

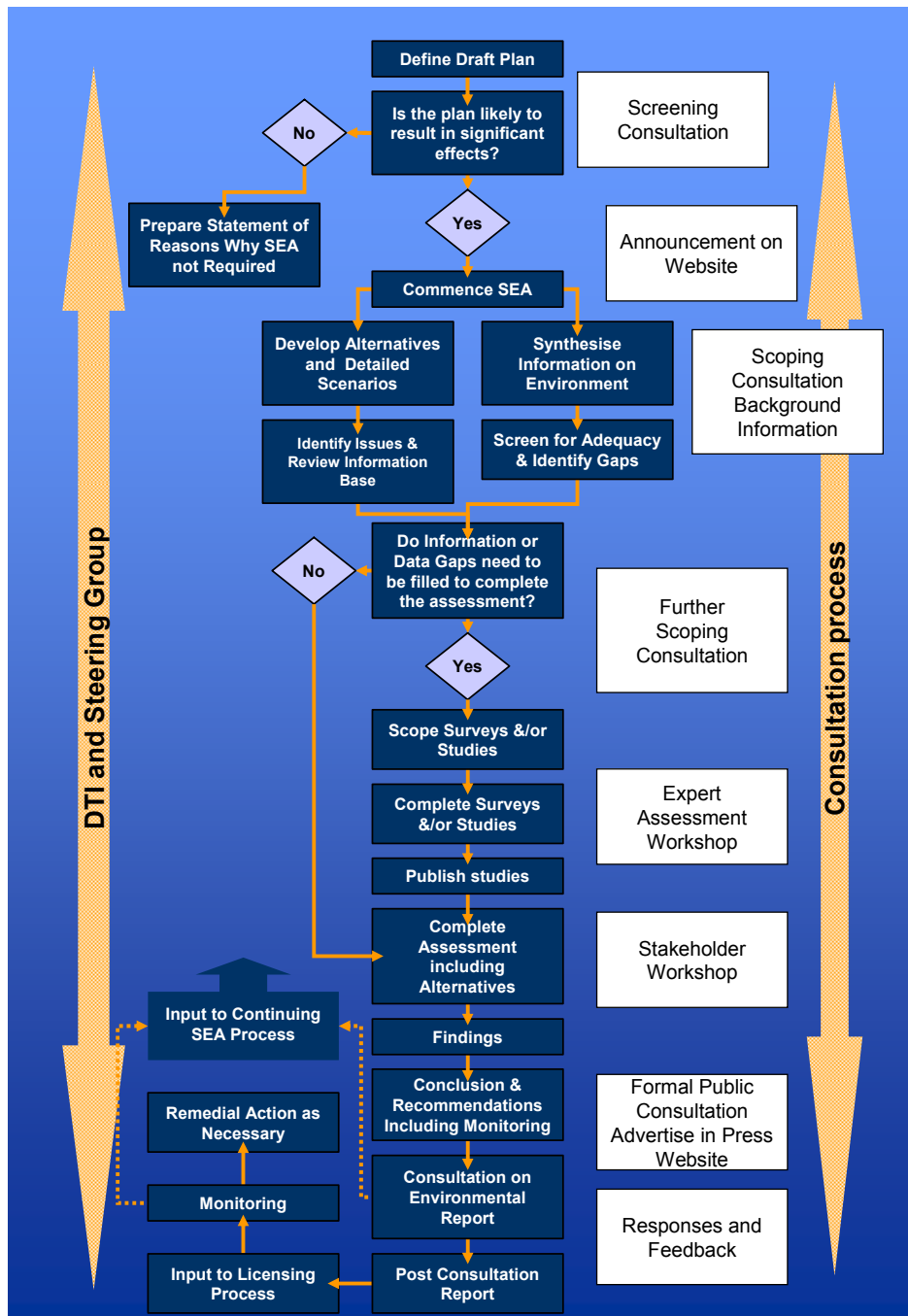
2 SEA PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

The DTI oil and gas licensing SEA process is underpinned by the requirements of the SEA Directive, UK implementing legislation and those of the Aarhus Convention – see Section 1.

A summary of the SEA process used for SEA 5 is given below in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 – Overview of the SEA Process



The SEA process aims to help inform Ministerial licensing decisions through consideration of the environmental implications of the proposed action.

In November 2000, the Cabinet Office published a code of practice on written consultation which provides criteria (which have been applied to SEA 5) for consultations involving documents in written or electronic form. The Code of Practice was reviewed, and a revised code was published on 20 January 2004 - see below.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON CONSULTATION

The six consultation criteria:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

These criteria must be reproduced within all consultation documents.

Extract from Code of Practice on Written Consultation issued January 2004

Since SEA 1, the DTI oil and gas licensing SEA process has evolved and the following process improvements have been implemented:

- Establishment of a SEA Steering Group with wide representation from a range of stakeholders (established in early 2001)
- A formal scoping step with wide stakeholder involvement
- Integrated management of survey, consultation and assessment processes
- Facilitation of public consultation through a dedicated website
- Publication of reports on website, CD as well as hard copy where requested
- Widespread dissemination of data and information
- Development of modular documents applicable to more than one SEA
- Syntheses of data to facilitate access
- Commissioning of expert underpinning studies
- Involvement of authors of expert underpinning studies and other users in an assessment workshop
- Stakeholder workshop meetings
- A streamlined public consultation document
- Continuing development of the methods for the consideration of cumulative and synergistic effects

Responsibility for the publication of the Environmental Report rests with the DTI. Members of the steering group, as individuals and through their organisations, may comment on the proposed licensing and the consultation materials (including this document) during the consultation phase, and encourage others to comment.

2.2 Scoping the SEA

The objective of scoping is to identify key issues of concern at an early stage so that they can be considered in appropriate detail in the SEA. Scoping also aids in the identification of information sources and data gaps that may require to be filled by studies or surveys to underpin the assessment.

The SEA 5 process included a formal scoping step, the principal purposes of which were to:

- Promote stakeholder awareness of the SEA initiative
- Ensure access to all relevant environmental information
- Identify opportunities for potential collaboration and the avoidance of duplication of effort
- Identify information gaps so these could be evaluated and filled if necessary
- Identify stakeholder issues and concerns which should be considered in the SEA

Scoping involves consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. For SEA 5 there were two stages in the scoping process; initial scoping consultation with a range of academics and conservation organisations was carried out in spring 2003, focussed on ascertaining seabed survey and other study needs. This part of scoping was conducted early because of the timescale needed to organise, collect and analyse offshore seabed information and samples. The conclusion of that consultation was that, although parts of the area had been extensively surveyed in the past, additional information on specific seabed habitats and fauna would be needed for SEA 5 purposes and, as such, a survey of targeted areas of SEA 5 was conducted in the late summer/autumn 2003.

2.3 Studies and surveys

A preliminary review, with input from the SEA Steering Group, of the availability of information to support preparation of the environment description for this assessment (Sections 5-9) concluded that a number of studies were required. These studies were commissioned either to provide expert reviews or data syntheses in areas for which synoptic overviews were not published or readily available.

2.3.1 Studies

As part of the SEA 5 process a series of seabed surveys, independent studies and syntheses were commissioned. These reports underpin the assessment documented in this report and are available for review from the DTI's SEA website (www.offshore-sea.org.uk).

An overview of cephalopods relevant to the SEA 5 area – This report, prepared by the Department of Zoology, University of Aberdeen, provides an overview of the distribution and ecology of cephalopods (in particular squid and octopus) in the SEA 5 area. Fisheries, environmental contamination and other related conservational issues are also discussed.

Background information on marine mammals relevant to Strategic Environmental Assessment 5 – Prepared by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), Gatty Marine Laboratory, University of St. Andrews, this report details the distribution and abundance of marine mammals in the SEA 5 area, their ecological importance, sensitivity to disturbance, contamination and disease, bycatch and other non-oil related management issues, and conservation framework.

Conservation sites in the SEA 5 area – Local, national, European and international designations and sites (statutory and non-statutory), which occur within the SEA 5 area, are summarised in this report. The report was produced by the SEA team in association with the Aberdeen Institute of Coastal Science and Management, University of Aberdeen.

Existing users and management initiatives relevant to SEA 5 – This report is a compilation of information on human activities in the SEA 5 area which may impact on, or themselves be affected by, further oil and gas developments in the region. Activities include shipping, energy, telecommunications, military activities, tourism, aggregate extraction, fishing and archaeological sites. The report was produced by the SEA team in association with the Aberdeen Institute of Coastal Science and Management, Aberdeen University.

Northern North Sea shellfish and fisheries – Produced by Colin Chapman, independent consultant, this report outlines the shellfish resources within SEA 5 and related impacts of oil and gas exploration in the area. Future shellfish and fisheries management and legislation are also discussed.

Plankton report for Strategic Environmental Assessment area 5 – Prepared by the Sir Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science (SAHFOS), this report gives an overview of the phytoplankton and zooplankton communities in SEA 5, in particular their composition, blooms and sensitivity to disturbance/contamination.

Review of divers, grebes and seaduck distribution and abundance in the SEA 5 area – This report, prepared by Cork Ecology, reviews the distribution and abundance of divers, grebes and seaduck in the SEA 5 area.

Review of the potential impacts of offshore windfarms on migrating and overwintering swans and geese in the SEA 5 area – This study, also prepared by Cork Ecology, reviews the coastal distribution and abundance of swans and geese in the SEA 5 area and includes migration routes, key feeding and roosting areas and the potential impacts of offshore wind farms.

Surficial geology and processes – Provided by the British Geological Survey, this report gives an overview of the hydrocarbon geology and geomorphology of the SEA 5 area. Seabed geological formations, bedforms and sediment transport, past tsunami events and modern coast variability are also discussed.

Synthesis of information on the benthos of area SEA 5 – This report, prepared by scientists from the FRS Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen, presents a synthesis of current information on the benthic environment and the benthic communities and associations in the SEA 5 region and, additionally, highlights areas considered to be particularly vulnerable to anthropogenic influences.

The potential socio-economic implications of licensing the SEA 5 area – This study, by Mackay Consultants, provides an assessment of the possible socio-economic implications of licensing the SEA 5 area in relation to oil and gas production/reserves, capital, operating and decommissioning expenditure, employment, tax revenue and social impacts.

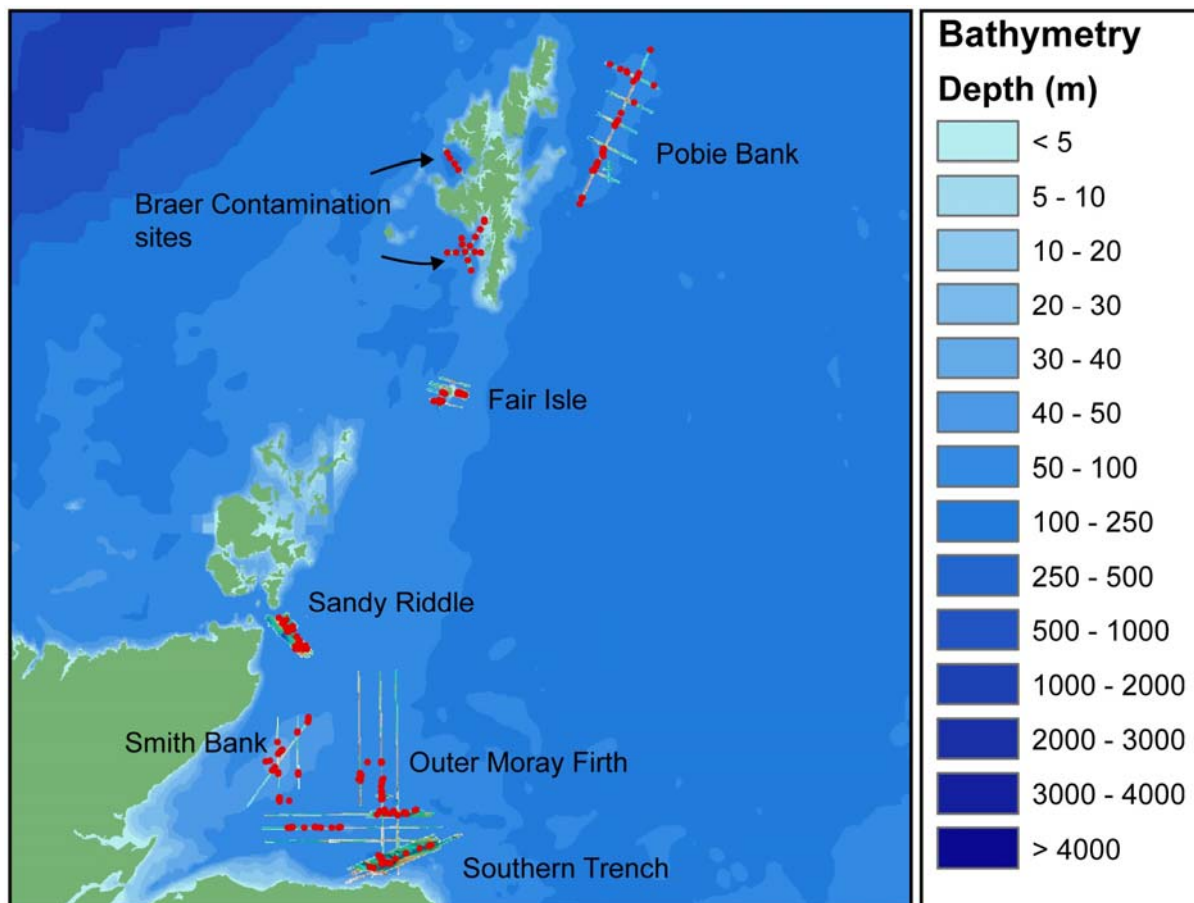
The scope of Strategic Environmental Assessment of North Sea area SEA 5 in regard to prehistoric archaeological remains – This report documents the known and likely occurrence of prehistoric coastal and submerged marine archaeological remains in the SEA 5 area, and makes suggestions as to how to enhance the finding and reporting of such artefacts. The document has been prepared by independent scientist Nic Flemming, an authority on underwater archaeology.

The commissioned studies listed above, are available for download as pdf files from the SEA website or in CD or paper copy from Ms Christine Weare, Department of Trade & Industry, 86-88 Atholl House, Guild Street, Aberdeen, AB11 6AR.

2.3.2 SEA 5 Offshore Survey

The SEA 5 survey was carried out in September to October 2003 from the *MV Kommandor Jack* and comprised geophysical and biological sampling, video and still photographs collected using a towed camera system. Areas mapped and sampled are shown in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2 – Location of SEA 5 Survey Coverage



Samples were analysed for chemical contaminants, particles size make-up and biology. Biological material collected during the survey (and supporting data documentation) is deposited in the collection of the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh to promote its long term availability for scientific study.

2.4 Assessment workshop

An Expert Assessment Workshop was held over two days in May 2004. The workshop brought the expertise of the SEA Steering Group, the authors of the SEA 5 underpinning technical reports, other users of the offshore area and the SEA team to bear on the assessment process for SEA 5 – see Appendix 2 for more information on the Assessment Workshop.

For oil and gas licensing the objectives of the assessment workshop are to:

- Consider the potential environmental interactions to identify those which could result in significant effects so that these can be considered further in the Public Consultation Document.
- Review areas, sites and features of the SEA 5 region to identify any requiring additional protection over and above that available through existing mechanisms.
- Identify any gaps in information and understanding, and assess their influence on the confidence with which the SEA 5 assessment of likely effects and necessary mitigation can be made.

Although there is currently only an oil and gas licensing round (draft plan) proposed for the SEA 5 area, the workshop also considered key issues and information gaps for renewable energy developments to facilitate future SEAs.

2.5 Stakeholder dialogue workshop

A stakeholder workshop meeting was held in Aberdeen on 29 June 2004, facilitated by independent facilitators People=Positive™ on behalf of the DTI. A wide variety of potential stakeholders, drawn from UK and other regulators, government advisers, local authorities, other industry representatives, academics and NGOs were invited to the session.

Prior to the workshop, a background document was prepared and placed on the website providing an overview of:

- Proposed draft licensing plan
- Activity levels that might follow licensing
- The Strategic Environmental Assessment process
- An overview of the SEA 5 environment
- Further consultation to be conducted as part of the SEA process and how to input to the process

The objectives of the SEA 5 stakeholder workshop are to provide stakeholders with updates on:

- UK oil and gas supply context
- The outcome of “scoping” consultation
- How issues raised in scoping are being addressed in the SEA process and consultation document
- The outcomes of the assessment workshop
- Initial conclusions of the overall assessment

The meeting was attended by over fifty stakeholders and included presentations on the UK & international regulatory context, SEA 5 process, oil and gas activities that could follow further licensing, and the natural environment and human uses of the SEA 5 area.

Four information stations relating to offshore oil and gas licensing were established covering the SEA process and context, overview of the SEA 5 physical, chemical and ecological environment and human interests, main issues and controls and re-offering of previously licensed blocks, each with a number of posters. These information stations formed the basis for facilitated discussion, the outcome of which was recorded on cards.

Stakeholder input was captured as a learning portfolio report produced by People=Positive™ and is included on the SEA website as a supporting document to SEA 5. A summary of the issues raised in the meeting is given in Appendix 3.

A fifth information station provided the opportunity for stakeholders to consider issues relating to offshore renewable energy to contribute to future SEA in this area.

2.6 Further consultation process

Key elements of public and stakeholder consultation and input to the SEA 5 process are:

- The SEA website
- Scoping (spring 2003 and on)
- Stakeholder dialogue meeting (summer 2004)
- A 3 month public consultation period following publication of the SEA 5 documents on the website (autumn 2004)
- Post consultation report (winter 2004/5)

The SEA 5 Environmental Report and supporting documents are available for review and public comment for a period of 90 days from late September 2004. The documents are being made available from the SEA website (www.offshore-sea.org.uk) or on CD or printed copy. Comments and feedback may be made via the website or by fax or letter.

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