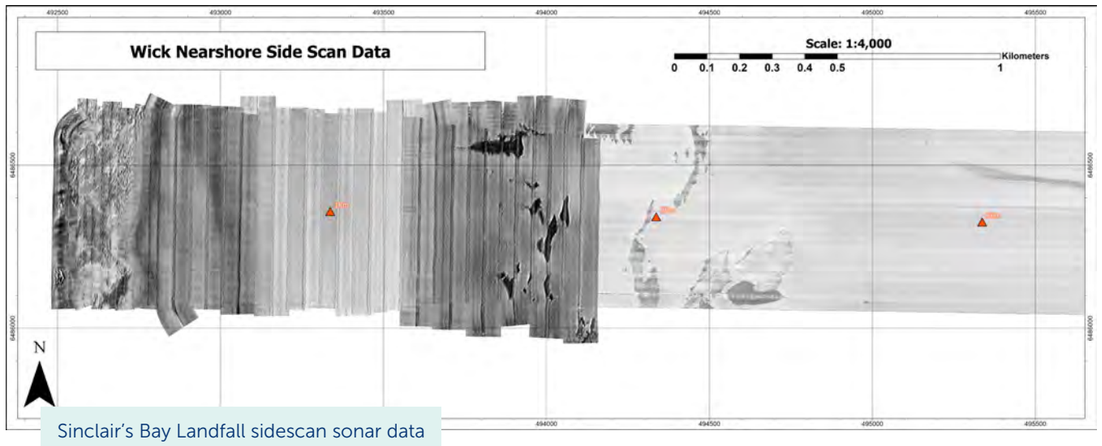
1. Geophysical survey to determine water depths, seabed features, shallow geology, cable crossing positions, intertidal topography, and to detect objects on the seabed. Instruments used include Multi-Beam Echosounder (MBES), Side Scan Sonar (SSS), Sub-Bottom Profiler (SBP), magnetometer, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).

2. Environmental survey to understand seabed habitats and species, using underwater cameras and sediment grab sampling. We use this information to create maps of the type and extent of seabed habitats throughout the corridor.

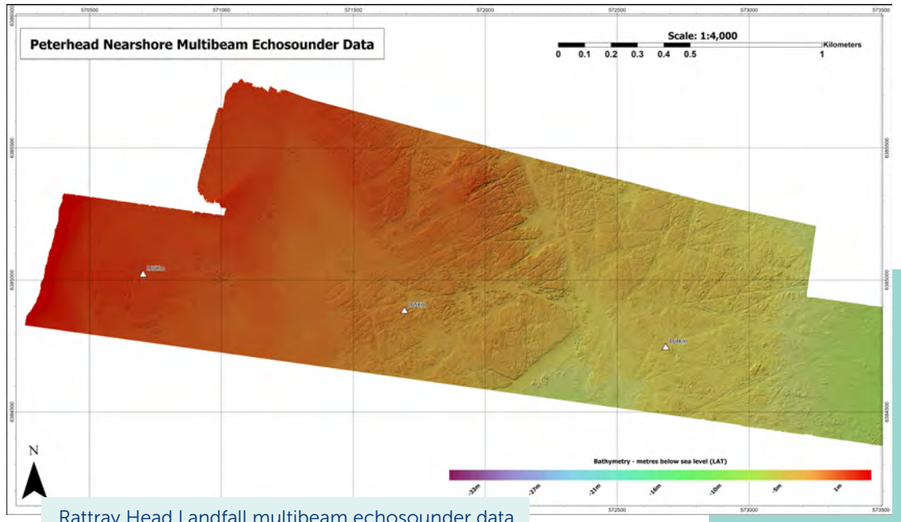
3. Geotechnical survey to determine the structure and physical properties of the surface and shallow sediment layers. Instruments used include a Vibrocorer and Cone Penetrometer Testing (CPT).



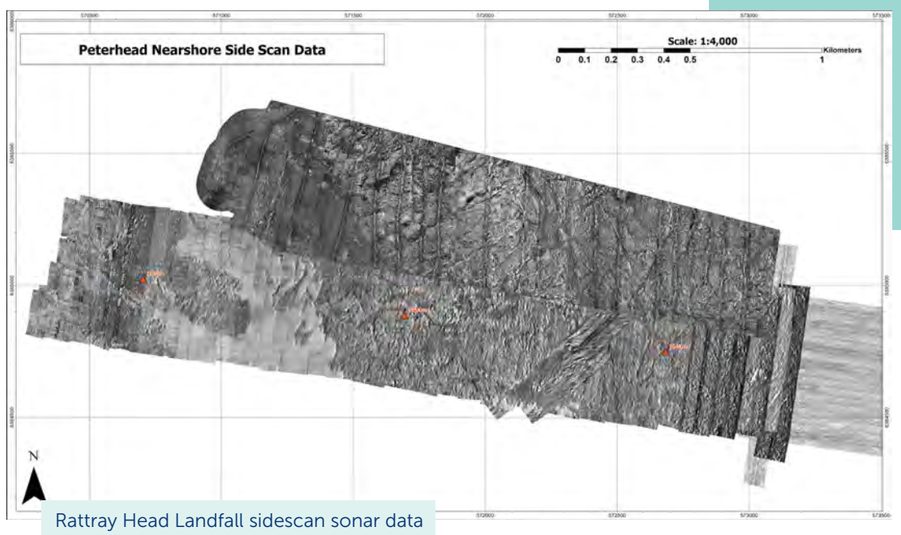
Sinclair's Bay Landfall multibeam echosounder data



Sinclair's Bay Landfall sidescan sonar data



Rattray Head Landfall multibeam echosounder data



Rattray Head Landfall sidescan sonar data

The data collected during the marine survey has allowed us to optimise the installation corridor to:

- Maximise cable burial by avoiding (wherever possible) obstacles, including boulders, rock outcrops, plough marks, and potential unexploded ordnance.
- Avoid (wherever possible) or minimise impacts to any additional sensitive habitats identified in the corridor.
- Avoid (wherever possible) mobile sediments including sandbanks and sandwaves. Where not possible, optimisation of the corridor to minimise any potential for exposure of the cable.
- Cross in-service subsea cables as near to 90° as possible.
- Minimise anchoring and navigation restrictions.

Subsea cable installation

The subsea cable system will be installed within a Marine Installation Corridor approximately 500m wide and 165km long. The installation of the cables will be split into the following campaigns.

Pre-lay survey

Prior to cable installation, additional marine surveys will be undertaken by the installation contractor within the subsea cable installation corridor to inform detailed route engineering and refinement. These surveys will aim to validate known constraints and identify any changes that could affect the cable installation including seabed sediments, sensitive environmental features, bathymetry, unexploded ordinance and other seabed features.

Cable route clearance

Debris and obstructions to the cable route will be cleared from the seabed before the subsea cable is laid. Cable route clearance may involve the following activities:

- Pre-sweeping sandwaves using a Mass Flow Excavator (MFE);
- Boulder clearance using grabs or ploughs;
- Debris clearance using a Pre-Lay Grapnel run (PLGR) and/or ROV
- Cutting and removing sections of out of service cables.

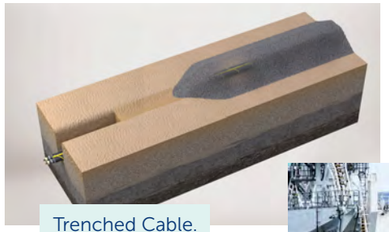
Cable lay and burial

Considering the dynamic environment in which our marine cables are installed, there are various hazards that pose a risk to the integrity of the cable. The cable will be protected from damage in one of the following ways:

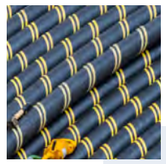
Burial - Burial in seabed sediments, using a trenching tool which follows the cable along the seabed using water jets or a plough to lower the cable into the seabed.

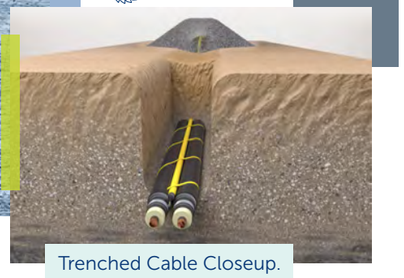
Surface protection - By using surface protection such as rock berms or protective ducts. Rock berms are placed over the cable using a fall pipe, allowing the rock to be accurately placed and the berm profile to be carefully designed. In some areas protective ducts or specially designed mattresses may be used, i.e in areas of environmentally sensitive habitats.

Trenching/ducts - At the landfalls, the cable will be brought ashore using pre-installed ducts. The ducts are installed using a horizontal directional drill, where a bore hole is drilled from the shore, under the intertidal area, and emerging at circa 10m water depth, protecting the cable from damage and minimising impacts on sensitive intertidal environments.



Trenched Cable.





Trenched Cable Closeup.

Post installation surveys

Detailed geophysical and imaging surveys will be undertaken to confirm the location of the installed cable and cable protection such as trenching and rock placement. Post-installation surveys will also be used to monitor seabed recovery, particularly in areas of sensitive habitats.

Environmental considerations

The possible effects of the installation, operation, and decommissioning of the subsea cable are considered within the project Marine Environmental Appraisal (MEA). Cumulative and in-combination effects are also considered where there is potential for effects from this project to overlap with the effects of other marine and coastal developments.

The following topics are included within the MEA, as summarised on the pages that follow:

- Physical environment
- Benthic ecology
- Fish and shellfish ecology
- Marine mammals
- Ornithology
- Marine archaeology
- Shipping and navigation
- Commercial fisheries
- Other sea users

Physical environment

The seabed in the subsea cable installation corridor mainly consists of soft sediments, ranging from silt and silty sand to sandy gravel and gravelly sand. Outcropping rock and boulders are also present within the installation corridor; notably an area of outcropping bedrock in the vicinity of Rattray Head. Water depths throughout the route range from approximately 1m to 106m below Lowest Astronomical Tide.

The coastline at the southern landfall at St Fergus includes extensive sandy beaches backed by dune systems. Most of the coastline in this area is undefended, in part because of the low rate of erosion.

The coastline at the northern landfall at Sinclair's Bay is predominantly rocky, with a long stretch of beach backed by dunes where the landfall site is located.

At both landfalls, horizontal directional drilling will be used to minimise impact on coastal dune features.

The marine installation corridor traverses the Southern Trench NCMPA which includes features protected for their geological diversity such as sub-glacial tunnel valleys, moraines, and a slide scar. Sub-glacial tunnel valleys are characterised by erosion-resistant geology and are not considered to be sensitive to cable installation, while the slide scar has been avoided and is more than 10km from the subsea cable installation corridor. Moraines were identified within the environmental assessment study area, and subsea cable installation methodologies will be selected to minimise any potential impacts to these features.

Rattray Head Landfall

Sinclair's Bay Landfall

Benthic ecology

The Moray Firth and North Sea area supports a range of intertidal and subtidal seabed habitats, many of which can be found within the Spittal to Peterhead HVDC subsea cable corridor.

The northern landfall area at Sinclair's Bay is comprised of sandy and rocky beaches backed by sand dunes and sea cliffs, while the southern landfall area at Rattray head is a sandy beach backed by an extensive sand dune community.

In the nearshore subsea areas of the route, the seabed mainly consists of coarse sediment, sand, bedrock, boulder and cobbles, while in offshore sections the seabed is mainly comprised of sand and coarse sediment.

Conspicuous benthic fauna observed within the installation corridor included the seapen *Pennatula phosporea*, brittlestars *Ophiothrix fragilis*, the rugose squat lobster *Munida rugosa,* the Ross worm *Sabellaria spinulosa,* common starfish *Asterias rubens,* and edible sea urchin, *Echinus esculentus.*

The subsea cable installation corridor traverses one marine protected area that includes a designation for benthic features (burrowed mud): the Southern Trench NCMPA. Burrows and burrowing fauna were detected at 67km, 93 – 95km and 102-112.5 km along the installation corridor, but these only qualified as an OSPAR Seapen and Burrowing Megafauna Communities habitat at one station.

One additional NCMPA is located approximately 2.2km to the south of the installation corridor at Sinclair's Bay: the Noss Head NCMPA, which is designated for the protection of horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* beds.

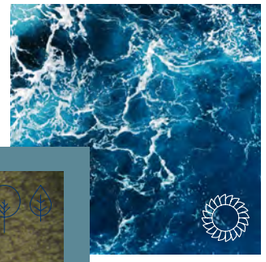
To reduce any potential impact to sensitive seabed habitats, micro-routing will be used where possible to avoid or minimise the footprint of cable installation in proximity to potentially sensitive habitats, and cable protection will only be deployed where adequate cable burial cannot be achieved.

Annex I Reef

Areas of 'low' and 'medium' annex I stony, rocky and biogenic reef formations were identified in the approach to the southern landfall at Rattray Head at approximately 3km to 6km from the shore.

Of interest was an area of patchy low and medium biogenic reef that included *Sabellaria spinulosa* aggregations growing on exposed bedrock and boulders.

In March 2024, we commissioned an additional survey to map the area of potential reef, to help us to understand it's extent and its ecological value. This survey gathered high-resolution geophysical data and imagery which will allow us to undertake detailed route engineering and micro-siting in order to minimise our impacts to the seabed (including reefs) in this area.



Ross worms growing on exposed bedrock.

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Fish and shellfish ecology

The Moray Firth supports a wide range of sharks, skate and ray species, many of which are characteristic of the sand-dominated seabed in this region. Diadromous fish such as Atlantic salmon and European eel may also undertake migrations in this area.

The subsea cable installation corridor traverses potential habitat and spawning grounds for sandeel and Atlantic herring. The seabed along much of the proposed survey corridor has been identified as 'preferred' sandeel habitat, which is consistent with what would be expected throughout the Moray Firth.

Other potential spawning grounds in the area intersected by the cable installation corridor include European plaice, cod and whiting. Fish that use the area as high intensity nursery grounds include for cod, whiting, anglerfish, monkfish, herring.

The proposed subsea cable installation corridor does not traverse any protected areas designated for fish or shellfish features, although it crosses the Southern Trench NCMPA which is designated for a seabed habitat characterised by burrowing species including the Norway lobster (burrowed mud).

It is expected that potential impacts to fish and shellfish habitat will be limited by the short duration of cable installation activities. To minimise fish and shellfish habitat loss, cable protection will only be deployed where the subsea cable cannot be adequately buried.

Marine mammals and megafauna

Many species of whales and dolphins are regularly recorded along the subsea cable installation corridor, including harbour porpoise, common dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, Risso's dolphin, killer whale, and minke whale.

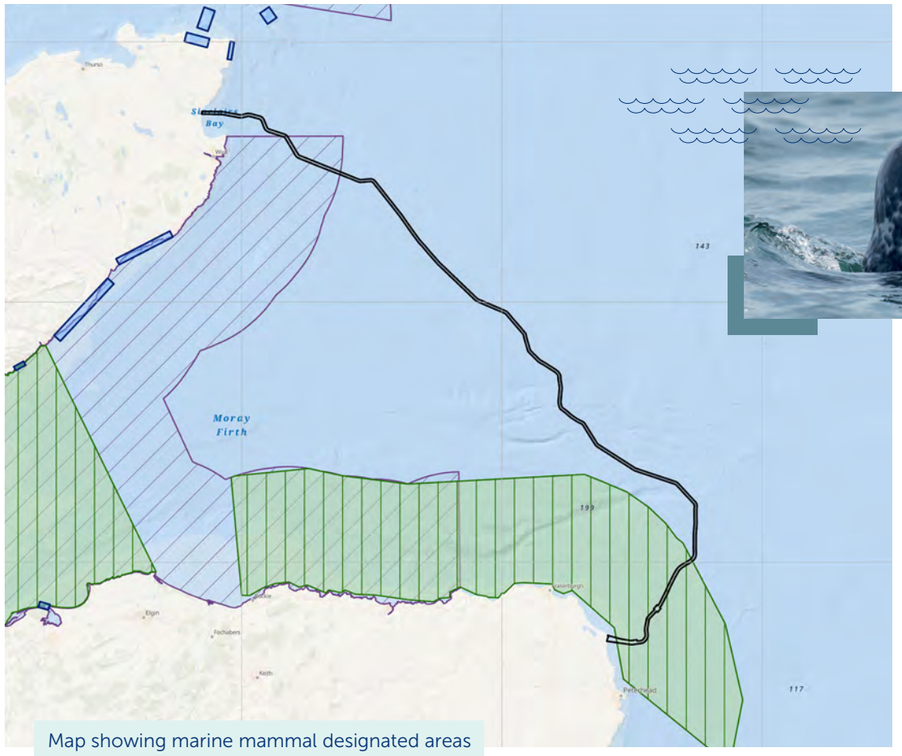
All cetaceans are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and are European Protected Species under the Habitats Regulations. Minke whale are a designated feature of the Southern Trench NCMPA, which they use as a seasonal feeding ground.

Bottlenose dolphin are also a designated feature of the Moray Firth SAC. This population of bottlenose dolphins has an extensive range, extending beyond the boundary of the SAC and as far south as the Firth of Forth.

Grey and harbour seals are found in the vicinity of the subsea cable installation corridor, although grey seals are more numerous than harbour seals. The nearest designated seal haul out to the installation corridor is at Duncansby Head, which is situated approximately 10km away from the corridor. No effects on seal haul out sites are predicted.Basking shark are very rarely sighted in the Moray Firth, and are unlikely to interact with the project.

The proposed project work does not overlap with any designated otter habitat, including at landfalls. There is unlikely to be any significant interaction between Eurasian otters and the proposed project.

To minimise any disturbance to marine mammals, we will undertake a detailed assessment of potential impacts, which will inform a marine mammal mitigation plan. All work will be carried out following relevant guidance, including the Joint Nature Conservation Committee guidance and the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code.



Map showing marine mammal designated areas

Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

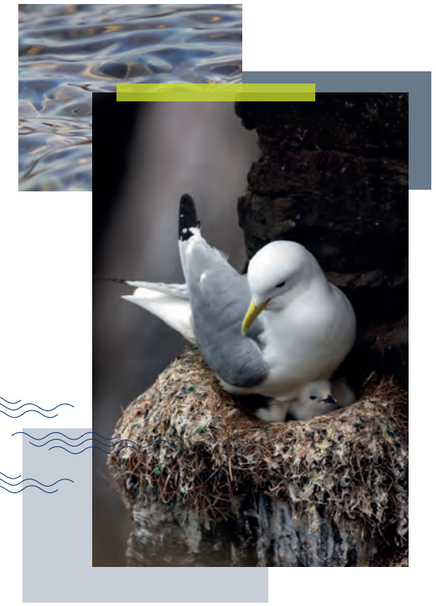
Marine ornithology

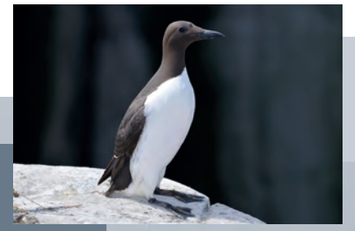
The subsea cable installation corridor does not pass directly through any areas which have been protected specifically for seabirds.

The nearest protected areas are the East Caithness Cliffs MPA (designated for black guillemots) and the East Caithness Cliffs SPA, designated for breeding seabird colonies such as cormorants, fulmar, gulls, guillemot, razorbill, and shag. Seabirds from other breeding colonies may also be found within the subsea cable installation corridor, particularly those with extensive feeding ranges. However, it is not possible to determine which designated sites these birds may originate from.

The Loch of Strathbeg SSSI and SPA extend into the intertidal zone at the Rattray Head landfall.

Horizontal directionally drilled landfalls at both ends of the subsea cable will minimise potential impacts to intertidal seabirds. Potential impacts on seabirds from installation of the subsea cable are also considered within the project's environmental assessment, and we will follow appropriate mitigation measures to be identified. Potential impacts on birds from activities above mean high water springs will be considered in a separate assessment carried out for the terrestrial elements of the project.





Marine archaeology

There are no identified designated historical assets in proximity to either landfall. At Sinclair's Bay, defensive anti-tank blocks are located near to the subsea cable landfall, and two identified wrecks may be present in the vicinity of the subsea cable installation corridor at the landfall or in the nearshore region. Two anti-tank ditches run parallel to the coastline at the St Fergus landfall.

Similarly, no designated historical assets were identified in the offshore part of the subsea cable installation corridor. Five shipwrecks and one wrecked aircraft have been identified in close proximity to the installation corridor. Thirty-seven other wrecks have been identified in the vicinity, suggesting that there is potential for additional archaeological finds within the corridor.

Avoidance of any archaeological assets will be prioritised in a thorough analysis of geophysical and geotechnical survey data and detailed route engineering incorporating the advice of a qualified marine archaeologist.

Shipping and navigation

A large number of cargo ships transit the subsea cable installation corridor, and ferry traffic from Aberdeen crosses the corridor regularly.

The charted anchorage in Sinclair's Bay to the south of the northern landfall (Sinclair's Bay) affords fair anchorage in fine settled weather, but it is not safe in unsettled conditions. At the southern landfall (St Fergus) there is uncharted anchorage at Buchanhaven.

Recreational activity is mainly focused in the vicinity of the cable landfalls. There is little recreational activity in the offshore parts of the subsea cable installation corridor, and there are no identified offshore cruising routes.

We have included a number of mitigation measures in the design and operational planning for the subsea cable installation, including avoidance of main navigational features, timely publishing of Notice to Mariners, AIS broadcasts, and use of guard vessels and safety zones.

Stakeholder input has been incorporated into the Navigational Risk Assessment we carried out in support of the marine environmental assessment, so that any concerns and potential impacts are recorded and minimised wherever possible.

Shipping Traffic Intensity

Commercial fisheries

The Moray Firth is an area of relatively dense commercial fishing in nearshore and offshore waters.

To foster good relationships with all shared users of the marine space, we have consulted with fisheries organisations including the Scottish Fisherman's Federation (SFF), Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA), and local fishers to improve our understanding of existing commercial fishing activity in the area. The results of these consultations have helped to inform the design of our subsea corridor.

The area is important for fisheries using static gear including pots and traps, particularly in the vicinity of and offshore from the Rattray Head landfall. In addition to pots and traps, towed fishing gear such as otter trawls and dredges are frequently used along the installation corridor.

Safety zones will be required around the subsea cable installation area to ensure the safety of all personnel involved in the cable installation, so access to certain areas along the cable route will be restricted for temporary periods of time. These areas will be communicated ahead of time and a Notice to Mariners will be issued prior to the installation of the subsea cable.

Spittal-Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link Project

Other sea users

Impacts to other sea users have been assessed in the Navigation Risk Assessment carried out in support of the Marine Environmental Assessment.

Oil and Gas

The subsea installation corridor does not cross any of the oil fields situated in the Moray Firth, or any of their associated infrastructure.

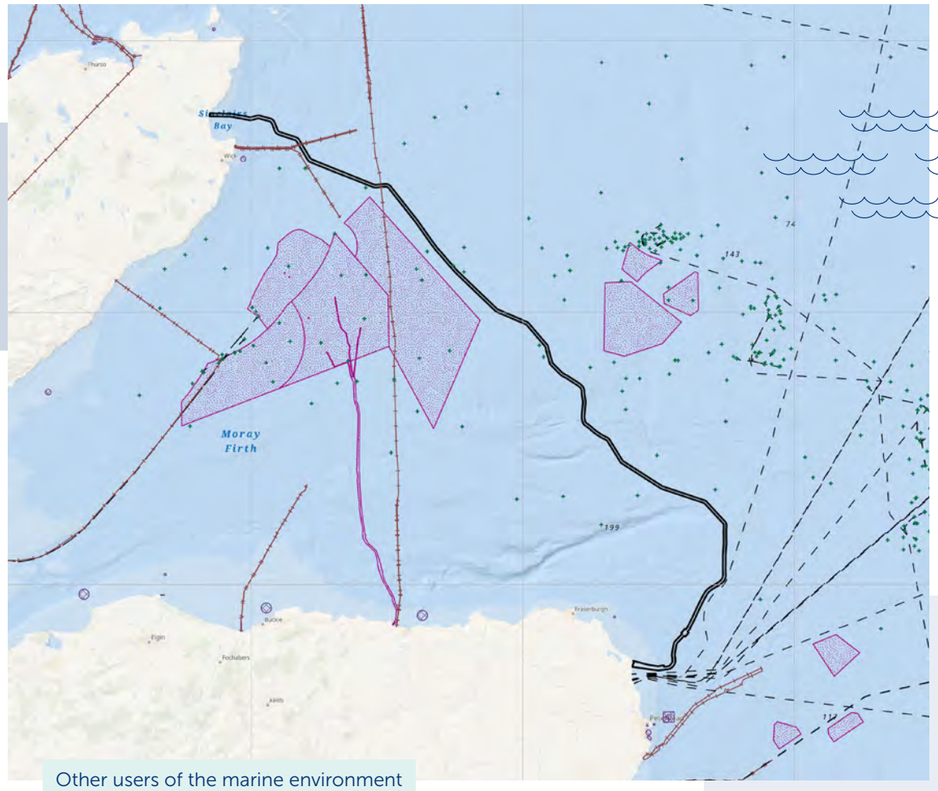
Renewable Energy

Within the Moray Firth there are two fully commissioned offshore wind farms: Beatrice and Moray East. The subsea installation corridor has been designed to avoid interaction with these developments, and will also avoid any interaction with the Moray West wind farm which is currently under construction.

We have consulted with a number of development-phase offshore wind farms in the vicinity of the Spittal to Peterhead subsea cable project. Of these, the subsea installation corridor is likely to directly interact with the Ayre offshore wind farm and the Buchan offshore wind farm.

Cables and Pipelines

The proposed subsea cable installation corridor crosses two existing subsea cables: the SSEN Transmission 320kV Shetland HVDC link and the SHEFA-2 telecommunications cable. The installation corridor also crosses the Subsea7 pipeline bundle tow out route.



Other users of the marine environment

Have your say

We value community and stakeholder feedback. Without this, we would be unable to progress projects and reach a balanced proposal.

Feedback

We will accept feedback from now until **15 October 2024.**

How to provide feedback

Submit your feedback online by scanning the QR code on this page or via the form on our project webpage at: **ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/**

Email the feedback form to the Community Liaison Manager, or write to us enclosing the feedback form at the back of this booklet.

Our Community Liaison team

Each project has a dedicated Community Liaison Manager who works closely with community members to make sure they are well informed of our proposals and that their views, concerns, questions or suggestions are put to our project teams.

Throughout the life of our projects, you will hear from us regularly. We aim to establish strong working relationships by being accessible to key local stakeholders such as community councils, residents' associations, and development trusts, and regularly engage with interested individuals.

What we're seeking views on

During our last public consultation events in May and June 2023, we wanted to understand your views on the proposed locations of the subsea cable landfalls and potential cable route. We also wanted to understand whether there were any significant factors or environmental features that you considered to be important, as well as your overall perspectives on the project.

We'll be actively looking to mitigate the impacts of this subsea cable project as much as possible over the coming months by scheduling the installation to have least impact to marine activities. It would be helpful to understand from marine users the location and timing of any activities to inform our plans. We would also like to understand if there are any opportunities to deliver a local community benefit.

You can also follow us on social media:

@ssentransmission @SSETransmission

Underground land cable

Note that information on the proposed final route alignment for the underground cable between the landfall in Sinclair's Bay to the converter station located in Banniskirk Hub and from Rattray Head and the converter station at Netherton Hub is outlined in a separate document that can be found on the documents tab of the project webpage at **ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/**

It is provided for information and does not form part of this consultation process.

Recite me

To support everyone online, we provide accessibility and language options on our website through 'Recite Me'. The accessibility and language support options provided by 'Recite Me' include text-to-speech functionality, fully customisable styling features, reading aids, and a translation tool with over 100 languages, including 35 text-to-speech.

Please select "Accessibility" on our website to try out our inclusive toolbar."

Community Liaison Manager

Gillian Doig

gillian.doig@sse.com

[Redacted]

Additional information:

Submit your feedback online by scanning the QR code on this page or via the form on our project webpage at:

ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/

Your feedback

Thank you for taking the time to read this consultation booklet. In order to record your views and improve the effectiveness of our consultation, please complete this short feedback form.

Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS. (Please tick one box per question only)

Q1. **Now that we have shared updated plans for the project, is there anything you'd like to bring to our attention that you believe we may not have already considered during project development?**

Comments:

Q2. **Are there any marine features (environmental, historic, or other) that you consider to be important and should be brought to the attention of the project team?**

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Comments:

Q3. **What suggestions for social or environmental community benefit opportunities do you have that you would like us to consider, or are there any local initiatives you would like us to support?**

Comments:

Q4. **Following review of the provided information, how would you describe your understanding of the project and are there any aspects that you feel you require more information on?**

Comments:

Q5. **Do you fish in the area affected by the proposed HVDC subsea cable?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

A. If yes, please provide details of the type of fishing you do, i.e. mobile or static and the locations you fish

B. Please provide an estimate of how often you fish in the installation corridor area and the time of year

Q6. **Have you had experience of other subsea cable projects? What has worked well in the past and has had the least effect on your maritime activity?**

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Comments:

Q7. Do you have any other comments regarding the proposed Spittal to Peterhead HVDC subsea cable?

Comments:

Full name: ..... **Email:** .....

Telephone: ..... **Address:** .....

We would like to send you relevant communications via email such as invitations to stakeholder events, surveys, updates on projects, services and future developments from the Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks group listed below. If you are happy to receive email updates please opt in by ticking the box below. You can unsubscribe at any time by contacting us at stakeholder.admin@sse.com or by clicking on the unsubscribe link that will be at the end of each of our emails.

☐ **If you would like to be kept informed of progress on the project, please tick this box**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this feedback form.
Please submit your completed form by one of the methods below:

Post: 200 Dunkeld Road, Perth PH1 3GH

Email: gillian.doig@sse.com

Online: ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/

For information on how we collect and process your data please see our privacy notice available at today's event. This can also be obtained online at: ssen-transmission.co.uk/privacy

Comments forms and all the information from today's event will also be available to download from the project website.

We intend to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist our experienced teams in the analysis of your feedback, so we can categorise key points raised more quickly. You can learn more about how we're utilising AI at: ssen-transmission.co.uk/AIFAQ

Any information given on the feedback form can be used and published anonymously as part of Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks consultation report. By completing this feedback form you consent to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks using feedback for this purpose.

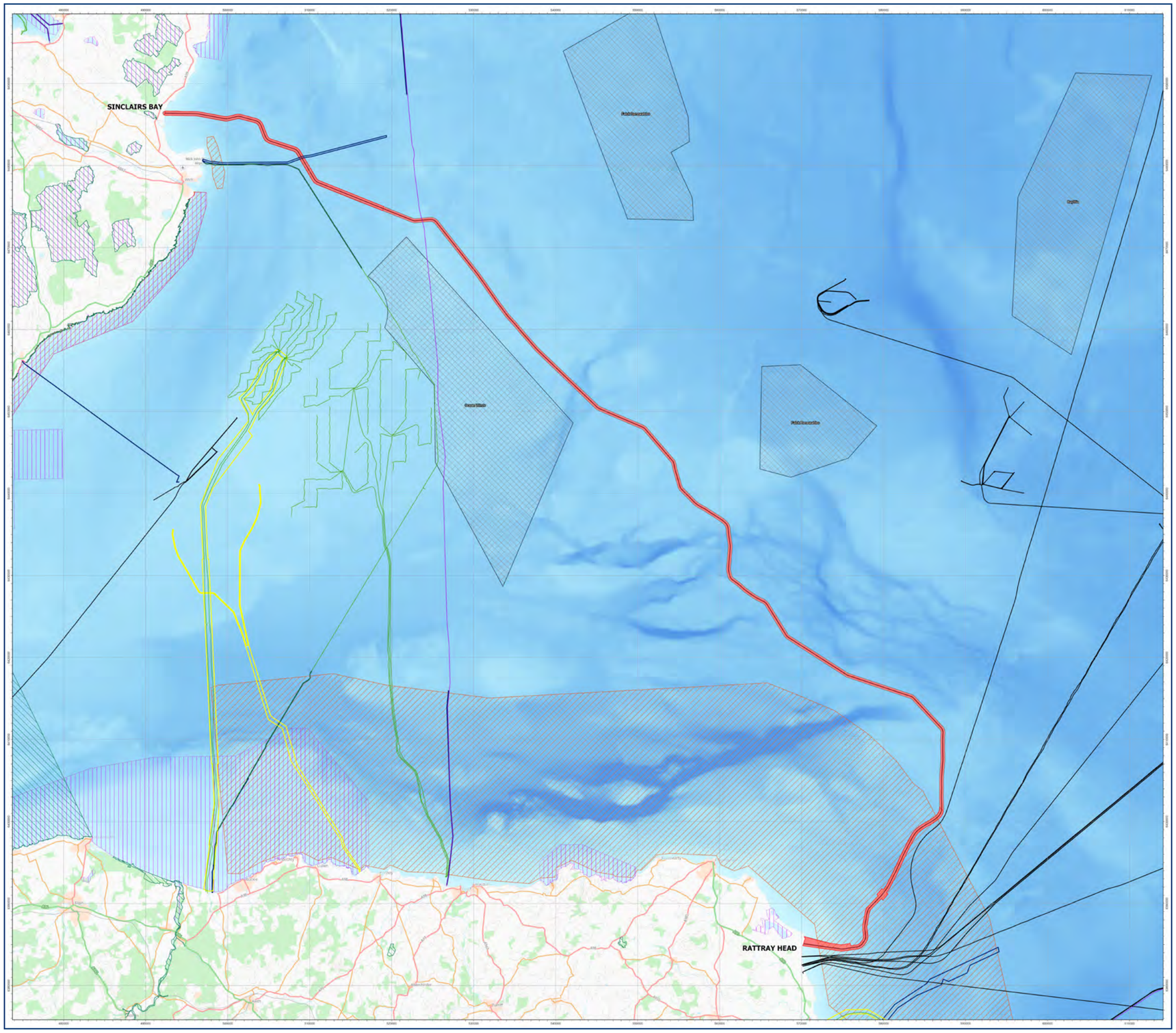
2.B Banners

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

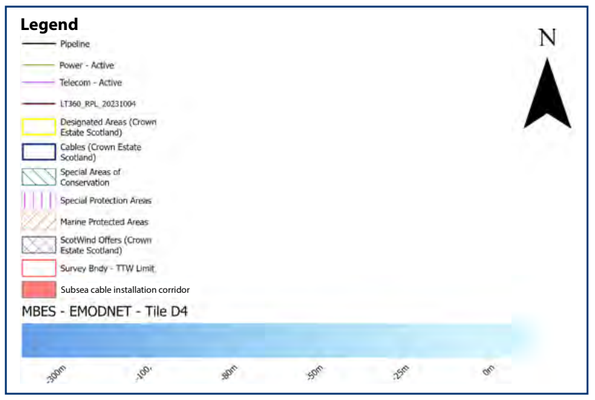
TRANSMISSION

Spittal to Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link

Marine pre-application consultation



Subsea cable installation corridor



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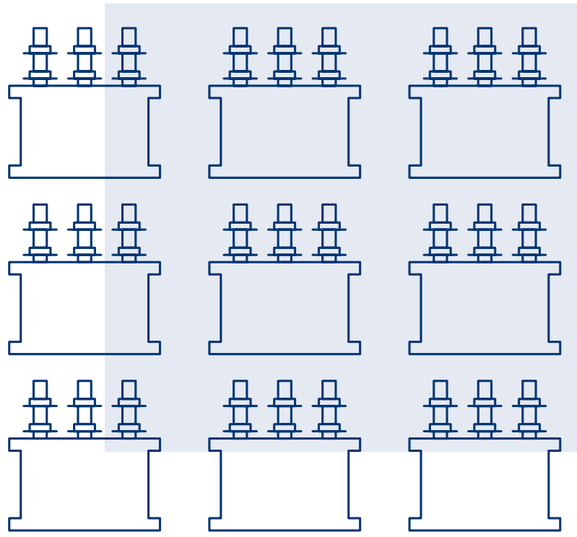
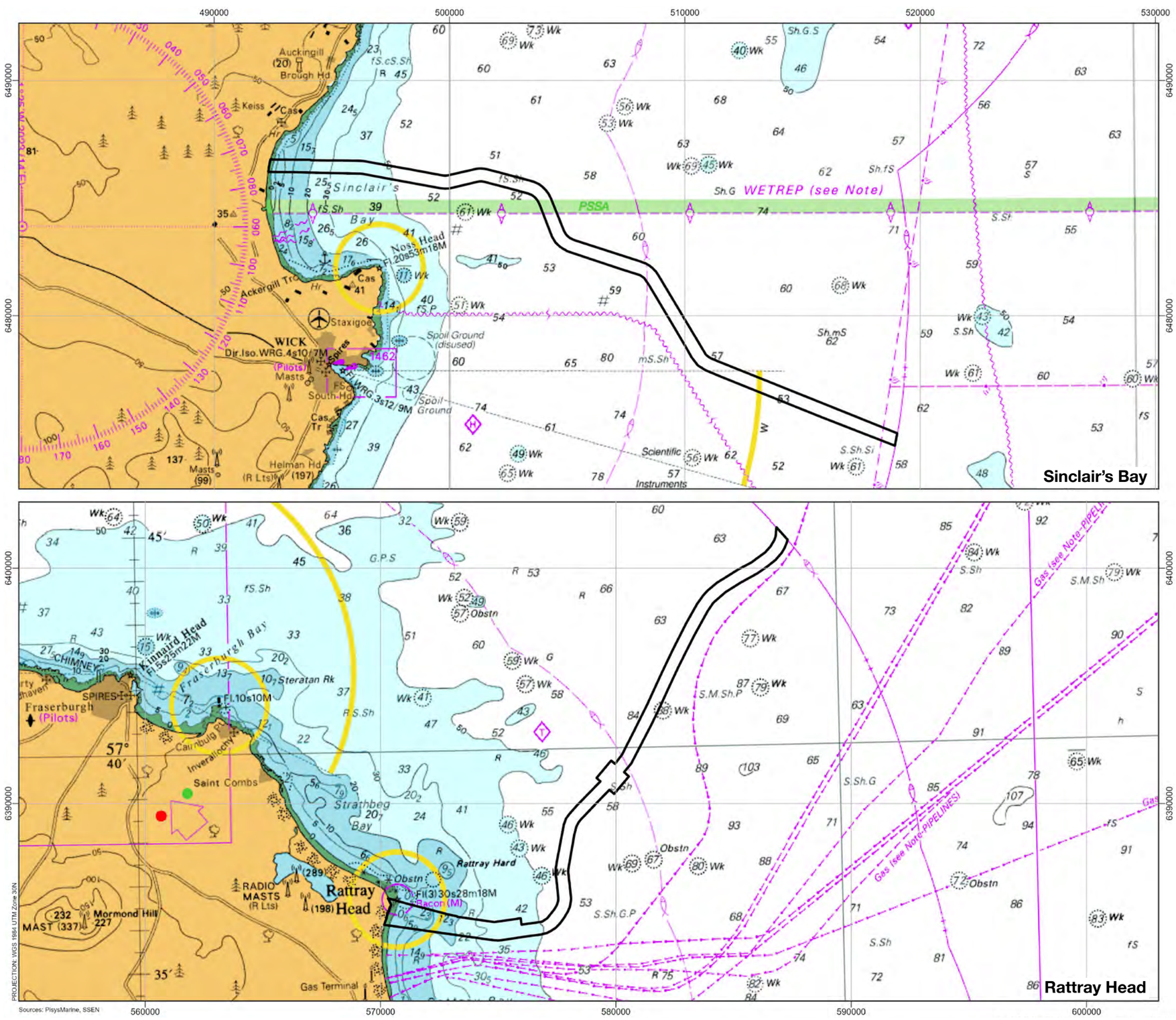
Spittal to Peterhead High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link

Marine pre-application consultation





Landfalls and nearshore corridor

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Powering change together

The time has come to further enhance Scotland's energy infrastructure, providing power for future generations as we move towards net zero.

The shift to a cleaner, more sustainable future is about more than climate change. It's about ensuring future generations have the same opportunities to thrive as we have all had.

Countries around the world are investing in their energy infrastructure to support the demands of modern economies and meet net zero targets. The UK is leadingthe way in building a modern, sustainable energy system for the future.

We all have a part to play

When it comes to net zero, we have to be in it together. The UK and Scottish governments have ambitious net zero targets, and we're playing our part in meeting them.

We work closely with the National Grid Electricity System Operator to connect vast renewable energy resources—harnessed by solar, wind, hydro and marine generation—to areas of demand across the country. Scotland is playing a big role in meeting this demand, exporting two thirds of power generated in our network.

But there's more to be done. By 2050, the north of Scotland is predicted to contribute over 50GW of low carbon energy to help deliver net zero. Today, our region has around 9GW of renewable generation connected to the network.

At SSEN Transmission, it is our role to build the energy system of the future.

We're investing £20 billion into our region's energy infrastructure this decade, powering more than ten million UK homes and 20,000 jobs, 9,000 of which will be here in Scotland.

More information about the policies and documents driving the need for the energy system for the future can be found here:

Who we are

We're responsible for maintaining and investing in the electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland. We're part of SSE plc, one of the world's leading energy companies with a rich heritage in Scotland that dates back more than 80 years. We are also closely regulated by the GB energy regulator Ofgem, who determines how much revenue we are allowed to earn for constructing, maintaining and renovating our transmission network.

What we do

We manage the electricity network across our region which covers a quarter of the UK's land mass, crossing some of the country's most challenging terrain. We connect renewable energy sources to our network in the north of Scotland and then transport it to where it needs to be. From underground and subsea cables and overhead lines to electricity substations, our network keeps your lights on all year round.

Working with you

We understand that the work we do can have an impact on communities. So we're committed to minimising our impacts and maximising all the benefits that our developments can bring to your area. We're regularly assessed by global sustainability consultancy AccountAbility for how we engage with communities. That means we provide all the information you need to know about our plans and how they will impact communities like yours. The way we consult is also a two-way street. We want to hear people's views, concerns, or ideas and harness local knowledge so that our work benefits their communities: today and long into the future. You can share your views with us at: **ssen-transmission.co.uk/talk-to-us/contact-us**

gillian.doig@sse.com [Redacted]
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Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

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The Pathway to 2030

Building the energy system of the future will require deliveryof significant infrastructure over the next few years. In partnership with the UK and Scottish governments, we're committed to meeting our obligation of connecting new, renewable energy to where it's needed by 2030.

Achieving Net Zero

By 2030, both the UK and Scottish governments are targeting a big expansion in offshore wind generation of 50GW and 11GW respectively. The Scottish Government has also set ambitious targets for an additional 12GW of onshore wind by 2030.

Across Great Britain, including the north of Scotland, there needs to be a significant increase in the capacity of the onshore electricity transmission infrastructure to deliver these 2030 targets and a pathway to net zero.

Securing our energy future

And it's not just about net zero. It's also about building a homegrown energy system, so that geopolitical turmoil around the world doesn't severely impact the UK and push up energy prices.

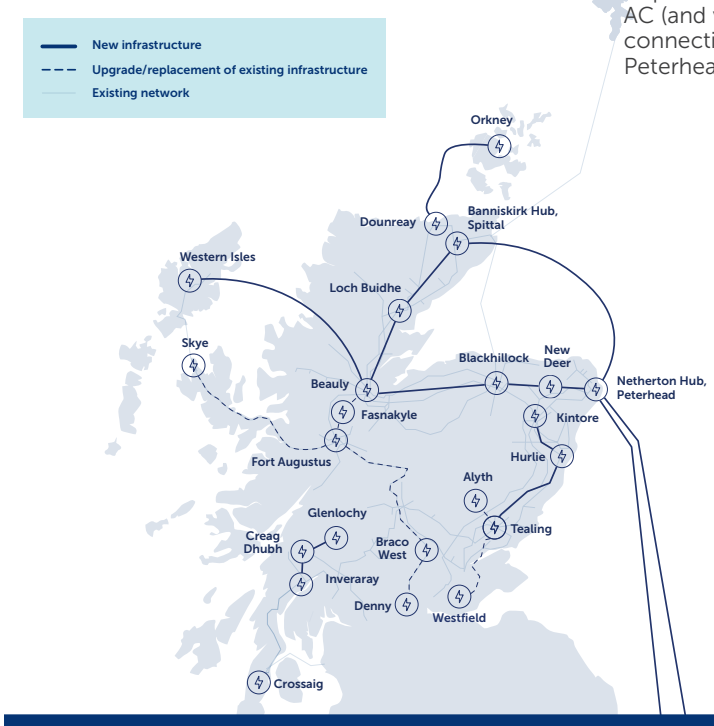
The UK Government's British Energy Security Strategy further underlines the need for this infrastructure, setting out The UK Government's British Energy Security Strategy further underlines the need for this infrastructure, setting out plans to accelerate homegrown power for greater energy independence. The strategy aims to reduce the UK's dependence on and price exposure to global gas wholesale markets through the deployment of homegrown low carbon electricity generation supported by robust electricity network infrastructure.

Meeting our 2030 targets

In July 2022, National Grid, the Electricity System Operator (ESO), published the Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design (HND). This set out the blueprint for the onshore and offshore transmission infrastructure that's required to support the forecasted growth in the UK's renewable electricity. It's an ambitious plan that will help the UK achieve net zero.

What does this mean for the north and north-east of Scotland?

The north and the north-east of Scotland will play a key role in meeting these goals. The extensive studies that informed the ESO's Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design confirmed the requirement to reinforce the onshore corridors between Beauly and Peterhead, Beauly and Spittal in Caithness, and for an offshore subsea cable between Spittal and Peterhead. Providing a 400kV overhead line and high voltage subsea cable (HVDC) connection between these sites provides the significant capacity required to take power from large-scale onshore and offshore renewable generation to the north-east of Scotland. From there, it will be transported to demand centres via HVDC subsea cables. To support these developments, new 400kV substations are also required at key locations. At Spittal, Beauly, and Netherton near Peterhead, high voltage converter stations are also required to convert DC electricity to AC (and vice versa), from offshore subsea connections between Spittal and Peterhead, and Peterhead and England.



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Project overview

We're leading some exciting projects to power change in the UK and Scotland. To support the delivery of 2030 offshore wind targets set by the UK and Scottish Governments, and to power local communities, we need to upgrade our existing network. In some key areas, we need to develop entirely new infrastructure, and quickly.

This project will provide a 2GW bi-pole, 525kV HVDC link between Spittal in Caithness and Peterhead in Aberdeenshire.

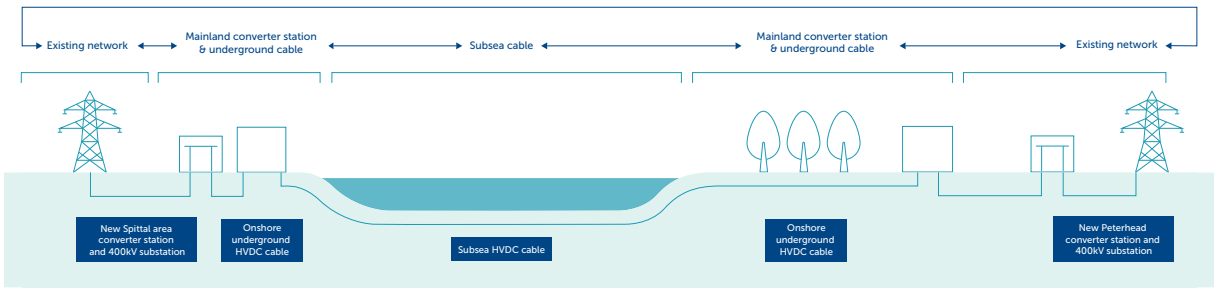
At each end of the HVDC link, 400kV AC substations will supply power to (or receive power from) newly constructed high voltage AC/DC converter stations at Spittal (Banniskirk Hub) and Peterhead (Netherton Hub), depending on the directional flow of the power. Consultation for the converter station sites has already occurred, and planning applications will be submitted later this year.

Connections between these assets will be via HVDC cables buried either underground or below the seabed. In Caithness, the land cable corridor is likely to stretch approximately 20km between the Spittal converter station and the area of Sinclair's Bay where it will transition to the subsea cable.

The subsea cable route will extend from horizontally directionally drilled (HDD) landfalls between Sinclair's Bay in Caithness, and Rattray Head in Aberdeenshire. The subsea portion of the cable will be approximately 165km in length, through the Moray Firth and the North Sea.

The cable route in Aberdeenshire extends to approximately 16km between Rattray Head and the converter station at Netherton, near Longside.

Unlike previous projects, the design of this system requires the inclusion of an additional cable to reinforce the network in the event of a cable or other equipment fault. This additional cable is referred to as the Dedicated Metallic Return (DMR) and will be installed alongside the standard bi-pole arrangement of two HVDC cables and a fibre optics cable for communications.



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Project timeline

2023
- Consultations with stakeholders and statutory consultees.
- Onshore, offshore and engineering surveys commence.

2024
- Marine Licence Pre-Application Consultation.
- Marine Environmental Assessment.
- Onshore Voluntary Environmental Assessment completion.

2025
- Marine Licence Application submission.
- Project receives Marine Licence.
- Commencement of cable manufacture.

2026
- Commence onshore cable installation.
- Marine pre-installation activities.

2027-2028
- Continue onshore cable installation.
- Marine cable installation.

2029-2030
- Marine cable installation completed.
- Onshore cable installation complete.
- Commissioning and energization.

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Help shape our plans

The work we have planned is significant and has the potential to deliver massive benefits in your community, Scotland, and beyond. Yet we know that achieving our goals will require a lot of work that will impact your lives. That's why we want to work with you every step of the way throughout the planning and delivery stages of these essential and ambitious works.

We're committed to delivering a meaningful consultation process that actively seeks the views of everyone affected by our plans. That means making our plans clear and easily accessible, so that you can give us input throughout each stage of the development process.

Throughout the consultation, we'll present our approach to developing the project, including changes made since we last consulted with you. We will also provide some visualisations and maps to show you where everything will be located.

We want you to share your thoughts and opinions on our plans, where you think we can make improvements, concerns about the impact of our work and what youthink of any changes and refinements we've made. By telling us what you think, you will help shape our proposals. We want to harness your local knowledge so that wespot any unforeseen challenges early and maximise the potential benefits and opportunities for your communities.

Because, ultimately, we want you to work with us to ensure that the energy infrastructure we build will be the best it can possibly be.

The marine pre-application process

We are holding public consultation events in Caithness and Aberdeenshire to provide information about the proposed subsea cables in Scottish waters, prior to submitting Marine Licence applications to the Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team.

These events comply with the Marine Licensing (Pre- Application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, which apply to Marine Licence applications in the Scottish Territorial Waters, from Mean High Water Springs out to 12 nautical miles from the shore. You are invited to comment on the material presented in this document and the proposed development prior to the submission to the Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team. Consultation responses must be returned before the **15 October 2024.**

What we're consulting on

We are holding public consultation events in Caithness and Aberdeenshire to provide information about the proposed subsea cables in Scottish waters, prior to submitting Marine Licence applications to the Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team.

Who we're consulting with

As well as communities, we are keen to hear feedback from a broad range of other stakeholders including but not limited to landowners, businesses, non-statutory consultees and statutory consultees such as Marine Directorate, NatureScot, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), The Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and The Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses.

What next?

Following today's event, a Pre-Application Consultation Report will be prepared which will be submitted to support the Marine Licence application. The report will describe the comments received during these events and how we have responded to those, including any additional mitigation or amendments to the project.

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Marine Licensing in Scotland

Scotland's National Marine Plan sets out how developments in Scottish inshore waters (out to12 nautical miles) and offshore waters (12 to 200 nautical miles) will be managed, including objectives and marine planning policies for subsea cables.

Subsea power cables in Scottish watersrequire a marine licence to be granted by the Marine Directorate Licensing and Operations Team (MD-LOT), on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. Cables longer than 1853m and which cross the intertidal boundary are also subject to pre-application consultation requirements, hence our current consultation on the subsea cable elements of this project.

Although subsea electricity transmission cables are not subject to a formal Environmental Impact Assessment process, the Marine Scotland Act requires that we consider the scale and nature of the project, and provide a proportionate environmental assessment. With this in mind, a non-statutory marine environmental appraisal (MEA) will accompany our application for a marine licence. The MEA will detail the assessments that we have carried out, including our subsea cable routing studies and assessments of our potential impacts on the environment, cultural heritage, navigation, and other maritime activities.

We have also engaged with Crown Estate Scotland to obtain an option to lease agreement for the subsea cable installation corridor within Scottish territorial waters. Closer to the time of cable installation, the project will step from an option to lease to the full lease agreement, which provides SSEN Transmission with the seabed rights required to install and maintain the cable.

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How we selected our proposed subsea cable route and landfalls

In our previous consultation in May and June 2023, we presented potential subsea cable corridors between various landfall locations.

Several subsea cable corridors were developed and considered as part of the selection process. These options were based on identifying pairs of landfalls linked by a subsea cable corridor.

The process of identifying subsea cable corridors followed the stages below:

The process for selecting our proposed landfall and marine cable corridors:

Stage.1

Preliminary landfall option identification, focussing on identifying potential landfall locations meeting essential construction characteristics.

Stage.2

Constraints identification, identifying environmental, social, and technical constraints associated with each landfall.

Stage.3

Corridor Optioneering, identifying potential subsea cable corridors based on relative impacts on constraints identified in Stage 2.

Stage.4

Corridor Development and Selection, including a multi-disciplinary review of constraints and interactions between them to develop a suitable subsea cable corridor.

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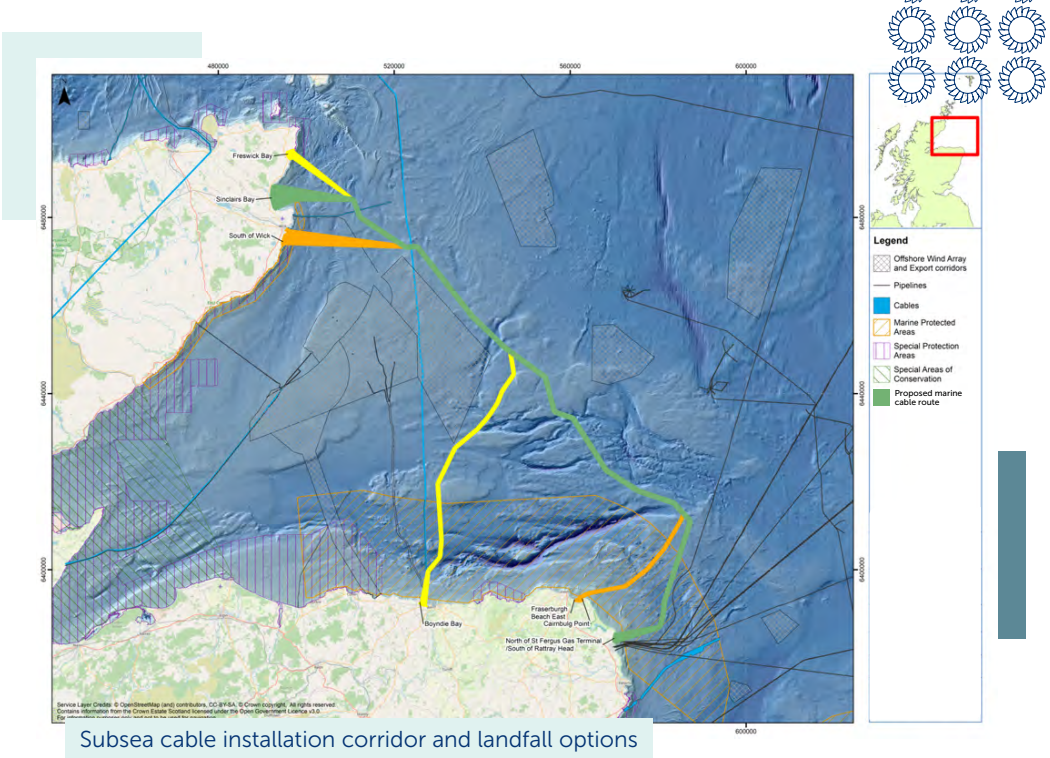
How we selected our proposed subsea cable route and landfalls

The subsea cable installation corridor options we presented joined each of the landfall options in Caithness to each of the landfall options in Moray and Aberdeenshire. Refer to map below.



Subsea cable installation corridor and landfall options

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Selecting a corridor between Sinclair's Bay and Rattray Head

The following key assessment principles were used during the preliminary corridor development process:

- Minimising subsea cable length, subject to avoiding important constraints
- Engineering factors that may affect cable laying feasibility and cost effectiveness have been considered as much as possible
- Avoidance (wherever possible) of interactions with designated sites, sensitive habitats and wrecks. Where avoidance is not possible, optimisation of the corridor to minimise impacts.
- Minimising disruption/interactions with other marine infrastructure and sea users including shipping, commercial fisheries, cables, pipelines and oil and gas stakeholders.

Following our previous consultation, a subsea cable installation corridor between Sinclair's Bay in Caithness and Rattray Head in Aberdeenshire was selected as the least constrained option because:

- It minimised interactions with protected areas and sensitive habitats and species to the greatest extent.
- It minimised interactions with recreational use of the coastline, particularly in Moray and Aberdeenshire.
- It maximised the potential for subsea cable burial throughout the cable corridor and minimised the number of crossings of 3rd party assets required.
- It minimised the length of onshore underground cable required to connect to substations at each end.

Since our last consultation in May and June 2023, we have carried out a marine survey campaign to gather additional data on the proposed subsea cable corridor between Sinclair's Bay and Rattray Head. We have used this data to refine our cable installation corridor to maximise cable burial and to quantify and minimise the potential environmental impacts of our works.

We are preparing to apply to Marine Directorate for a marine licence for the installation and operation of the proposed subsea cable.

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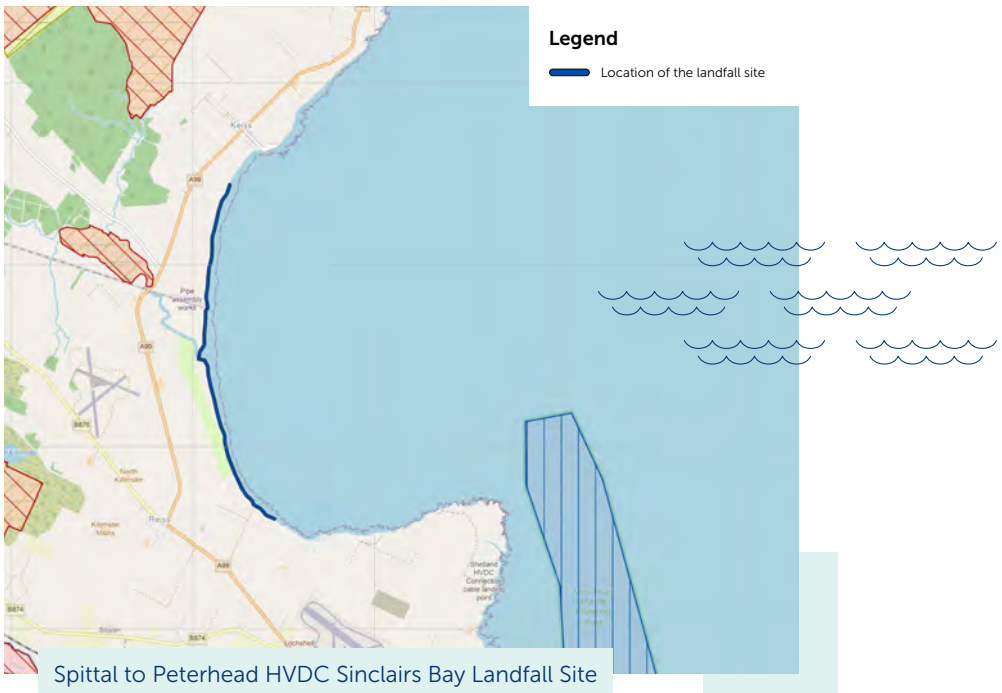
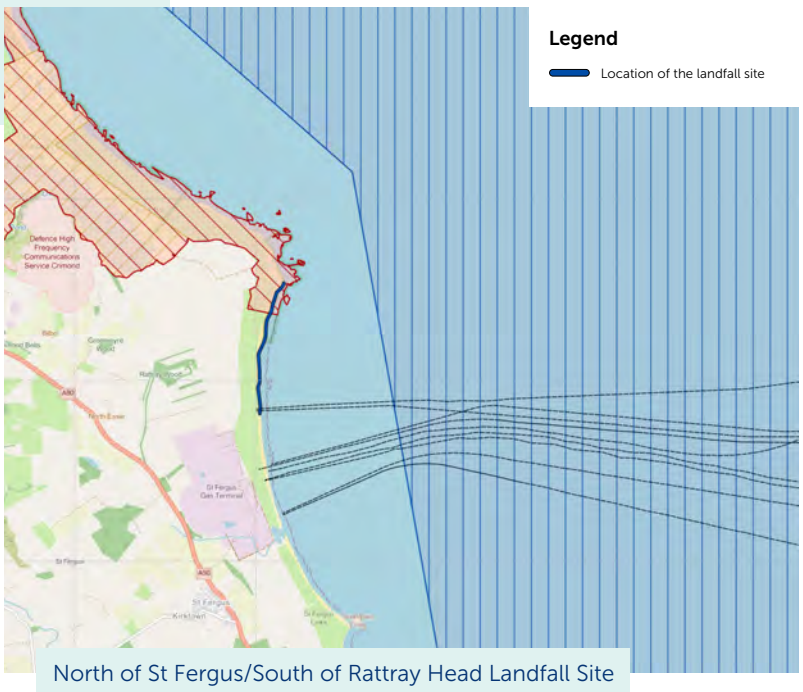
Selecting a corridor between Sinclair's Bay and Rattray Head



Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Sinclairs Bay Landfall Site



North of St Fergus/South of Rattray Head Landfall Site

gillian.doig@sse.com [Redacted]

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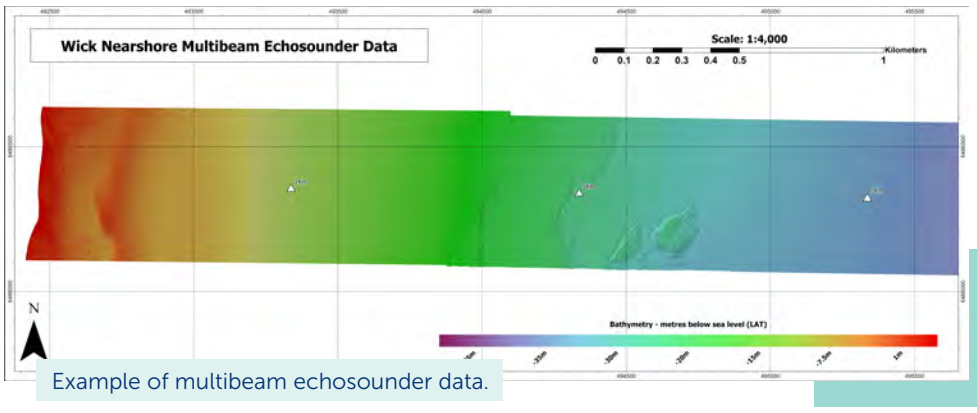
Marine surveys

To support development of the subsea cable installation corridor, we carried out a series of intertidal, nearshore, and offshore surveys during 2023 and 2024. The purpose of these surveys was to gather detailed information about the seabed and any technical constraints or sensitive features. This included:

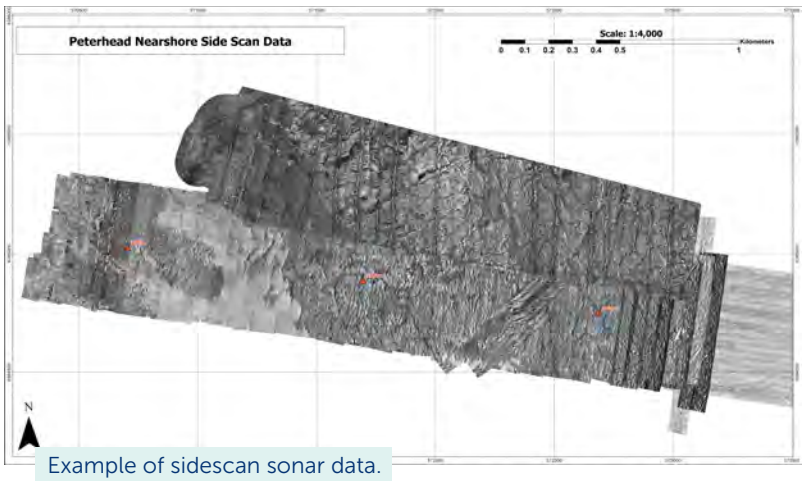
1. Geophysical survey to determine water depths, seabed features, shallow geology, cable crossing positions, intertidal topography, and to detect objects on the seabed. Instruments used include Multi-Beam Echosounder (MBES), Side Scan Sonar (SSS), Sub-Bottom Profiler (SBP), magnetometer, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).

2. Environmental survey to understand seabed habitats and species, using underwater cameras and sediment grab sampling. We use this information to create maps of the type and extent of seabed habitats throughout the corridor.

3. Geotechnical survey to determine the structure and physical properties of the surface and shallow sediment layers. Instruments used include a Vibrocorer and Cone Penetrometer Testing (CPT).



Example of multibeam echosounder data.



Example of sidescan sonar data.

The data collected during the marine survey has allowed us to optimise the installation corridor to:

- Maximise cable burial by avoiding (wherever possible) obstacles, including boulders, rock outcrops, plough marks, and potential unexploded ordnance.
- Avoid (wherever possible) or minimise impacts to any additional sensitive habitats identified in the corridor.
- Avoid (wherever possible) mobile sediments including sandbanks and sandwaves. Where not possible, optimisation of the corridor to minimise any potential for exposure of the cable.
- Cross in-service subsea cables as near to 90° as possible.
- Minimise anchoring and navigation restrictions.

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Subsea cable installation

The subsea cable system will be installed within a Marine Installation Corridor approximately 500m wide and 165km long. The installation of the cables will be split into the following campaigns.

Pre-lay survey

Prior to cable installation, additional marine surveys will be undertaken by the installation contractor within the subsea cable installation corridor to inform detailed route engineering and refinement. These surveys will aim to validate known constraints and identify any changes that could affect the cable installation including seabed sediments, sensitive environmental features, bathymetry, unexploded ordinance and other seabed features.

Cable route clearance

Debris and obstructions to the cable route will be cleared from the seabed before the subsea cable is laid. Cable route clearance may involve the following activities:

- Pre-sweeping sandwaves using a Mass Flow Excavator (MFE);
- Boulder clearance using grabs or ploughs;
- Debris clearance using a Pre-Lay Grapnel run (PLGR) and/or ROV
- Cutting and removing sections of out of service cables.

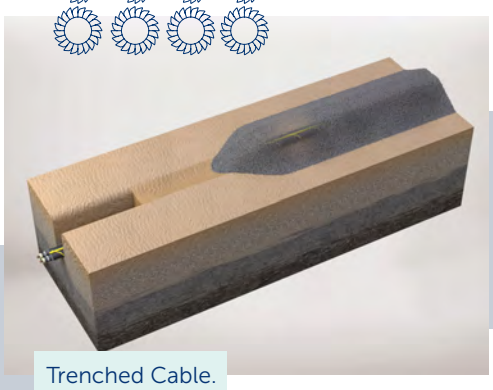
Cable lay and burial

Considering the dynamic environment in which our marine cables are installed, there are various hazards that pose a risk to the integrity of the cable. The cable will be protected from damage in one of the following ways:

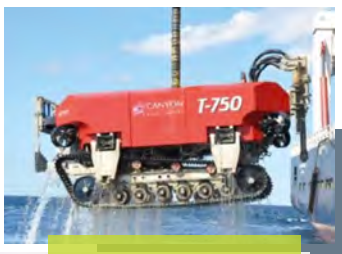
Burial - Burial in seabed sediments, using a trenching tool which follows the cable along the seabed using water jets or a plough to lower the cable into the seabed.

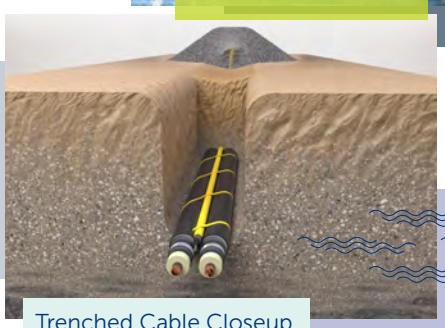
Surface protection - By using surface protection such as rock berms or protective ducts. Rock berms are placed over the cable using a fall pipe, allowing the rock to be accurately placed and the berm profile to be carefully designed. In some areas protective ducts or specially designed mattresses may be used, i.e in areas of environmentally sensitive habitats.

Trenching/ducts - At the landfalls, the cable will be brought ashore using pre-installed ducts. The ducts are installed using a horizontal directional drill, where a bore hole is drilled from the shore, under the intertidal area, and emerging at circa 10m water depth, protecting the cable from damage and minimising impacts on sensitive intertidal environments.



Trenched Cable.





Trenched Cable Closeup.

Post installation surveys

Detailed geophysical and imaging surveys will be undertaken to confirm the location of the installed cable and cable protection such as trenching and rock placement. Post-installation surveys will also be used to monitor seabed recovery, particularly in areas of sensitive habitats.

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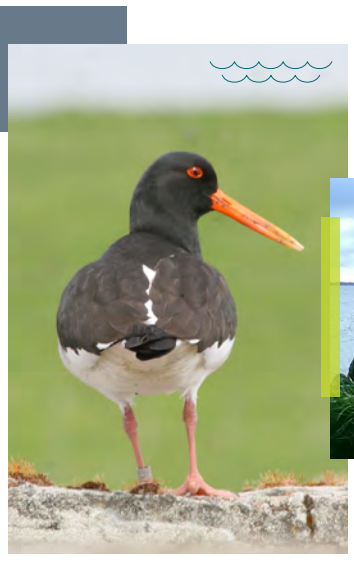
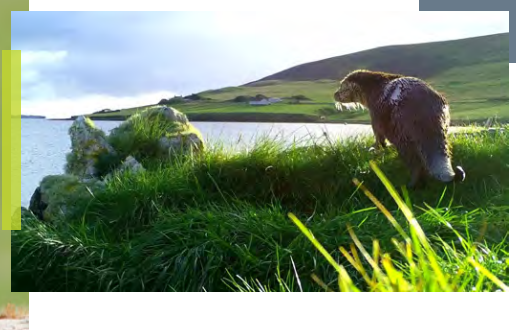
Environmental considerations

The possible effects of the installation, operation, and decommissioning of the subsea cable are considered within the project Marine Environmental Appraisal (MEA). Cumulative and in-combination effects are also considered where there is potential for effects from this project to overlap with the effects of other marine and coastal developments.





The following topics are included within the MEA. Refer to the booklet for more information.

- Physical environment
- Benthic ecology
- Fish and shellfish ecology
- Marine mammals
- Ornithology
- Marine archaeology
- Shipping and navigation
- Commercial fisheries
- Other sea users

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Benthic Ecology

The Moray Firth and North Sea area supports a range of intertidal and subtidal seabed habitats, many of which can be found within the Spittal to Peterhead HVDC subsea cable corridor.

The northern landfall area at Sinclair's Bay is comprised of sandy and rocky beaches backed by sand dunes and sea cliffs, while the southern landfall area at Rattray head is a sandy beach backed by an extensive sand dune community.

In the nearshore subsea areas of the route, the seabed mainly consists of coarse sediment, sand, bedrock, boulder and cobbles, while in offshore sections the seabed is mainly comprised of sand and coarse sediment.

Conspicuous benthic fauna observed within the installation corridor included the seapen *Pennatula phosporea,* brittlestars *Ophiothrix fragilis,* the rugose squat lobster *Munida rugosa,* the Ross worm *Sabellaria spinulosa,* common starfish *Asterias rubens,* and edible sea urchin, *Echinus esculentus*.

The subsea cable installation corridor traverses one marine protected area that includes a designation for benthic features (burrowed mud): the Southern Trench NCMPA. Burrows and burrowing fauna were detected at 67km, 93 – 95km and 102-112.5 km along the installation corridor, but these only qualified as an OSPAR Seapen and Burrowing Megafauna Communities habitat at one station.

One additional NCMPA is located approximately 2.2km to the south of the installation corridor at Sinclair's Bay: the Noss Head NCMPA, which is designated for the protection of horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* beds.

To reduce any potential impact to sensitive seabed habitats, micro-routing will be used where possible to avoid or minimise the footprint of cable installation in proximity to potentially sensitive habitats, and cable protection will only be deployed where adequate cable burial cannot be achieved.

Annex I Reef

Areas of 'low' and 'medium' annex I stony, rocky and biogenic reef formations were identified in the approach to the southern landfall at Rattray Head at approximately 3km to 6km from the shore.

Of interest was an area of patchy low and medium biogenic reef that included *Sabellaria spinulosa* aggregations growing on exposed bedrock and boulders.

In March 2024, we commissioned an additional survey to map the area of potential reef, to help us to understand it's extent and its ecological value. This survey gathered high-resolution geophysical data and imagery which will allow us to undertake detailed route engineering and micro-siting in order to minimise our impacts to the seabed (including reefs) in this area.

Ross worms growing on exposed bedrock.

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Shipping and navigation

A large number of cargo ships transit the subsea cable installation corridor, and ferry traffic from Aberdeen crosses the corridor regularly.

The charted anchorage in Sinclair's Bay to the south of the northern landfall (Sinclair's Bay) affords fair anchorage in fine settled weather, but it is not safe in unsettled conditions. At the southern landfall (St Fergus) there is uncharted anchorage at Buchanhaven.

Recreational activity is mainly focused in the vicinity of the cable landfalls. There is little recreational activity in the offshore parts of the subsea cable installation corridor, and there are no identified offshore cruising routes.

We have included a number of mitigation measures in the design and operational planning for the subsea cable installation, including avoidance of main navigational features, timely publishing of Notice to Mariners, AIS broadcasts, and use of guard vessels and safety zones.

Stakeholder input has been incorporated into the Navigational Risk Assessment we carried out in support of the marine environmental assessment, so that any concerns and potential impacts are recorded and minimised wherever possible.

Shipping Traffic Intensity

Commercial fisheries

The Moray Firth is an area of relatively dense commercial fishing in nearshore and offshore waters.

To foster good relationships with all shared users of the marine space, we have consulted with fisheries organisationsincluding the Scottish Fisherman's Federation (SFF), Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA), and local fishers to improve our understanding of existing commercial fishing activity in the area. The results of these consultations havehelped to inform the design of our subsea corridor.

The area is important for fisheries using static gear including pots and traps, particularly in the vicinity of and offshore from the Rattray Head landfall. In addition topots and traps, towed fishing gear such as otter trawls and dredges are frequently used along the installation corridor.

Safety zones will be required around the subsea cable installation area to ensure the safety of all personnel involved in the cable installation, so access to certain areas along the cable route will be restricted for temporary periods of time. These areas will be communicated ahead of time and a Notice to Mariners will be issued prior to the installation of the subsea cable.

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Have your say

Feedback
We will accept feedback from now until **15 October 2024.**

What we're seeking views on
We'll be actively looking to mitigate the impacts of this subsea cable project as much as possible over the coming months by scheduling the installation to have least impact to marine activities. It would be helpful to understand from marine users the location and timing of any activities to inform our plans. We would also like to understand if there are any opportunities to deliver a local community benefit.

Underground land cable
Note that information on the proposed final route alignment for the underground cable between the landfall in Sinclair's Bay to the converter station located in Banniskirk Hub and from Rattray Head and the converter station at Netherton Hub is outlined in a separate document that can be found on the documents tab of the project webpage at **ssentransmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/**

It is provided for information and does not form part of this consultation process.

How to provide feedback
Submit your feedback online by scanning the QR code on this page or via the form on our project webpage at: **ssen-transmission.co.uk/spittal-peterhead-subsea-cable-link/**

Email the feedback form to the Community Liaison Manager, or write to us enclosing the feedback form at the back of this booklet.

Community Liaison Manager

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Additional information:

Submit your feedback online by scanning the QR code on this page or via the form on our project webpage at:
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