

OSW0017

Written evidence submitted by Natural England

By email: <https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/111/technological-innovations-and-climate-change-offshore-wind/>

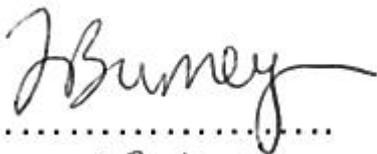
Environmental Audit Committee - Inquiry into Technological Innovations and Climate Change: Offshore Wind

Natural England welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above consultation and are pleased to enclose our submission.

If you have queries regarding our response, please contact Michael Watson, Principal Adviser, Legal and Governance on 07920 596 490 or michael.watson@naturalengland.org.uk.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



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Jonathan Burney
Director, Strategy & Government Advice

Natural England's submission to the Environmental Audit Committee - Inquiry into Technological Innovations and Climate Change: Offshore Wind

1. As the Government's advisor on the natural environment, Natural England's purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development. We advise on the environmental aspects of sustainable development and engage with the planning system as a statutory consultee for development plans, Environmental Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and where planning applications are likely to impact upon our particular interests.
2. We are pleased to have an opportunity to submit comments and would like to offer the following points in relation to the question '**How well is the UK industry managing the environmental and social impacts of offshore wind installations?**' posed by the Committee. They are as follows;
 - 2.1 Climate change represents the most serious long term threat to the natural environment. We recognise the importance of the offshore wind sector in reducing impacts of climate change, and we work closely with and have good relationships with a number of developers and the trade association Renewable UK.
 - 2.2 However, space at sea is limited, multiple sectors and other users of the sea space are competing for a limited resource and impacting on natural habitats and ecosystem processes that are now in need of recovery. A healthy and biodiverse marine environment is critical to ensure its resilience to climate change and our ability to mitigate its effects.
 - 2.3 Evidence is increasingly showing that environmental capacity thresholds are being met for a range of different aspects of the marine environment, particularly in relation to seabird populations, impacts on seabed habitats and marine mammals. There are currently significant concerns relating to the potential effects from offshore windfarm developments relating to seabird mortality and disturbance, loss of seabed habitats and underwater noise.
 - 2.4 Offshore windfarms need to be sensitively located and constructed in ways to ensure marine ecosystems are protected, can recover and where possible enhanced.
 - 2.5 Natural England believes there needs to be prioritisation of use of sea space at government level such that the overlap with marine protected areas is minimised and managed.
 - 2.6 Strategic or 'plan level' measures to compensate for or offset the impacts on biodiversity are urgently needed.
 - 2.7 Investment in alternative technologies which reduce environmental impacts is needed, for example low noise construction technology, low impact cable installation techniques and infrastructure which can be removed on decommissioning.
 - 2.8 There is a need to improve the collection of evidence, especially better environmental impact monitoring, of seabirds in particular.
 - 2.9 Improvements to the grid connection process could be made through strategic consideration of the need for and use of existing and future connection points, taking into account their onshore and offshore environmental impacts and ensuring opportunities for good design are taken to minimise impacts and provide a positive environmental legacy. Consideration of non-linear connections and joint use of cables by multiple asset owners or users could have the potential to reduce environmental impacts.

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2.10 Where coastal communities are affected by transmission-cable landing sites, Community Funds could also be used to join up with these initiatives adding wider benefits for people and their health and wellbeing by improving green infrastructure and access to green spaces.

15th May 2020