

# PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT OFFSHORE SCOPING



## North Channel Wind

OCTOBER 31, 2023

NORTH CHANNEL WIND  
Forsyth House, Cromac Street, Belfast BT2 8LA

## Document Control

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Project overview and status

North Channel Wind 1 and 2 are two proposed floating offshore wind farms in the North Channel of the Irish Sea. North Channel Wind 1 (NCW 1) is off the east coast of County Antrim, with turbines positioned between 9 km and 25 km from the shore (nearest to farthest).

North Channel Wind 2 (NCW 2) is located off the south-eastern coast of County Antrim and north-eastern coast of County Down, with turbines proposed between 15 and 24 km from shore (nearest to farthest).

The projects are at the scoping stage of development, which gives the opportunity to engage early with statutory agencies and other stakeholders to help identify all the factors that should be considered in the subsequent assessment of the projects.

To inform this engagement North Channel Wind prepared an Offshore Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report (“the Offshore Scoping Report”), which describes the key offshore elements of the proposed projects, the potential effects of the projects on the surrounding offshore environment, and the methods that will be used to gather and assess data to inform the subsequent EIA for the projects.

In addition, a number of environmental, technical and engineering surveys and studies are underway. Consent applications, including Marine Licences and planning permission, are expected to be submitted in 2026. Rights to lease the seabed are granted by The Crown Estate and North Channel Wind intends to submit an application once a leasing round for Northern Irish waters is open. Subject to all necessary permits and consents being achieved North Channel Wind could begin constructing in 2029.

## 1.2. North Channel Wind development team

North Channel Wind is a wholly owned subsidiary of SBM Offshore, with front end development work being carried out by NMK Renewables.

SBM Offshore is a global market leader in floating offshore solutions for the energy industry. A deep-water specialist with over 60 years of experience and innovation, SBM brings engineering and technical expertise to the projects.

NMK Renewables’ team has decades of experience in the renewable energy sector and are passionate about delivering offshore wind projects that can enhance coastal communities and enable Northern Ireland to achieve its energy and climate targets.

## 1.3. Commitment to consultation

North Channel Wind is committed to transparent and meaningful engagement with all stakeholders and sees consultation as an integral part of the development process.

Whilst there is no statutory requirement for public consultation at the scoping stage of the EIA process, North Channel Wind believes that listening to and addressing the views of interested parties at an early stage helps to identify issues of potential concern, explore solutions and ensure feedback

is taken into consideration in the subsequent development of the project and EIA. This helps to deliver a better project and a more robust EIA. As such, in addition to the formal scoping consultation that the consenting authorities will conduct, North Channel Wind held a voluntary public consultation on the Offshore Scoping Report in May/June 2023.<sup>1</sup>

This report outlines the consultation that took place, summarises the feedback received during the consultation and describes North Channel Wind's response to the feedback.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the voluntary public consultation featured the Offshore Scoping Report and accompanying HRA Report dated May 2023. The consenting authorities (Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and Department for Infrastructure (DFI)) subsequently advised that they would scope the offshore and onshore elements of the projects in parallel, therefore the Offshore Scoping Report and HRA Report were updated by NCW and re-submitted at the same time as the Onshore Scoping Report submission in January 2024. The main change to the content of the Offshore Scoping Report between May 2023 and January 2024 was a reduction to the size of the Export Cable Corridor Areas of Search for both NCW 1 and NCW 2.

## 2. Consultation process

### 2.1. Approach to stakeholder engagement & consultation

The purpose of this first phase of public consultation was to introduce the North Channel Wind projects and begin a dialogue with local communities and other stakeholders which will continue throughout the development of the project. It allowed us to share early proposals, the Offshore Scoping Report, and provided the opportunity for feedback.

Engaging early will help to improve the quality of the proposed projects and EIA by considering stakeholder opinions and addressing, where possible, issues raised.

North Channel Wind is committed to finding effective ways to engage with stakeholders, and to refine the process in response to feedback received. Our approach to stakeholder engagement involves the following key components:

- **Identify:** identification of those stakeholders with an interest in, or who might potentially be affected by, the Proposed Development;
- **Communicate:** provide information to stakeholders on the Proposed Development, its potential effects, and information about the consultation and development process.
- **Consult:** provide the opportunity for stakeholders to give information and feedback, record views and potential concerns about the project and the consultation process.
- **Communicate feedback:** provide information to stakeholders detailing the results of the consultation and provide responses to any concerns raised, along with follow up actions as appropriate.
- **Repeat and refine** - Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing process. The engagement process will be refined in response to feedback received.

### 2.2. Identification of stakeholders

North Channel Wind undertook desk-based research to identify stakeholders who might have an interest in or potentially be affected by the proposals. Those identified included:

- National and local authorities, Government and regulatory agencies
- Elected representatives:
  - MPs (East Antrim, North Down, North Antrim, Strangford, South Antrim, South Down, Belfast North and East)
  - MLAs (East Antrim, North Down, North Antrim, Strangford, South Antrim, South Down, Belfast North and East)
  - Elected council representatives (Mid & East Antrim Council – all wards; Ards & North Down Council – all wards; Causeway Coast & Glens Council – The Glens ward; Newry, Mourne & Down – Downpatrick ward, The Mourne ward).
- Local community organisations (e.g. community associations, community centres, churches, local environmental and recreational groups located in NI coastal communities within an approximate 20km radius of the projects)
- Other users of the sea (e.g. commercial fishing, angling, diving, recreational boating stakeholders)
- Interest organisations (e.g. environment, conservation, heritage groups, research bodies)

- Supply chain/industry
- Electricity transmission and distribution operators
- Other offshore renewable energy developers
- Residents (in NI coastal communities within an approximate 20km radius of the projects)

This first phase of public consultation focused on Northern Ireland, however it is intended to include consultation with appropriate stakeholders in other jurisdictions as the EIA progresses.

## 2.3. Communication and consultation

Following the identification of potential stakeholders, the methods for communicating information and consulting stakeholders were defined. This consisted of two main elements: in-person public exhibition events held in coastal areas in the vicinity of the two projects and a virtual exhibition, held online from the project website.

The public consultation ran from 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023 to 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023 inclusive.

In addition to this a number of briefing and engagement meetings were held with stakeholder groups in the months before the public consultation, including elected representatives, commercial fisheries, local councils, environmental groups and sea users.

### 2.3.1. Public exhibitions

#### *Locations*

The following public exhibitions were held:

| <b>Date and time</b>                    | <b>Location</b>                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Wednesday 31 <sup>st</sup> May, 2pm-8pm | Glenlough Community Centre, Carnlough |
| Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> June, 2pm-8pm  | The Gobbins Centre, Islandmagee       |
| Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> June, 2pm-8pm    | Hamilton Road Community Hub, Bangor   |

These three locations were chosen to provide a good geographical spread along the coastline in the vicinity of the projects. All venues were visited in advance to ensure suitable and accessible space and facilities including nearby parking for visitors travelling by car.

The exhibitions were scheduled at the start of the consultation period to allow plenty of time for people to provide feedback or ask follow-up questions after the events, before the consultation closed.

The exhibitions ran from 2pm until 8pm to allow for people to attend outside usual working hours. Refreshments and plenty of seating were available. Quizzes and colouring sheets were provided for children.

A total of 97 visitors attended the exhibitions over the three days: 33 in Carnlough, 29 in Islandmagee and 35 in Bangor.

#### *Information banners*

The exhibition included 13 information banners covering the following topics. A copy of the information banners is included in Appendix A.



- Welcome information introducing the project and exhibition
- About the developer, SBM Offshore
- Project location and development approach
- Northern Ireland's aspiration for offshore wind, including policy context and benefits
- Project status and estimated development timeline
- How electricity is generated from offshore wind
- Description of the offshore development
- Description of the onshore development
- The Environmental Impact Assessment process, surveys and studies
- Fishing engagement
- Community and supply chain benefits
- About the consultation, how to give feedback, next steps and ongoing engagement

### *Photomontages*

Computer generated visualisations, called photomontages, were displayed on boards to show the viewer what NCW 1 and NCW 2 could look like from different viewpoints along the coastline. For each project (NCW 1 and NCW 2), from a number of viewpoints, the photomontages showed two different indicative wind turbine array layouts to represent the turbine design envelope included in the offshore scoping report:

#### NCW 1:

- Array showing 46 x 22 megawatt turbines (290m rotor diameter)
- Array showing 68 x 15 megawatt turbines (240m rotor diameter)

#### NCW 2:

- Array showing 19 x 22 megawatt turbines (290m rotor diameter)
- Array showing 28 x 15 megawatt turbines (240m rotor diameter)

### *360-degree photomontage viewer*

In addition to the printed photomontages, attendees were able to look at the wind farms layouts in the context of a 360-degree views from each viewpoint. This virtual photomontage viewer is available in the North Channel Wind Virtual Consultation Room and was made available at the public exhibitions via a laptop and large TV screen.

### *Animated fly-through video*

An animated video showing a narrated 'fly-through' of the proposed NCW 1 and NCW 2 turbine arrays was played on a loop throughout the exhibitions. The video shows the turbines in relative to the Country Antrim and North Down coastlines.

### *Scoping report and habitat regulations screening report*

Several hard copies of the Offshore Scoping Report and Habitat Regulations Screening Report were available for viewing at the exhibitions.

### *Feedback forms & enquiry forms*

Feedback Forms were available for attendees to provide their views. The Feedback Form contains 10 questions seeking people's views on the projects, the consultation and renewables/offshore wind in general. There are further questions asking if respondents would like North Channel Wind to keep in

touch. A copy of the Feedback Form is included in the Appendix B. The feedback received is summarised in section 3.

Enquiry Forms were also available for members of the public to fill in as an alternative to speaking to a staff member, and as a way to record queries requiring follow-up.

#### *North Channel Wind project team*

Eight team members representing the North Channel Wind project, as well as the Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO) and Communications support, were present at each exhibition covering consenting, environment, grid, engineering, stakeholder, communications, supply chain and fisheries. The team was available to talk to attendees and answer questions.

### 2.3.2. Online exhibition / Virtual Consultation Room

In addition to the three public exhibition events, a Virtual Consultation Room was created so that members of the public could view the exhibition online.

The Virtual Consultation Room was accessible from the Consultation Page on the North Channel Wind website [www.northchannelwind.com/consultation](http://www.northchannelwind.com/consultation). It opened on 31<sup>st</sup> May to coincide with the first public exhibition.

The Consultation Page also linked directly to the Offshore Scoping Report and the Feedback form, allowing quicker access to users. Users were invited to contact the Stakeholder Manager or Project Coordinator if they were having difficulties accessing the online information or to request digital or hard copy of the material.

During the consultation period the Consultation Page was viewed 580 times by 191 unique users.

The Virtual Consultation Room contained the information boards, photomontages, 360-degree photomontage viewer, animated fly-through video, Offshore Scoping Report and Habitat Regulations Screening Report, which were all described in the previous section of this report. The Virtual Consultation Room also featured three videos of North Channel Wind team members talking introducing the projects and talking about their roles.

#### *Online feedback form*

The Virtual Consultation Room contained a link to an online version of the Feedback Form, where viewers could submit their views. Contact details of the Stakeholder Manager and Project Coordinator were provided in case viewers wanted to ask questions or get in touch.

A Supply Chain Form was also linked, inviting local businesses to be added to the North Channel Wind supply chain database. A printout of the Supply Chain Form is contained in Appendix C.

Although the consultation period lasted from 31<sup>st</sup> May to 28<sup>th</sup> June the Virtual Consultation Room has remained available to view on the North Channel Wind website.

Images from the Virtual Consultation Room are available in Appendix D.

### 2.3.3. Publicising the consultation

The consultation was publicised in a number of different ways to help reach the identified stakeholder groups identified in section 2.2.

### *Leaflet – direct mail*

A two-page colour leaflet was prepared to introduce the North Channel Wind projects and the public consultation, inform the reader about the local public exhibitions and the online exhibition, and to provide contact details.

Approximately 300 hard copies of the leaflet were sent to recipients by post and approximately 320 digital copies were sent to recipients by email. In addition to this, the information was also communicated by phone to a number of stakeholders who had provided only phone numbers. The leaflet recipients included all of the stakeholder groups listed in section 2.2 with the exception of local residents. It was decided that a combination of printed and online newspaper adverts in addition to distributing the leaflets to community organisations, churches and sports clubs in the local areas would provide sufficient coverage for local residents.

A copy of the leaflet is contained in Appendix E.

### *Newspaper adverts*

Quarter page full colour adverts were placed in the following print newspapers. These titles were chosen due to their geographical readership in coastal communities within approximately 20km of NCW 1 and NCW 2. The adverts also appeared in the online editions. A copy of the advert is included in Appendix F.

| <b>Publication</b>       | <b>Date(s)</b>                             |
|--------------------------|--|
| Ballymena Guardian       | 24 <sup>th</sup> May; 1 <sup>st</sup> June |
| Larne Times              | 25 <sup>th</sup> May                       |
| Carrick Times            | 25 <sup>th</sup> May                       |
| Coleraine Times          | 24 <sup>th</sup> May                       |
| Ballymena & Antrim Times | 23 <sup>rd</sup> May                       |
| Down Spectator           | 25 <sup>th</sup> May                       |
| Newtownards Chronicle    | 25 <sup>th</sup> May                       |

### *Press release*

Press releases were issued to announce the consultation to local and national media in advance of the exhibitions. The releases included information about the location of the proposed projects, the dates, times and venues of the public exhibitions, the online exhibition, and contacted details for the North Channel Wind team.

Copies of the press releases are contained in Appendix G.

The news was covered by the News Letter (25<sup>th</sup> May), The Irish Times (29<sup>th</sup> May), The County Down Spectator (1<sup>st</sup> June) and sailing and boating website [www.Afloat.ie](http://www.Afloat.ie).

### *Website news page*

A news piece was published in the news section of the North Channel Wind website on 19<sup>th</sup> May to highlight the upcoming public exhibitions. The releases included the dates, times and venues of the

public exhibitions, details of the online exhibition, and contact details for the North Channel Wind team. A further news piece was published mid-way through the consultation period on 15<sup>th</sup> June to remind viewers that the consultation was open.

### 2.3.4. Stakeholder meetings and briefings

North Channel Wind understands the value of building and maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders throughout the life of a project, and this is maximised by engagement at an early stage. North Channel Wind began consulting with statutory and non-statutory consultees from the inception of the projects.

For example, a key stakeholder group is the commercial fishing industry. Meetings have been held with NIFPO and ANIFPO to discuss the project, gain feedback on the impact of the proposals to the fishing community and discuss communication going forward. This resulted in the agreement of a scope of works for a Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO), a role which was subsequently appointed in 2022. A number of subsequent introductory meetings were held with fishermen from the ports of Ardglass, Bangor, Kilkeel, Larne and Portavogie, and the Clyde Fishermen’s Association. The issues raised by the fishermen were included in the Offshore Scoping Report commercial fisheries chapter to ensure they are fully considered in the project development and EIA.

A summary of the engagement and briefings to date is included below.

| <b>Stakeholder</b>                     | <b>Purpose of stakeholder engagement</b>   |
|--|--|
| DAERA                                  | Marine licence pre-application engagement to provide an overview of the project, discuss EIA scoping, consultation, and survey methodologies.  |
| Department for the Economy             | To provide an overview of the project and project updates. To discuss progress of the OREAP Steering Committee and Working Groups.   |
| Department for Infrastructure (DFI)    | To provide an overview of the project and project updates, engagement about planning requirements including Section 26 and EIA scoping.  |
| Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland | To provide an overview of the project and project updates and discuss regulatory requirements.   |
| SONI                                   | To provide an overview of the project and regular project updates. Discussions about progressing a grid connection application for North Channel Wind.   |
| Northern Ireland Electricity           | To provide an overview of the project and regular project updates. Discussions about grid connection requirements.   |
| ANIFPO                                 | Meetings to provide an overview and introduction to the project and subsequent project updates, gain feedback on the impact of the proposed projects to the fishing community, discuss communication and engagement going forward. |
| NIFPO                                  | Meetings to provide an overview and introduction to the project and subsequent project updates, gain feedback on the impact of the proposed projects to the fishing community, discuss communication and engagement going forward. |

| <b>Stakeholder</b>                                   | <b>Purpose of stakeholder engagement</b>  |
|--|---|
| Invest NI  | Discuss Invest NI plans to support offshore sector and options for joint projects of common interest.                           |
| RSPB   | Meeting to introduce the project.   |
| Ulster Wildlife Trust and NIMTF                      | Meetings to discuss joint projects to support environmental enhancement and introduce the wind farm project.                    |
| NI Marine Task Force                                 | Meeting to introduce the project and discuss engagement.  |
| National Trust                                       | Meeting to introduce the project.   |
| National Energy Action                               | Meeting to introduce the project.   |
| AFBI   | To provide an introduction to the project, and subsequent project updates, and discuss AFBI's marine research.                  |
| Fishing engagement meeting - Larne                   | Initial stakeholder meeting to introduce the project to the fishermen and listen to feedback.                                   |
| Fishing engagement meeting - Kilkeel                 | Initial stakeholder meeting to introduce the project to the fishermen and listen to feedback.                                   |
| Fishing engagement meeting - Ardglass                | Initial stakeholder meeting to introduce the project to the fishermen and listen to feedback.                                   |
| Fishing engagement meeting - Bangor                  | Initial stakeholder meeting to introduce the project to the fishermen and listen to feedback.                                   |
| Clyde Fishermen's Association                        | Initial stakeholder meeting to introduce the project, gather initial feedback and learn about the CFA's activities.             |
| Fishing engagement meeting - Portavogie              | Initial stakeholder meeting to introduce the project to the fishermen and listen to feedback.                                   |
| Maritime Coastguard Agency                           | To provide an overview of the project, gain feedback on the potential shipping and navigation impacts of the proposed projects. |
| Invest Northern Ireland Maritime Cluster             | Presentation delivered to introduce the project to cluster members.   |
| Causeway Coast & Glens Council – Planning Department | Meeting to introduce the project and listen to feedback.  |

| <b>Stakeholder</b>                                       | <b>Purpose of stakeholder engagement</b>   |
|--|--|
| Mid & East Antrim Council – Development Plan Department  | Meeting to introduce the project and listen to feedback.   |
| Ards & North Down Council – Place Directorate            | Meeting to introduce the project and listen to feedback.   |
| Ards & North Down Council – Place & Prosperity Committee | Presentation delivered to introduce the project to committee members and answer questions.   |
| Belfast City Council                                     | Meeting with Green Economy department to introduce the project.  |
| Various elected representatives                          | Meetings to introduce the project, listen to feedback and discuss community engagement.  |
| Royal Yachting Association                               | Meetings to introduce the project, listen to feedback and discuss ongoing engagement.  |
| Mid & East Antrim Council Harbour and Marinas Department | Meeting in Glenarm organised by the Harbour & Marinas Manager to enable their stakeholders to hear about the proposals including representatives from Glenarm Community Development Committee. |
| Commission for Irish lights                              | Meeting to introduce the project.  |
| Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority               | Meeting to introduce the project.  |
| Mutual Energy  | Introduction to the project and discussions about the Moyle Interconnector.  |
| Foyle Port   | Introduction to the project and discussion of infrastructure requirements going forward.   |
| Belfast Harbour  | Introduction to the project and discussion of infrastructure requirements going forward.   |
| Larne Port   | Introduction to the project and discussion of infrastructure requirements going forward.   |

### 2.3.5. Ongoing contacts and future consultation

Listening to and engaging with the public and our stakeholders is important at all stages of the development, not just during public consultation.

The North Channel Wind team remain available to talk with anyone who has questions and wishes to learn more about the project and will continue to engage in the months and years ahead.

- The North Channel Wind Stakeholder Manager, Fiona Stevens, is available throughout the development of the projects: [fiona.stevens@northchannelwind.com](mailto:fiona.stevens@northchannelwind.com) 07380 426 114.
- SeaSource Offshore is the Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO) for North Channel Wind. The FLO is the primary point of contact and works to maintain strong lines of communication between the fishing industry and North Channel Wind. The FLO contact is Brian Chambers: [flo2@seasource.com](mailto:flo2@seasource.com) 07355 744 942.

Members of the public are able to sign-up to receive news updates via a contact page on the website: [www.northchannelwind.com/contact](http://www.northchannelwind.com/contact).

The feedback received from this public consultation, together with the formal scoping opinion which will be issued by DAERA, will be used to inform further project design and the environmental impact assessment. North Channel Wind aims to hold a further public consultation during the environmental impact assessment process, during which the latest plans will be shared and there will be further opportunity for members of the public to provide feedback.

## 3. Feedback

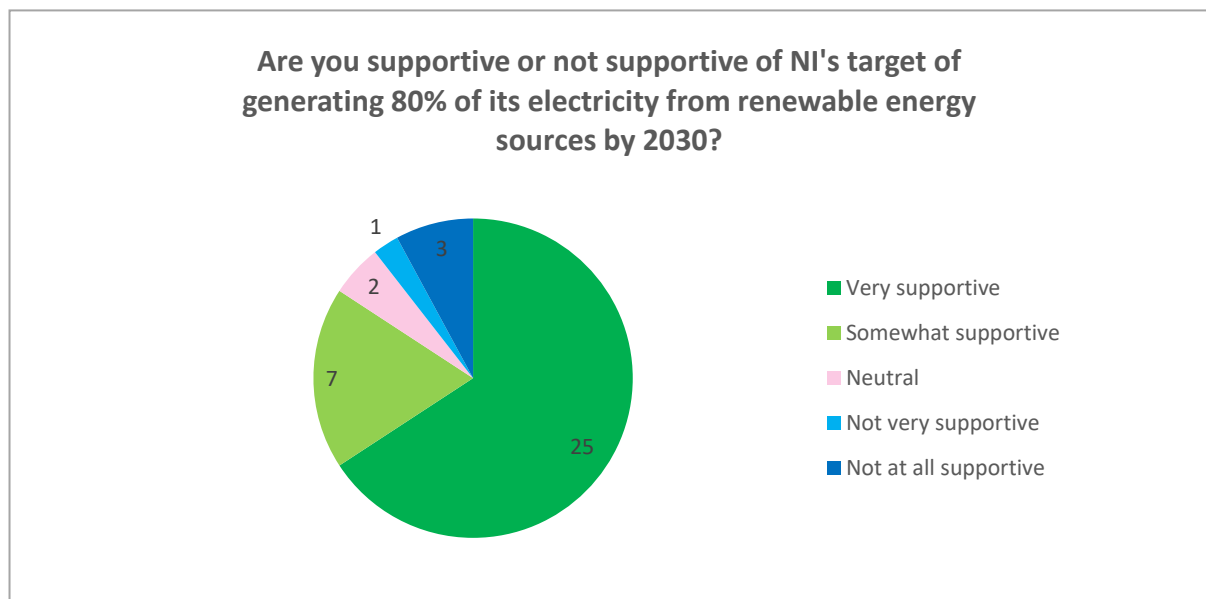
During the consultation people were able to submit feedback by filling in a Feedback Form, either at the public exhibitions or online. A copy of the Feedback Form is in Appendix B. 38 Feedback Forms were received in total. Feedback in other formats, (i.e. not using the Feedback Form) such as email, were also received. North Channel Wind received responses in other formats from 33 respondents, including questions, comments and observations.

Feedback Form questions 1, 2, 3, 4 & 9 were multiple choice style questions. Questions 5, 6, 7, 8 & 10 were open-ended questions where respondents could free-type or write their responses in their own words. Questions 11 to 16 were about keeping in touch, contact details and consent and are not presented in this report.

### 3.1. Responses to multiple choice questions

#### 3.1.1. Question 1: Views on renewable energy targets

*Question 1: Are you supportive or not supportive of Northern Ireland's target of generating 80% of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030?*

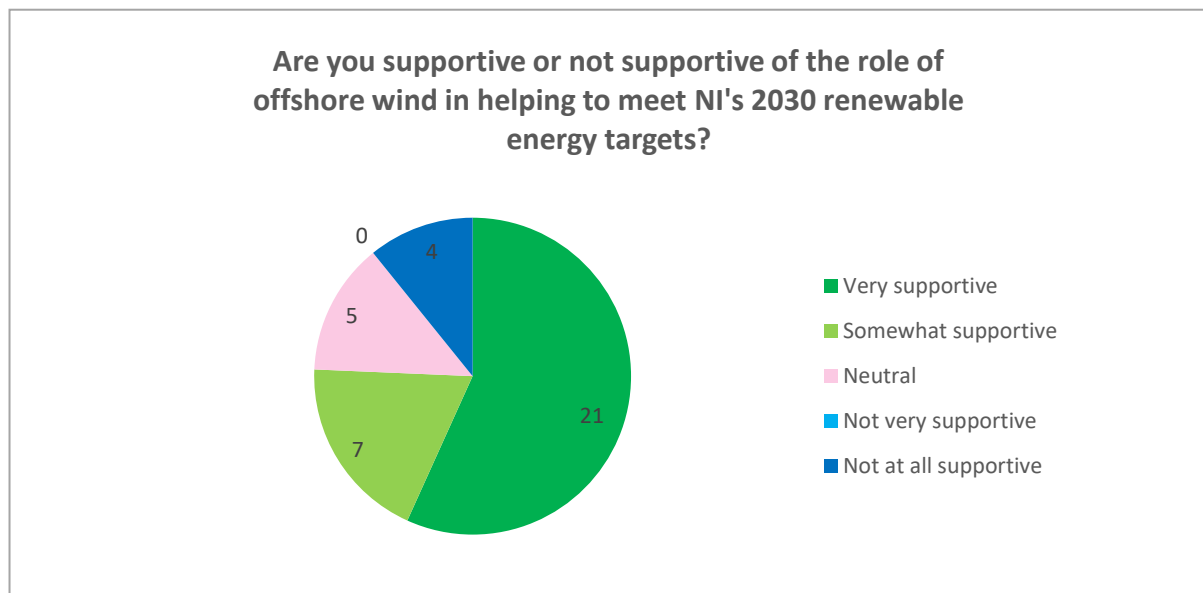


66% responded Very supportive; 18% responded Somewhat supportive; 5% responded Neutral; 2% responded Not very supportive; 8% responded Not at all supportive.



### 3.1.2. Question 2: Views on the role of offshore wind

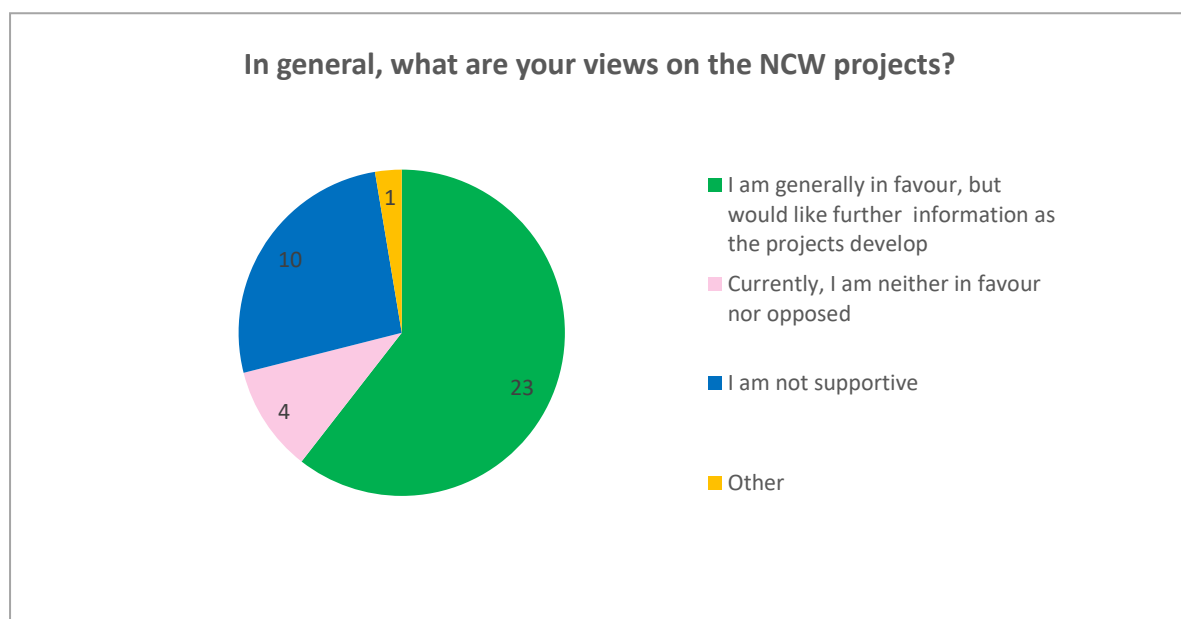
*Question 2: Are you supportive or not supportive of the role of offshore wind in helping to meet our 2020 renewable energy targets?*



57% responded Very supportive; 19% responded Somewhat supportive; 13% responded Neutral; 0% responded Not very supportive; 11% responded Not at all supportive. One respondent did not answer this question.

### 3.1.3. Question 3: Views on the North Channel Wind projects

*Question 3: In general, what are your views on the North Channel Wind projects?*



61% responded Generally in favour but would like more information as the projects develop; 11% responded Currently I am neither in favour nor opposed; 26% responded I am not supportive; 3% responded Other.

Question 3 allowed respondents who selected 'other' to enter a written comment to explain their view. The one respondent who selected 'other' commented that there was inadequate time to review the proposals.

### 3.1.4. Question 4: Views on the most important factors to consider

*Question 4: What do you think are the most important factors that you would like us to consider as we progress the design of the North Channel Wind projects?*

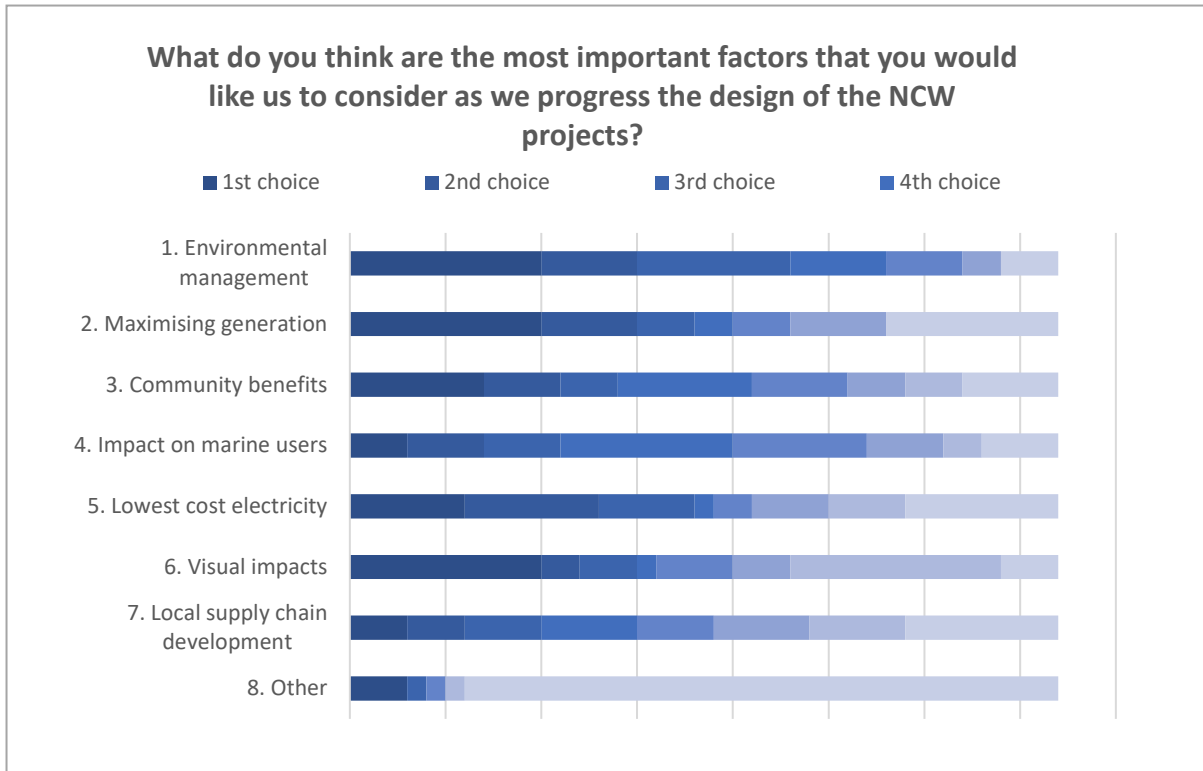
Respondents were asked to rank eight different factors in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important. The factors were:

- Benefits for local communities
- Environmental management
- Visual impacts
- Delivering the lowest cost electricity to consumers
- Maximising the generation of renewable electricity
- Development of local supply chain
- Impacts on marine users
- Other

A text box was provided to allow respondents to nominate a factor under 'other' that was not already listed as an option.

Any boxes left blank were awarded a rank of 8 (least importance). Some respondents ticked/crossed boxes and left others blank rather than provide a ranking/order of preference. In these cases, all ticked boxes were awarded a rank of 1 (most importance) and all blank boxes were awarded 8 (least importance).

Overall, 'environmental management' scored as the most important factor, followed by 'maximising renewable electricity generation'. 'Other' scored as the least important factor. The chart below shows a breakdown of the importance rankings received by each factor (1<sup>st</sup> choice through to 8<sup>th</sup> choice). The factors are listed in rank order (1 to 8) of overall importance based on the results.

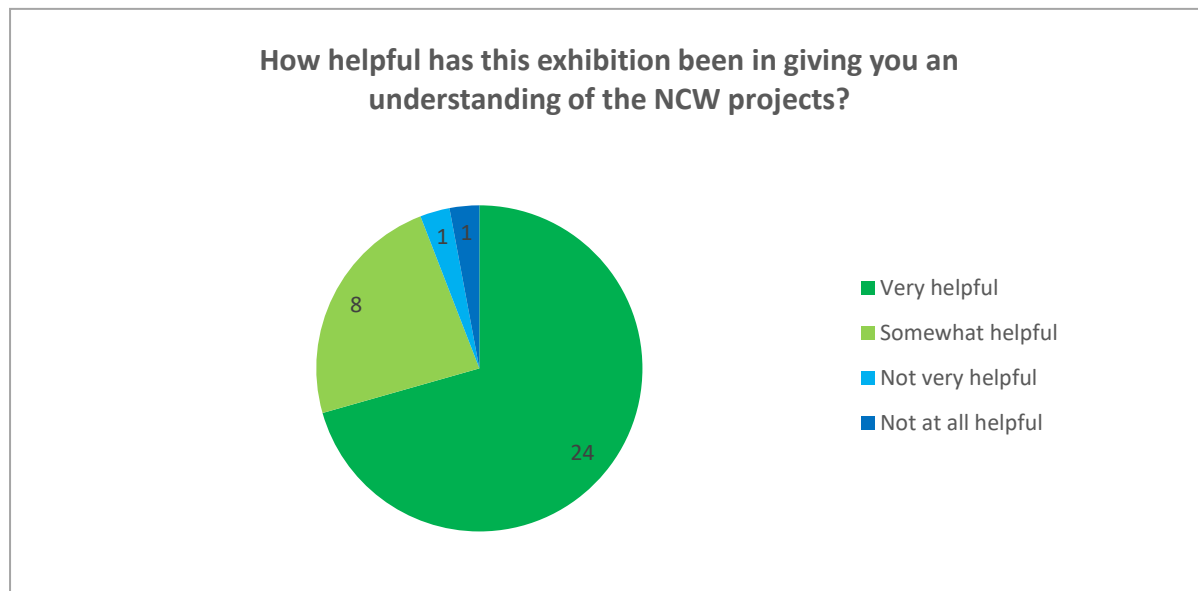


Factors that were recorded by respondents under the 'other' category included:

- Putting nature at the core of planning
- Noise
- Impacts on tourism and the local socio-economy due to visual impacts
- Impacts on marine life
- Impacts on landscape and visual amenity for residents and visitors
- Commitment to local communities for employment and suppliers
- Improvement of the grid for other renewable energy projects and facilitation of electrification and electric vehicles.

### 3.1.5. Question 9: Feedback on the exhibition

*Question 9: How helpful has this exhibition been in giving you an understanding of the North Channel Wind projects?<sup>2</sup>*



71% responded Very helpful; 24% responded Somewhat helpful; 3% responded Not very helpful; 1% responded Not at all helpful. Four respondents left this question blank.

## 3.2. Responses to open-ended questions and feedback in other formats

Questions 5, 6, 7, 8 & 10 were open-ended style questions inviting respondents to provide feedback in response to the following:

- *Question 5: Do you have any questions about the North Channel Wind development consent process?*
- *Question 6: Do you have any comments on the North Channel Wind Scoping Report? Are there any other factors to consider?*
- *Question 7: Please provide any specific feedback on North Channel Wind 1 that you would like the team to consider.*
- *Question 8: Please provide any specific feedback on North Channel Wind 2 that you would like the team to consider.*
- *Question 10: Have you any suggestions for how our exhibitions could be improved?*

Feedback received is summarised below, grouped by topic area (e.g. landscape & visual, economics). The summary below also contains any feedback relating to that topic which was submitted in other

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<sup>2</sup> 4 respondents left this blank.

formats, such as by email. Where comments relate specifically to either NCW 1 or NCW 2, this is stated at the end of each topic section.

### 3.2.1. Consenting and EIA

A number of questions were asked about consenting requirements and process for the NCW projects. One respondent requested clarification on whether a planning application would be submitted, who would adjudicate on this given that it is offshore, and what the roles of Mid & East Antrim Council, the Department for Infrastructure and The Crown Estate would be. One respondent commented that they would like to see a timeline for development. A number of respondents asked when the next round of public consultation would be and would the public be kept informed of progress. Another respondent asked when the marine licence application would be submitted.

#### *Project team response:*

A number of permissions and licences will need to be obtained in order for the NCW 1 and 2 projects to be built:

**Marine Licence:** The offshore elements of the projects, including the wind turbines, inter-array cables, export cable and offshore substation, will require a marine licence, for which applications are made to DAERA.

**Planning Permission:** The onshore elements of the projects, including landfall, the underground onshore cabling and onshore substation, will require planning permission. Planning applications for the majority of developments are made to the local councils, however applications for regionally significant projects are made to the Department for Infrastructure (DFI). We understand that the project is likely to be deemed regionally significant under the NI Planning Regulations and therefore the application will be made to DFI.

The consent applications will be accompanied by a number of important documents including: a detailed Environmental Statement, which will describe the EIA that was conducted for all elements of the project, onshore and offshore; a Navigation Risk Assessment and, a Habitat Regulations Assessment. We currently estimate submitting the applications for the marine licence and planning permission in 2026. Once submitted, the relevant consenting authority will formally consult with a wide range of organisations on the marine licence and planning permission applications, including the local councils.

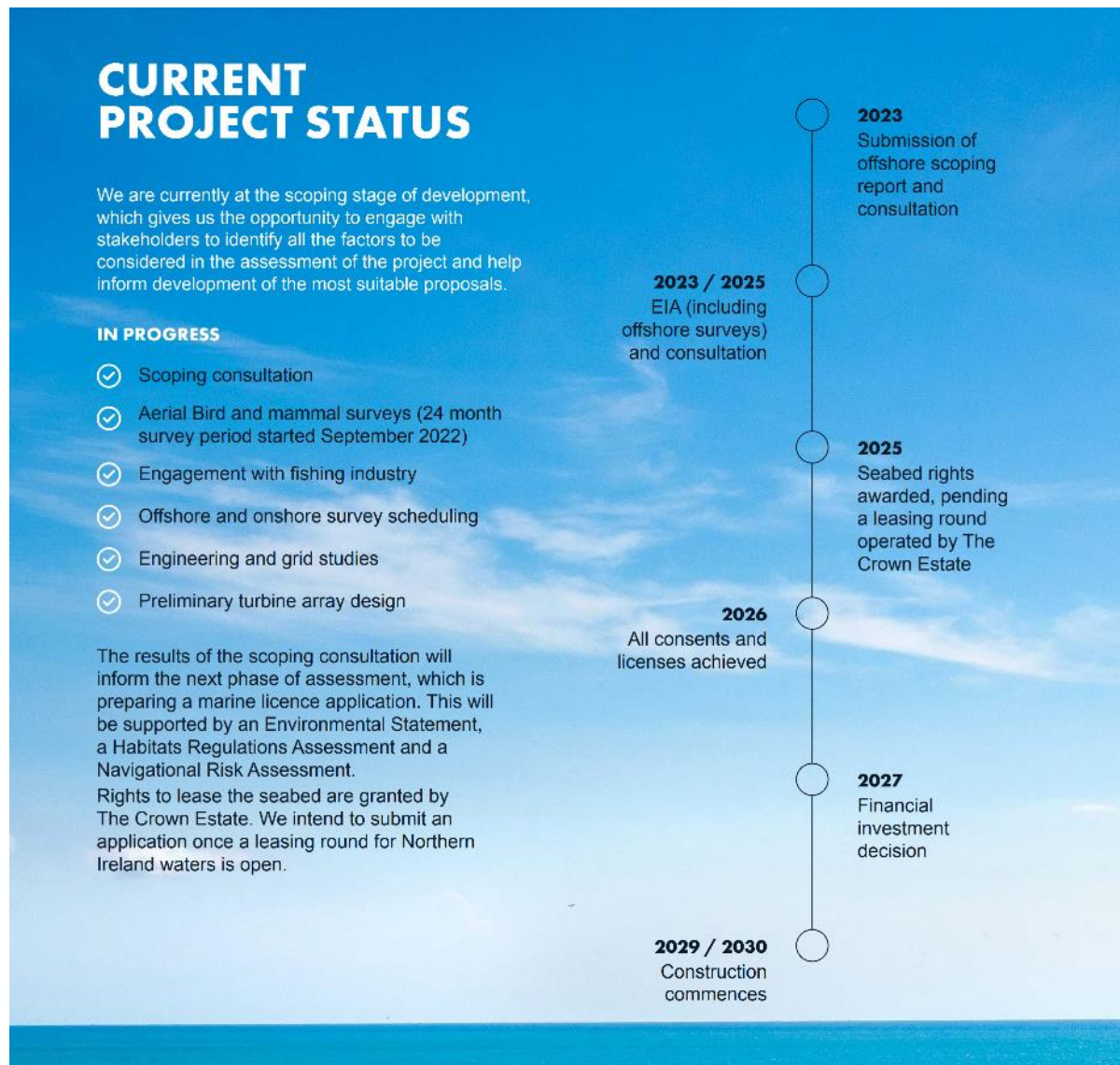
**Article 39 and Generation Licence:** In addition, the project will require consent to construct a generating station under Article 39 of the Electricity Order, which is issued by Department for the Economy (DfE) and an electricity generation licence, which is issued by the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland (UREGNI).

**Seabed Lease:** A seabed lease will need to be granted by The Crown Estate. The Crown Estate is currently engaged with DfE through the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) process to plan a leasing round which is likely to be specific to Northern Ireland.

An estimated timeline for the development process is included on our website [www.northchannelwind.com/timeline](http://www.northchannelwind.com/timeline) and was included as an information board in the physical and online exhibitions. A copy of the information board is below. It should be noted that timings for a leasing round by The Crown Estate and for the consenting process are estimates, and therefore may differ from what is shown. The team will update the timeline on the project website as and when any changes are known.

Progress updates will be provided to stakeholders, including any members of the public who have signed-up to receive project updates or indicated that they would like to be contacted again/keep in touch. This will include details of future consultations, although any stakeholders, including members of the public, are welcome to contact us at any time.

We envisage the next phase of public consultation on the offshore elements of the project will take place during the EIA process, so that further comments may be taken into account before the EIA is concluded and the consent applications are submitted.



### 3.2.2. Site selection

A number of respondents queried why the locations of the NCW 1 and 2 sites had been selected, primarily in relation to the visual impact, distance from the coast and wind resource.

Various suggestions with regard to alternative locations were made, including the west or north coasts of Northern Ireland due to their wind resource and the possibility of being located at a greater distance from the coastline, bringing the turbines onshore and consideration of tidal energy.

One respondent suggested that thought be given to smaller wind farms in various locations further from shore, (20% Glens, 20% Ards, 20% North Coast, 20% on land and 20% other means to reduce reliability on wind) to limit the impact in any one place. They expressed the view that this was preferable to having the turbines all in one place, which they considered to be for maximum ease and profit. The respondent said that North Channel Wind need to make the public more aware of key drivers for the site selection, suggesting that one of the main factors driving the site selection appeared to be providing as short of a cable run as possible to Ballylumford Power Station to limit costs of construction.

#### *Project team response*

The reasons why the project locations were selected were described on of the information boards in the public exhibition: 'Project Location and Development approach, Why the North Channel?' which says:

*Many factors are taken into consideration when identifying areas suitable for floating offshore wind farms. North Channel Wind has undertaken comprehensive work to determine the optimum area for the development of commercial floating offshore wind projects. These include: The availability of good wind resource; Potential to connect to the electricity grid; The constraints in Northern Ireland territorial waters; Absence of hard constraints, such as areas already leased by the State for other uses; International shipping routes; Water depth or unfavourable seabed conditions; Environmental, technical and economic considerations.*

*The combination of all the above factors are the main reasons why we have identified the North Channel as an excellent location for a floating offshore wind development.*

Further detail on the site selection is provided in the Offshore Scoping Report, Chapter 1.3.

The proximity of the wind farm to a major electricity demand hub is indeed one of the considerations informing site selection, as stated in the public exhibition information. A shorter length of subsea electricity transmission cable can potentially reduce environmental impact and cost of construction and maximises the efficiency in bringing the electricity to shore. Operational costs are also reduced due to ease of access for maintenance and reduced transmission losses. Cost reductions in the delivery of projects like this ultimately reduce the cost of energy to the consumer. However careful assessment of all aspects of the proposed sites, cable corridors and constraints will continue throughout the EIA. The final Environmental Statement will include a detailed description of the site selection process, and how the project design has evolved, including the consideration of alternatives.

Tidal developments around the north coast of Northern Ireland have been investigated in the past, however they did not proceed due to lack of grid connection and tidal technology. Northern Ireland currently has over 1.3 gigawatts of onshore wind installed capacity, which plays a vital role in helping to decarbonise electricity generation in Northern Ireland. However offshore wind is also needed to deliver at the scale and pace needed to meet the Government's future renewable electricity targets. As well as there being more space offshore, capacity factors are typically much higher offshore than onshore, maximising electricity generation.

### 3.2.3. Seascape, landscape and visual

Concerns were raised by some respondents about the landscape and visual impact of both projects. This included fears of destroying the natural beauty of the area and visual impacts on residents and visitors to the coast road.

One respondent commented that the location and scale of the proposals were entirely inappropriate. Concerns were raised over the impact on 'cherished' views of Argyll, Kintyre and Islay.

#### *NCW 1*

In relation to NCW 1 specifically, concerns raised included the significant visual impact on Northern Ireland's eastern seaboard and impacts on rural life and visitors to Portmuck. The impact on the Glens of Antrim Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was raised, with one respondent particularly mentioning Glenariffe, as Queen of the Glens, renowned worldwide. One respondent asked what steps were being taken to minimise the visual impact of the scheme. Another commented that some visualisations from Scotland would be useful.

#### *NCW 2*

In relation to NCW 2, one respondent commented that the proposals were very close to shore and suggested that smaller rotors be considered to minimise visual impact.

Another respondent expressed the opinion that NCW 2 was much more acceptable than NCW 1 in respect of scale and distance from the shore and its non-AONB location. The respondent felt that it would not impact on tourism as much. The respondent however questioned the suitability of a wind turbine 325m tall that isn't at least 100km out to sea, referencing Dogger Bank wind farm as an example.

Another respondent commented that careful analysis of the benefits of the project was necessary against the potential impacts of the projects on the natural beauty and wildness of the environment and industrialisation of the site. The respondent referred to the project becoming another potential eye-sore, in addition to the existing Kilroot Power Station.

#### *Project team response*

The EIA will include a comprehensive Seascape, Landscape & Visual Resources Assessment (SLVRA) prepared by chartered landscape architects in accordance with best practice guidance. The approach to the assessment is set out in Chapter 15 of the Offshore Scoping report.

For the scoping consultation, indicative photomontages were prepared from six different viewpoints to show viewers what the proposed wind turbines could look like from different locations along the Antrim and Down coastlines (Cushendun, Carnlough, Portmuck, Whitehead, Crawfordsburn and Donaghadee). These were included within the Offshore Scoping Report and were displayed in the public and online exhibitions. These visualisations will be updated and added to as the SLVRA progresses.

Impacts on designated landscapes within the study area, including the Glens of Antrim AONB, will be thoroughly examined as part of this assessment.

Portmuck also falls within the study area and impacts on visual amenity of residents and visitors will be included in the assessment. Photomontages of what the proposed NCW 1 wind farm might look like from Portmuck were included in the Offshore Scoping Report and were on display in the public



and online exhibitions. Other topics that will be considered in relation to local populations, where relevant, include noise, vibration, air quality, employment, economics and tourism.

Parts of Scotland fall within the study area for the SLVRA and the updated visualisations prepared for the EIA will include viewpoints on the Scottish coastline.

Offshore wind turbines are large and the project team appreciates that visual impact will be of concern to some stakeholders. The size of the turbines enables them to generate significant quantities of renewable electricity, helping to reduce carbon emissions and improve the security of our energy supplies.

In relation to rotor sizes, the offshore wind turbine market is evolving all the time. North Channel Wind is using a design envelope approach in its scoping report, which sets a minimum and maximum rotor diameter based on our estimations of the turbine sizes that will be available in the market should the projects be built in the years to come. The design envelope approach allows for this flexibility, whilst ensuring that the potential effects on the environment of the whole envelope is fully considered in the EIA.

### 3.2.4. Ornithology & marine life

Several respondents highlighted a concern over the potential impact of the wind farms on birds and marine wildlife.

One respondent queried if it would be possible to shut down turbines during important migration periods for birds and fish.

#### *Project team response*

Detailed studies are underway to assess the impacts of the proposals on wildlife, including bird and mammal surveys, which started in 2022 and will continue until 2024. The results from these surveys and assessments will inform the design of the wind farms and will be reported in a comprehensive Environmental Statement. A Habitat Regulations Assessment will also be prepared which will consider the potential impacts of the projects on protected species and nature conservation sites. Both of these documents will be submitted in support of the application for development consent.

The approach to assessing impacts on wildlife is detailed in the Offshore Scoping Report Chapters 7 to 11 covering: Benthic Subtidal and Intertidal Ecology; Fish and Shellfish Ecology; Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles; Offshore and Intertidal Ornithology; and Commercial Fisheries. A Habitat Regulations Screening assessment has also been prepared and is available in the virtual consultation room via the project website, [www.northchannelwind.com/consultation](http://www.northchannelwind.com/consultation).

It is too early to determine what further mitigation measures and future monitoring is required, for example turbine shut down during important migration periods for birds and fish, however the need for such measures will be thoroughly considered through the EIA process. There have been many decades of research into interactions between migrating birds and offshore wind and best practice will be incorporated into our proposals as appropriate.

### 3.2.5. Socio-economic and community benefit

Various comments were received in relation to socio-economic considerations and community benefits.

One respondent asked what the impact would be on the local economy and how many jobs would be created. Another respondent asked if North Channel Wind could investigate ways to help develop very local coastal communities as part of a social aspect of the development. The respondent expressed the wish to see a set up with all local community groups, with funding for local charities to help them keep running in the future. Another respondent asked if there was a proposed community benefit package and who it would be managed by. Consideration of legacy management post decommissioning was raised by another respondent, in relation to use of local infrastructure created to support the wind farms.

Impact on tourism and the local economy, due to visual impact from the wind farms, was raised as a concern.

One respondent expressed the view that the socioeconomic section of the Offshore Scoping Report was short and queried the accuracy and origin of a statistic within the report that 5% of visiting tourists to Northern Ireland visit Mid and East Antrim. The respondent claimed that almost half of all tourists visiting Northern Ireland pass through the Glens of Antrim on their way to the Causeway Coast and that tour buses go out of their way to increase their journey time by over 1 hour just to include the Glens of Antrim because it is so desirable to tourists. The respondent went on to comment that the footfall in the Glens of Antrim is an integral part of the Causeway Coast and shouldn't be considered in isolation. They expressed that percentage statistics may be attributed to quantifiable factors like ticket entries into the Causeway Visitor Centre, but they do not account for the many thousands of people stopping in Ballygally, Glenarm, Carnlough or Cushendun etc. on their way to the Causeway.

The respondent raised a concern that the NCW 1 and NCW 2 sites are located in the less affluent areas of Northern Ireland's coastline and that house prices would be negatively affected.

#### *Project team response*

North Channel Wind would be Northern Ireland's largest generator, bringing substantial investment to the local economy, supporting the development of a local supply chain and job creation. We will seek to maximise the benefit to Northern Ireland by activating the local supply chain, engaging with local businesses and supporting skills and training.

The EIA will include a full socioeconomic assessment of the proposed projects, the approach to which is set out in Chapter 17: Population & Human Health of the Offshore Scoping Report. The socioeconomic assessment will include two geographical areas, one local and one regional. The local socio-economic study area will cover the coastline authorities of Mid & East Antrim Council and Ards & North Down Council. The regional study area will consider impacts at the Northern Ireland level.

The socio-economic assessment will consider a range of issues, including the effects of the projects on employment and the economy during construction, operation and decommissioning of the projects, the effect on demand on housing and local services during construction, tourism, and recreation activity. The assessment will also draw on information provided in other sections of the EIA, including commercial fisheries, shipping and navigation, aviation, military and communications, marine archaeology, seascape landscape and visual resources, and infrastructure and other sea users.

We are currently at an early stage in the project and the EIA won't be finalised until 2026. However, a recent report by BVG Associates<sup>3</sup>, commissioned by Renewable NI, studied the potential impact on the Northern Ireland economy from installing 1.5 gigawatts of offshore wind. They found that 1.5 gigawatts of offshore wind could lead to up to £1.9 billion being spent with NI suppliers over the projects lifetime, could lead to up to £2.4 billion gross value added to the NI economy, and could create up to 32,400 full time equivalent job years for Northern Ireland suppliers. This report is based on theoretical developments, not the North Channel Wind projects specifically, but it shows the potential benefits that could result from offshore wind in general.

Regarding the query about consideration of legacy management post decommissioning, the EIA will assess the construction, operation and decommissioning of the wind farms. As such, the legacy aspect of the project following its decommissioning is out of scope of the EIA. However, we would comment that the socioeconomic benefits during the 35-year lifetime of the project will be substantial. The BVG Associates report estimated that around 71% of employment associated with offshore wind farms (in terms of full-time equivalent job years) occurs post-construction, which highlights the long-term nature of job creation in this sector.

The 5% statistic was clarified with the scoping report author and refers to the percentage of estimated expenditure on overnight trips in Northern Ireland that took place in Mid and East Antrim in 2019 (Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics (2019)). This will be clarified in the scoping report and a reference added. The respondent's comments regarding the tourism section of the Offshore Scoping Report and the relationship between the Glens of Antrim and the Causeway Coast will be passed to the EIA consultant for consideration in the assessment.

The North Channel Wind team is not aware of any research showing that offshore wind farms affect house prices, therefore it is not proposed to include this topic in the socioeconomic assessment.

In relation to community benefits, North Channel Wind is committed to citizen engagement and will work closely with local communities throughout the development to maximise the benefit to the local area. There are various mechanisms and schemes to support communities in different jurisdictions. We plan to investigate best practice internationally, and through meaningful dialogue with communities and stakeholders, develop a bespoke process which will support local communities and other marine stakeholders. We will be in touch with local communities as the projects develops to discuss these themes further.

### 3.2.6. Shipping and navigation

A number of respondents asked for clarification on whether recreational vessels would be permitted to navigate in between the wind turbines.

Recreational sailing routes were mentioned between Northern Ireland and Scotland, including Groomsport to Port Patrick and Glenarm to Campbell Town. One respondent commented that Glenarm was sometimes used as a potential refuge in case of needing to get ashore quickly.

One respondent asked what the minimum distance would be between the sea and the blade tip.

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<sup>3</sup> The Clean Revolution: Building Northern Ireland's Offshore Wind Industry, BVG Associates, 2022 [The-Clean-Revolution---Building-Northern-Irelands-Offshore-Wind-Industry.pdf \(renewableni.com\)](https://renewableni.com/The-Clean-Revolution---Building-Northern-Irelands-Offshore-Wind-Industry.pdf)

Several respondents asked to be kept up to date as the Navigational Risk Assessment progresses.

*Project team response*

North Channel Wind are aware of the interest in this topic area and we thank stakeholders for their positive engagement.

We are keen to co-exist with other users of the sea and we expect that recreational boats will be able to pass through the wind turbines, which will be spaced around 1km apart. Navigational safety will be of principal concern when considering whether any safety zones are needed around the turbines and we will be undertaking a thorough Navigational Risk Assessment in keeping with Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 654. This will involve consultation with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and other commercial and recreational marine stakeholders. Safety zones around turbines are typically granted by government during construction, for major maintenance and for decommissioning of an offshore wind development to preserve the safety of other users of the marine environment and the development itself. However once the wind farm is fully constructed and operating normally safety zones are only approved if there is a clear justification for their implementation.

As well as the Navigation Risk Assessment, the EIA will also examine potential effects on shipping and navigation. The approach to the assessment is set out in the Offshore Scoping Report Chapter: Shipping and Navigation.

The minimum clearance between the blade tip and the sea would be 22m above sea level. Depending on final turbine selection the clearance could be greater than this, however 22m would be the minimum.

North Channel Wind have met with the Royal Yachting Association, and have presented to boating stakeholders in Glenarm, including the Berth Holders Association, at the invitation of the Harbour and Marinas Manager of Mid & East Antrim Council. We will keep in touch with these stakeholders, including members of the public who have expressed an interest in this topic, and provide updates as the Navigational Risk Assessment progress.

### 3.2.7. Unexploded ordnance

One respondent asked what consideration had been given to the munitions dump in Beaufort Dyke.

*Project team response*

North Channel Wind is carrying out studies of the potential for unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the vicinity of the projects, including Beaufort Dyke, so that any potential risks can be taken into account in the future design of the projects. The munitions dump at Beaufort Dyke has been identified in the Offshore Scoping Report Chapter 16: Infrastructure and Other Users of the Sea. Injury or disturbance to marine mammals due to UXO clearance is covered in Offshore Scoping Report Chapter 9: Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles, Table 9.7.

### 3.2.8. Emergency plans

One respondent asked about what emergency plans for major incidents are in place.

### ***Project team response***

Comprehensive procedures for dealing with emergency response will be included in a detailed Construction Method Statement and/or Construction Environmental Management Plan, which will be included as part of the Environmental Statement. Emergency response is also considered various chapters within the EIA, including Aviation and Radar and Shipping & Navigation.

### **3.2.9. Infrastructure**

Various questions were received about aspects of the wind farm infrastructure. These included: when will the number of wind turbines be firmed up; when will mitigation proposals be firmed up; will the connection of the wind farms to the electricity network require additional infrastructure at Kilroot; will the floating platforms for the turbines be built in Belfast; is there was anything to prevent the proposals being enlarged in Northern Ireland waters once established.

### ***Project team response***

In relation to turbine numbers, as described in the scoping report and exhibition materials, a Project Design Envelope (PDE) approach is being adopted for the NCW 1 and NCW 2 Projects. The PDE concept is routinely used in applications for development consent for offshore wind farms to allow for some flexibility in design options, and more particularly for foundations and turbine types, where the full details of a project are not known by the offshore renewable supply chain at the point of submission of an application for development consent. The PDE does however provide sufficient detail to enable all likely significant environmental effects to be identified, considered and mitigated as part of the EIA. The Environmental Statement will include our PDE for the NCW projects, which will contain the number of turbines proposed for the development.

Proposed mitigation measures will also be detailed in the Environmental Statement, including mitigation measures that have been built into the project design and any additional mitigation. All mitigation and monitoring will be listed as marine licence and/or planning permission conditions.

Work continues with NIE and the System Operator for NI (SONI) to establish the most suitable location for the electrical grid infrastructure. North Channel Wind is currently assessing multiple options in terms of engineering, environmental and land use planning characteristics. Our aim is to confirm the final onshore locations and provide additional information during future consultation phases during the EIA phase.

It is unknown as yet if the floating platforms will be built in Belfast. Facilities in relative proximity to the wind farms are desirable to reduce programmes and reduce vessel costs. Access is a critical factor, with unrestricted tidal access a large consideration. Large landside areas are also desirable to facilitate storage and assembly of major components. The exact port requirements for floating wind assembly will be dictated by the nature of the platform substructure proposed, in addition to project logistics. If the turbines are to be 'mated' (i.e. connected) to the substructure at the quayside a certain level of shelter will also be desirable.

North Channel Wind will identify and agree which ports and harbours will be used during the lifetime of project prior to construction. The projects have the advantage of having several well-equipped facilities in close proximity, including the Port of Belfast and Port of Larne.

In relation to future expansion, North Channel Wind has no plans to increase the development areas included within the Offshore Scoping Report. However, as outlined in section 3.2.1 of this report,

The Crown Estate is responsible for leasing rights to the seabed and they will determine which areas of the seabed will be open to applications, therefore it is possible that boundaries may change. If any boundary changes do occur, they will be fully considered and consulted upon through the EIA and consenting process.

### 3.2.10. Decommissioning

One respondent asked if decommissioning would include the removal of all infrastructure.

#### *Project team response*

The North Channel Wind projects are expected to have an operational lifetime of 35 years.

If granted a marine licence, the licence will confirm the operational period and will contain conditions for the decommissioning of the wind farm.

A detailed Decommissioning Programme will be developed and agreed with relevant authorities prior to construction. The Decommissioning Programme will include a description of the assets to be removed, methodology, cost estimates and details of securities to be put in place to fund the decommissioning activities and conduct appropriate surveying and monitoring. The Decommissioning Programme will be updated as required over the lifetime of the project in keeping with relevant guidelines and best practice and decommissioning activities will be compliant with the relevant legislation at that time.

As a baseline, decommissioning will mirror the installation process in reverse. However, innovations over the next several years as more industry experience is gained may result in more effective and cost-efficient methodologies. Any proposed updates to methodologies will be formally documented and agreed. Platforms and moorings will be removed from the wind farm and transported to local ports for disassembly and proper disposal, and the site will be made safe for navigation and other seabed users according to the requirements detailed in decommissioning guidance adopted by Northern Ireland. Engagement with regulators and stakeholders will be undertaken through the process.

### 3.2.11. Commercial / electricity markets

A number of respondents asked questions relating to the economics of the projects and market arrangements for offshore wind farms.

One respondent queried how renewable electricity would benefit consumers if the electricity market links the price of renewables to the price of fossil fuel electricity, and asked if these market arrangements are likely to change. The respondent queried what personal gain would result, aside from the carbon savings, given the potential impacts of the project. Another respondent asked if there will be a guaranteed price per kilowatt assured to the NCW projects. A third respondent asked how much of the project would be owned and controlled by people in Northern Ireland and whether there was any option for shared public ownership.

#### *Project team response*

Electricity generators in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are part of a Single Electricity Market (SEM). The crucial reason for why the price of gas is so influential comes from something called the 'merit order'. When every type of electricity generation type is available to meet demand, the system must decide which technology is brought online first. The good news is that renewables are

always chosen first when they are available because they are the cheapest to run. This is great for reducing emissions, but it is also logical to meet demand with the cheapest generators available at the time and help bring down peoples' bills. Gas typically sets the price of electricity because the electricity price is set by the marginal cost of the *last generating unit* to be turned off to meet demand – which is invariably a gas power plant with high marginal costs. So whilst the overall price of electricity is linked to gas, ultimately more renewables on the system will drive down the price. More information can be found in the video linked below. This was produced by Wind Energy Ireland, but since we operate in the SEM the same is true for Northern Ireland.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDsqLyqa3iQSQB8OGiLZu3MxnmUjtD9oU>

Unfortunately, we are not able to predict when oil/gas is decoupled from renewables in the overall market, however it is certainly something which is exercising the minds of policy makers, particularly in the context of recent energy crisis.

In relation to the guaranteed price per kW question, it is likely that support for floating offshore wind will be provided through a contract for difference (CFD) mechanism, where the project owner will be guaranteed a unit price for each unit of energy generated for a fixed duration, secured through competitive auction. This process has proven to deliver value for money in other jurisdictions, and it is important to note that under the current system, in cases where wholesale energy prices are higher than the agreed CFD price, the upside is paid back to the state. This has resulted in windfalls for consumers in recent years during the energy crisis.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of ownership, North Channel Wind is a wholly owned subsidiary of SBM Offshore, which is a Dutch listed company, but the development work on the projects is being carried out by Ireland-based company NMK Renewables. The consenting process for the wind farms will be managed by the government here in Northern Ireland, as set out in previous sections of this report, including the DAERA for marine licences, DfE and UREGNI for electricity construction and generation and DFI for planning permission for any onshore development. Once North Channel Wind submits the consent applications, these departments will consult with a range of expert bodies and the general public when considering the applications, so the decision on whether the projects are consented is made in Northern Ireland. In order to build and operate the wind farms we would also need to be granted a lease by The Crown Estate, which manages the seabed. Electricity generated from the wind farms will feed into the electricity network in Northern Ireland, which is managed by the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) and NIE. As the projects will be in Northern Ireland waters, they will contribute towards Northern Ireland targets in terms of energy and climate change.

Shared public ownership is something we are interested in and will be exploring further during the development process.

### 3.2.12. Supply chain

A number of positive enquiries were received from local supply chain companies expressing interest in working on the project.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://theenergyst.com/wind-farms-to-pay-back-660-million-as-levies-lead-to-lower-costs/>

### *Project team response*

North Channel Wind welcomes expressions of interest from supply chain companies. A Supply Chain Form has been created, which is available on our website at [www.northchannelwind.com/supplier](http://www.northchannelwind.com/supplier) where companies can register their interest.

To help familiarise local supply chain companies with the opportunities in floating offshore wind, North Channel Wind collaborated with Invest NI to arrange a trade mission to France in February 2023. The visit, which was hosted by SBM Offshore, included a visit to the Provence Grand Large (PGL) assembly yard for floating wind turbine bases, at the port of Fos sur Mer, near Marseille. Representatives from Foyle Port and Belfast Harbour were briefed by SBM Offshore engineers on port logistics and requirements for assembling the floating bases.

North Channel Wind is keen to ensure that opportunities for local supply chain companies are maximised and will continue to work with Invest NI and other stakeholders.

### **3.2.13. Feedback on the exhibition and consultation process**

A number of positive comments were received about the exhibitions, including the helpfulness and knowledge of the staff in attendance, and the layout and presentation of the information on display.

Positive comments were also made in relation to the NCW proposals, including the importance of the projects in meeting future targets for renewable electricity generation.

Some respondents made suggestions on how the advertisement of the consultations could be improved, including better signage on the roadside and venue entrances, more social media engagement, and more notice and publicity in general.

A number of comments were received in relation to the number and locations of exhibitions. One respondent suggested that more exhibitions be held at varying locations. Two respondents suggested that we should hold a public exhibition in Donaghadee, given that it is located closer to NCW 2 than the nearest exhibition in Bangor. A further respondent queried why there wasn't a consultation event on the Ards peninsula when the projects directly affect the fishing fleet.

One respondent asked what assessments and consultations had been incorporated into the plans to date and queried why more stakeholders had not been contacted directly, particularly recreational sea anglers and bodies, which they highlighted as equal stakeholders. They recommended finding invested community representatives to talk to and recommended that more time be given for respondents to review and respond to the consultation, given the length of the Offshore Scoping Report.

One respondent expressed the view that as a commercial enterprise the focus was on trying to sell the advantages of the scheme to the public and downplay the disadvantages whereas a more balanced approach, setting out the pros and cons of the scheme, would increase the credibility of the scoping exercise.

Another respondent commented that local engagement should continue even (or especially) through the difficult compromise decisions that will have to be made.



### *Project team response*

Section 2.3.3 of this Consultation Report sets out how the public consultation and exhibitions were publicised. The North Channel Wind team is always looking to improve consultation practices and we are happy to take this feedback on board. We will look into ways to increase the publicity of future exhibitions. This could include, for example, increased use of social media, and talking to stakeholders about the most effective ways of getting the information out to their communities.

A number of signs and arrows were put up outside the venues to direct visitors to the exhibitions, however we are happy to increase the amount of signage for future exhibitions.

We thank respondents for their suggestions about the locations of the public exhibitions. This scoping consultation is the first in a number of engagement events we plan to hold during development of the NCW projects. As part of this, we plan to vary venues to ensure engagement with all communities within the vicinity of the projects.

In response to the feedback, the team investigated the possibility of arranging a public exhibition in Donaghadee as well as Bangor, however it wasn't possible to find an available venue of sufficient size in Donaghadee within the public consultation period. Numerous organisations within Donaghadee had been sent the leaflet to advertise the Bangor exhibition and public consultation, including churches, community organisations and the harbour, along with elected representatives from the area. With the nearest exhibition taking place approximately six miles away in Bangor and all of the information being available online in the virtual consultation room, the team felt that the consultation was appropriate to cover stakeholders in Donaghadee. However the team welcome this feedback and will include Donaghadee as a location in future rounds of public engagement events about NCW 2. We are happy to meet with any organisations in Donaghadee who have an interest in the project.

In response to the suggestion about holding an exhibition in the Ards peninsula, we recognise that the fishing fleet is an important consultee, and as such we have already embarked on a series of engagement meetings specifically for the fishing community, in Portavogie, Kilkeel, Ardglass, Larne, Bangor and Glasgow. The feedback we received at those meetings helped to inform our scoping report. This round of public exhibitions was for the general public as a whole and was open to everyone to attend. We continue to keep in touch with the fishing community through our Fisheries Liaison Officer SeaSource Offshore, and will be holding further fishing engagement meetings on the Ards peninsula in the future as the projects develop.

We thank the respondent for their feedback regarding engagement with sea angling bodies. As part of its early engagement North Channel Wind met with numerous different stakeholders between 2021 and 2023 to introduce the project and gain initial feedback. A list of these meetings is contained in section 2.3.4 of the Consultation Report. As set out in section 2.3.3, over 600 information leaflets about the public consultation and exhibitions were distributed to stakeholders including community, environment and sport clubs, fishing and marine stakeholders, churches, government bodies and elected representatives. This included the NI Federation of Sea Anglers. We have contacted the organisation who submitted this comment to apologise for inadvertently missing them in the consultation to date, offer a meeting and agree more time to allow them to review and respond to the Offshore Scoping Report. We also explained that this consultation was developer-led and the formal DAERA-led scoping consultation was yet to take place.

In response to the comment about a balanced approach, the Offshore Scoping Report was prepared by the consultancy firm RPS who are EIA specialists. The report was prepared in order to support a request for formal Scoping Opinions in relation to the proposed NCW 1 and NCW 2 Projects from

DAERA Marine Strategy & Licensing Branch. The purpose of the report is to provide stakeholders with information on the proposed projects and allow for engagement with stakeholders on the key topics to be addressed in the Offshore Environmental Statement for each project, as well as the baseline data sources and assessment methodologies to be used to inform it. Within the Offshore Scoping Report, a number of potential environmental impacts are considered. These include impacts which are proposed to be scoped into EIA due to likely significant effects in EIA terms and identified effect-receptor pathways, and also impacts proposed to be scoped out of EIA due to no likely significant effects in EIA terms or no effect-receptor pathways identified. North Channel Wind welcomes the opportunity for engagement with stakeholders and feedback on the Proposed Development and the scope (proposed content) of the Environmental Statement (ES) for each project.

North Channel Wind have an open-door policy and are happy to engage with any stakeholders at any point during the development of the projects. We are committed to sharing the feedback received from the consultation with stakeholders, and future consultations/exhibitions are planned during the EIA stage.

### 3.3. Working with other stakeholders

In addition to feedback received from members of the public during the public consultation, North Channel Wind are also engaging with a range of other important stakeholders, such as environmental NGOs, fishing representative organisations and other maritime users, on an ongoing basis. A table of all the meetings held to date is contained in section 2.3.4 of this report. Our ethos is to engage positively and work together with our stakeholders to address any issues raised and ensure all feedback received is carefully considered as the development phase progresses.

## 4. Next Steps

This report describes the Offshore Scoping stage public consultation for the NCW 1 and NCW 2 projects including:

- A description of the consultation and exhibition materials
- Details of how the consultation and exhibitions were publicised
- A summary of the feedback received and the project team response to the points raised.

Each submission received has been reviewed by the project team and answers provided, where possible. Where information is not yet available, this has been acknowledged. The feedback received from this public consultation, together with the formal scoping opinion which will be issued by DAERA, will be used to inform further project design and the environmental impact assessment.

Throughout the EIA process the team will continue to engage with stakeholders, including local communities, fishermen and other marine users, government, elected representatives, environmental groups and supply chain companies. We have an open-door policy and are available to talk with anyone who has an interest, or questions about the projects. As well as other engagement events, we aim to hold a further public consultation during the EIA process, during which the latest plans will be shared and there will be further opportunity for members of the public to provide feedback.

Other key activities for the project team over the next two years will include: assessment of onshore locations for grid connection, identification of export cable routes between the turbines and the shore, designing the layout of the wind farms, onshore and offshore environmental and technical surveys, progressing with the EIA. We aim to submit applications for consent for the projects in 2026.

We thank all of the participants in the public consultation and if you would like to keep in touch, members of the public are able to sign-up to receive news updates via a contact page on the website: [www.northchannelwind.com/contact](http://www.northchannelwind.com/contact).

For any other queries please Fiona Stevens, North Channel Wind Stakeholder Manager, [fiona.stevens@northchannelwind.com](mailto:fiona.stevens@northchannelwind.com) 07380 426 114.

## Glossary

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| ANIFPO          | Anglo North Irish Fish Producers Organisation  |
| AFBI            | Agrifood and Biosciences Institute   |
| Capacity factor | The ratio of actual electrical energy output over a given period of time to the theoretical maximum electrical energy output over that period. |
| CFD             | Contracts for Difference   |
| DAERA           | Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  |
| DfE             | Department for the Economy   |
| DfI             | Department for Infrastructure  |
| EIA             | Environmental Impact Assessment  |
| FLO             | Fisheries Liaison Officer  |
| HRA             | Habitat Regulations Assessment   |
| MCA             | Maritime and Coastguard Agency   |
| MGN             | Marine Guidance Note   |
| NCW 1           | North Channel Wind 1   |
| NCW 2           | North Channel Wind 2   |
| NGO             | Non-governmental organisation  |
| NIE             | Northern Ireland Electricity   |
| NIFPO           | Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation  |
| NRA             | Navigation Risk Assessment   |
| PDE             | Project Design Envelope  |
| SONI            | System Operator for Northern Ireland   |
| SLVRA           | Seascape, Landscape & Visual Resources Assessment  |
| UREGNI          | Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland   |
| UXO             | Unexploded Ordinance   |
| TCE             | The Crown Estate   |

## Appendices

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Appendix A | Exhibition Information Banners                            |
| Appendix B | Feedback Form   |
| Appendix C | Supply Chain Form   |
| Appendix D | Images from Virtual Consultation Room / Online Exhibition |
| Appendix E | Leaflet   |
| Appendix F | Newspaper Advert  |
| Appendix G | Copies of Press Releases                                  |