ERM’s Christina Warner and Lauren Osmond describe one of the first non-transitional projects to go through the PINS planning process. East Anglia Offshore Wind was one of the companies awarded a license by The Crown Estate to develop offshore wind assets under the Round 3 licensing programme. EAOW is a 50/50 Joint venture between ScottishPower Renewables (UK) Limited, the UK’s largest onshore renewables developer and Vattenfall Wind Power Ltd, the Swedish energy utility. The joint venture was awarded rights to develop up to 7,200MW of wind capacity off the coast of East Anglia.

ERM was appointed to manage and undertake the EIA for offshore components for the first project in the Zone, East Anglia ONE, as well as carrying out the Zonal Environmental Appraisal.

First of its Kind
The East Anglia ONE project is the first UK offshore wind project to go through the Planning Act 2008 as a non-transitional project since the Act came into force. Given the increasing scale and complexity of Round 3 projects in the context of the new regime, it was important for ERM to adopt a tailor made, streamlined but technically robust approach to EIA.

Some of the key implications of the new legislation have been:
- a requirement for significant pre-application consultation;
- additional challenges in conducting worst case assessments; and
- cumulative impact assessments being subject to increasing scrutiny.

Pre-Application Consultation
The Planning Act requires that consultation takes place with local authorities, statutory undertakers and others before a formal application is made. Consultation should ensure that stakeholders can make informed comments and are able to influence the assessment.

Rather than consulting on a draft ES, ERM produced the Preliminary Environmental Information Report approximately half way through the EIA process, nine months before the application for a Development Consent Order was made. This timing ensured that as much environmental baseline information could be included as possible, together with tentative indications of impacts and mitigation, and that there was time for any stakeholder feedback to be fed into the assessment.

Maintaining Project Flexibility
Very rarely are definitive project details known at the time of an offshore windfarm application, and as such it has been common for applications to be based on a range of worst case parameters to allow flexibility in the final choice of turbines, foundation design, etc. Round 3 projects are typically larger in terms of numbers and size of turbines, so this has required some additional thinking regarding the Rochdale principles established through case law and Planning Policy Guidance.

The general principle is that for each environmental topic, the assessment should be based on a range of design parameters (e.g. turbines between 3MW and 8MW) that represent the range of options the developer wishes to keep open. The worst case for each environmental topic is then assessed within this range of options. This approach ensures that the EIA is based on clearly defined parameters that will govern or define the full range of development possibilities and the likely environmental impacts.

Approach to Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA)
The increased scale of Round 3, coupled with increased stakeholder activity, has led to the need to investigate alternative approaches to CIA.

The Crown Estate promoted a non-statutory Zonal Appraisal and Planning (ZAP) process as a way of managing how development is taken forward across an entire Zone.
The aim of ZAP is to produce a Zonal Development Plan which both maximises the generation capacity of the Zone whilst minimising potential impacts. The Zonal Environmental Appraisal (developed by ERM) supported EAOW’s approach to the ZAP by conducting a three tiered cumulative and in-combination assessment which could subsequently be used to support the EIA process:

- The Zonal CIA analysed the potential cumulative impacts of the developments within the Zone.
- The Regional Windfarm CIA examined the cumulative impacts of developments in the Zone alongside the overall impacts of other windfarms in the region, outside the Zone.
- The In-Combination Impact Assessment considered the cumulative impacts arising from all windfarm activities in the region in combination with similar impacts from other development activities within and outside of the Zone (i.e. dredging, oil and gas, etc).

**Successful Delivery**

The DCO application, accompanied by the Environmental Statement, was accepted by the Planning Inspectorate in December 2012. Statements of Common Ground were drawn up and agreed with a number of statutory agencies, with very few representations being made by other stakeholders. ERM supported EAOW during the hearings, which were carried out between June and September 2013. A recommendation was made by the Planning Inspectorate to the Secretary of State and a decision is due to be announced in June 2014.

The Environmental Statement is available from the East Anglia Offshore Wind Website http://www.eastangliawind.com/.

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