### EIA Quality Mark Case Study

#### Area 526 Culver Sands ES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Issues:</th>
<th>Purpose of the project:</th>
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<td><strong>Protected sites:</strong></td>
<td>Aggregate extraction from Area 526 is being proposed largely to serve as a strategic replacement for depleting resources in nearby aggregate extraction areas, particularly adjacent Area 472. Extraction in Area 472 is expected to cease over the next three to five years; this Area currently supplies well over 60% of the South-West region's marine-derived sand. Sand from Area 526 is also expected to help meet demand should several proposed NSIPs be approved in the region.</td>
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<td>The proposed extraction area has direct overlap with the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC).</td>
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<td><strong>Benthic Species and Habitats</strong></td>
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<td>The benthic community within Area 526 is typical of the Inner Bristol Channel, composed mainly of sands and inhabited by very few organisms.</td>
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Fish and Shellfish Ecology
Three migratory fish species (river lamprey, sea lamprey and twaite shad) are qualifying features of the Severn Estuary SAC. These were not recorded in Area 526 which was found to support a limited fish and shellfish community. However as migratory species, it is likely that they will move past the area at some point throughout the year. The ES therefore considered the impact dredging may have on these species. The seabed in Area 526 was not considered a suitable spawning ground for herring but was identified as a potential sandeel area. The effect of dredging in Area 526 on sandeel was therefore also assessed.

Commercial and Recreational Navigation
The potential for an increase in vessel presence to effect commercial and recreational navigation through accident or incident within and between Area 526 and the shore was assessed.

Marine Archaeology
No known submerged ancient geographic features or anomalies of human origin were identified within Area 526. The potential to effect features of archaeological interest (which may be related to shipwrecks, aircraft crash sites and paleo-channels) was, however, assessed.

Description of the project:
Area 526 ‘Culver Sands’ covers 29.5 km² of seabed is located within the Bristol Channel. The Welsh/English border runs roughly through the middle of Area 526 resulting in the area existing in both English and Welsh waters. The EIA considered the impacts of dredging a total of 30 million tonnes of sand from the new licence Area 526 over a period of 15 years.

Suction hopper dredgers will typically transit to and unload at several ports in the region, with 80% of the resource landed in Avonmouth, Bridgwater, Cardiff, Newport, Pembroke and Swansea. Screening of the cargo will take place by employing screens with a variety of mesh sizes, with coarser sediments being returned to the seabed within the active dredge zone.

The sensitive receptors in the local area to aggregate dredging were identified following the scoping process and a standard analysis methodology was applied using available EIA guidance. Of the receptors assessed, the majority were found to have insignificant impacts. The most sensitive receptors to aggregate dredging operations were found to be benthic species and habitats; fish and shellfish ecology (nature conservation and ecology); commercial and recreational navigation; and marine archaeology. Following application of mitigation measures, the impacts to these receptors reduced to insignificant or minor adverse.

EIA Learning Outcomes
Lessons learnt:
The EIA Report was used to inform the marine licence applications to both NRW and the MMO. The benefits of early consultation, including both of these regulators and their advisors was of considerable benefit to the success of this project.

Communication with the wider EIA team was essential, particularly in proposing and agreeing the mitigation measures and licence conditions.
## Contact details

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