EIA Quality Mark Case Study

Viking Link: Management of UXO within the EIA regime

Key Issues:
This case study focusses on the management of risks to marine mammals during installation of the Viking Link interconnector.

Prior to installation of the interconnector, any unexploded ordnance (UXO) which are present within the cable corridor will require clearance. This represents a risk to marine mammals due to potential disturbance and injury from the noise caused by the detonation of the UXO. GoBe Consultants were retained by National Grid Viking Link to advise on marine mammal issues in relation to the UXO detonation. This case study describes how this risk was managed in the EIA process and how risks to marine mammals will be minimised during the project.

Purpose of the project:
The National Grid Viking Link are planning to build a high voltage direct current interconnector between Great Britain and Denmark. The interconnector will enable the more effective use of renewable energy, access to sustainable electricity generation and improved security of electricity supplies.

Description of the project
Viking Link will involve installation of 630km of submarine high voltage cable, of which approximately 220km will pass through British waters. An EIA was undertaken for the project which formed part of the marine licence application for the Viking Link UK Offshore Scheme under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Prior to installation of the cables, any unexploded ordnance (UXO) which are present within the cable corridor will require clearance. Effects of UXO clearance on marine mammals has required particular study in the EIA and also assessment under the Habitats Directive.

A Marine Licence was issued for the scheme in October 2018. Construction is due to commence in 2020 with the aim of commissioning in 2023.
EIA Learning Outcomes

Lessons learnt:
Early engagement was carried out with SNCBs to agree the method for assessing effects of UXO detonation on marine mammals. This facilitated prompt processing of the Marine Licence application after the assessment was submitted.

Lessons learnt from the offshore wind industry were successfully applied to the project enabling UXO issues to be carried out in a timely and efficient manner.

GoBe assessed effects on marine mammals by reviewing modelling studies that had been undertaken for UXO detonation for other projects in the North Sea. This avoided the need for new modelling saving the client time and money.

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Lessons learnt continued:
During the EIA process, it was identified that there was a risk of significant impacts arising if UXO detonation was to occur on the same day as construction of other projects in the North Sea (particularly some of the windfarm projects). This issue was successfully managed through liaison with the Marine Management Organisation. Other developers have made commitments to manage the timing of their works to minimise the risk of significant impacts.

The subject of impacts of noise on marine mammals is currently the focus of significant research with management measures in industry rapidly evolving across the Europe. GoBe kept abreast of recent research and used this to inform the impact assessment.

Construction projects of this nature can be subject to delays such as due to poor weather delaying surveys at sea. It is good to allow in the EIA sufficient flexibility to accommodate such delays without the need for reassessment and/or reapplication. Marine mammals will be protected during the works through implementation of a Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan (MMMP). This will include the use of Marine Mammal Observers and acoustic monitoring methods.

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