

SEA 5

**Post Public Consultation
Report**

JANUARY 2005

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT

OIL AND GAS LICENSING

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In 1999, the UK Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) began a sequence of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) to consider the implications of further licensing of the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) for oil and gas exploration and production. To date five SEAs (including SEA 5) have been undertaken covering the east and north of the UK Continental Shelf and a sixth SEA (of the Irish Sea) initiated. During 2003, the DTI also conducted a SEA covering three strategic regions off the coasts of England and Wales in preparation for a second round of offshore wind licensing.

Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the SEA Directive) entered into force on 21 July 2001. Member States were required to bring into force the necessary laws, regulations and administrative provisions to comply with the Directive before the 21st July 2004 which the United Kingdom has done.

The DTI has taken a proactive stance towards the concept of SEA and the European Directive, and since 1999 has used SEA as a planning tool to inform decisions on proposed offshore licensing rounds for hydrocarbon exploration and production on the UKCS.

A key element of SEA is consultation with the public and other stakeholders and an overview of the steps taken to promote this for SEA 5 is given below.

1.2 Overview of the consultation process

Key elements of the SEA 5 public and other stakeholder consultation are:

- A dedicated SEA website (www.offshore-sea.org.uk) where the public consultation document and supporting reports can be viewed and downloaded
- Scoping consultation in early 2003 with a range of academics and conservation organisations, focussed on ascertaining seabed survey and other study needs
- Wider stakeholder scoping consultation during 2004
- Inclusion of a number of key stakeholders in the expert assessment workshop held in May 2004
- Stakeholder dialogue meeting at the draft assessment document stage in June 2004
- A 3 month public consultation period following publication of the SEA 5 Environmental Report and supporting documents on the website at the beginning of October 2004 (with extensive advertising in local and national newspapers of the start of consultation)
- Preparation of a post consultation report (this report)

In keeping with the Government's move towards "less paper" where feasible, scoping and subsequent consultation was conducted electronically using e-mail and the SEA website. In addition, the SEA 5 documentation could be requested in hard copy or on CD and 127

copies were provided during the consultation period. Responses to the formal public consultation period for SEA 5 were received via the website, e-mail and letter.

1.3 Purpose of this document

This report is intended to provide factual and technical clarifications to the comments received and issues raised during the public consultation period on the SEA 5 Environmental Report including the DTI's draft plan to offer UKCS Blocks for oil and gas exploration and production licensing. It also includes responses regarding policy, regulatory and other controls, and future plans where appropriate.

The consultation responses are one of the considerations which will be used by the DTI in making decisions regarding offering for licensing Blocks for oil and gas exploration and production in the SEA 5 area and in the areas previously assessed through the SEA process. Consultee responses are summarised in this report and for reference full copies of these responses are available on the SEA website.

2 CONSULTATION ISSUES

2.1 Consultation input received

Responses were received via the SEA website and as e-mailed or hard copy correspondence to the DTI. Feedback relevant to the SEA 5 public consultation was received from:

- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS)
- World Wildlife Fund-UK (WWF-UK)
- Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
- The Engineering Business Ltd. (TEBL)

For ease of reader access, consultee comments have been summarised and grouped in Section 2.2 (by SEA 5 Environment Report section), together with clarifications and DTI responses which are given in italicised text following each comment. Where consultee comments cover the same issue they have been combined to avoid duplication. Where author approval was given, full texts of consultee comments are available on the SEA website.

2.2 Consultation issues with DTI responses and clarifications

2.2.1 Comments on the SEA initiative

Positive comments on the DTI SEA initiative were received from:

- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

2.2.2 Issues raised on Non-Technical Summary

- a. WWF-UK Apparent contradiction between potential significant socio-economic benefits of development of SEA 5 and limited hydrocarbon reserve potential.
- Whilst the majority of the SEA 5 area has limited hydrocarbon potential, there are a number of areas of greater prospectivity which are described in Section 4.1 of the Environment Report. Whether these contain significant new hydrocarbon reserves can only be confirmed through exploration. Forecasts of UKCS oil production indicate an average annual decline of 5%. UKCS gas production is also in decline resulting in increasing volumes of gas imports. Production from the SEA 5 area would serve to slow down the rate of decline and make important contributions to tax revenues, the retention of employment, as well as extending the lives of facilities such as the Nigg and Flotta terminals.*

2.2.3 Issues raised on Section 1 Introduction and Background

Scope and purpose

- a. WWF-UK Plan seeks to address only the SEA of the 23rd licensing round, not the totality of oil and gas industrial impacts affecting the area. Extend scope to incorporate use of the products derived from the anticipated additional oil/gas production.
- The end use of any hydrocarbons found and produced as a result of 23rd licensing is not within the direct control of the DTI and much will take place outside the UK. As noted in the SEA 5 Environmental Report, UK policy on energy supply and greenhouse gas emission control are the subjects of other fora.*
- b. WWF-UK SEA should look to assess the cumulative and synergistic effect of impacts from all sectors on a particular area, before agreeing to plans and programmes by one sector.

The SEA process includes stakeholder scoping, an expert assessment workshop and a stakeholder dialogue meeting which all include consideration of cumulative and synergistic effects. Similarly, the assessment reflected in Section 10 of the Environmental Report includes consideration of the potential for the activities which could follow 23rd Round licensing to result in cumulative and synergistic effects with relevant natural and anthropogenic influences. The DTI takes into consideration the potential for significant impacts to occur during decisions regarding which blocks to offer in a licensing round, when evaluating an operator's application and in the setting of precautionary conditions applied to licences offered. This consideration of potentially significant effects is informed by the SEA Environmental Report and public consultation feedback on it, together with advice from the DTI's statutory advisers.

- c. RSPB SEA 5 was to include a draft plan for the next round of offshore renewables. Report should clarify that the offshore renewables plan has not been included and note that any future rounds for offshore renewables will need to complete a separate SEA for that plan.
- The decision to broaden the basis of the DTI offshore SEA programme to include renewable energy was taken in 2003. Since then there have been no plans or programmes advanced which would allow an SEA to be conducted. The offshore energy SEA process has aimed to collect and document information which would facilitate subsequent SEAs of renewable energy plans or programmes. It was explicitly stated at SEA Steering Group meetings, the Assessment Workshop and stakeholder meetings that the SEA 5 assessment could only be of the DTI's draft plan for further oil and gas licensing. The SEA Environmental Report clearly expressed the scope. However, in light of the RSPB comment, the Environmental Report for SEA 6 will include a statement that separate SEA assessments would be needed of future offshore renewable plans and programmes.*
- d. RSPB Recommend that consideration be given to setting SEA objectives at the start of the assessment process in line with current good practice guidance. Indicators should be identified to assess whether the SEA accurately assesses the environmental impacts, and to monitor the effect of mitigating actions.
- WWF-
UK
- A key objective of the DTI offshore energy SEAs from their inception has been to help strike a balance between promoting economic development of the UK's offshore oil and gas resources and ensuring effective environmental protection. In addition, more recently, the SEAs aim to fulfil the spirit and requirements of the SEA Directive. The DTI and the assessment team are aware of the recently*

published Office of the Deputy Prime Minister A Draft Practical Guide to the SEA Directive (2004) and its recommendation that "...SEA objectives and indicators should be developed in consultation with the Consultation Bodies and relevant stakeholders...". We look forward to working with the Steering Group and other stakeholders in the framing of meaningful objectives for future SEAs.

In respect of monitoring, the DTI has established a committee tasked to draw up a future comprehensive, long term monitoring strategy for the UK offshore oil & gas industry and to ensure appropriate interfaces with the UK Marine Environment Monitoring Group (responsible for the National Marine Monitoring Programme), and other relevant groups/initiatives. The Monitoring Committee is chaired by the DTI and comprises representatives of industry, UKOOA, academia, JNCC, CEFAS & FRS.

- e. MCS For future SEAs the DTI needs to be careful not to misinterpret the SEA Directive by bringing in too many social and economic considerations. SEA is an environmental assessment and as such the environment is and should be the key consideration.
- Noted. The bulk of the work of the SEA process and the Environmental Report explicitly address the natural and cultural environment. However, potential socio-economic consequences of the draft plan which may have significant impacts on human populations should be assessed as part of an SEA (Environment Report Section 10.3.8 and 10.6). Section 4.6 of the ODPM SEA Guidelines (2004) states that "Responsible Authorities are free to broaden the scope of the assessment to include social and economic effects of their plans and programmes in addition to environmental effects". Indeed, the DTI views this an important contribution to the promotion of sustainable development. The balance of environmental and socio-economic considerations for SEA 6 can be discussed at the planned Assessment Workshop.*
- f. SNH Concerned about way the SEA 5 consultation was advertised as did not formally receive an invitation to comment on the report. Unclear whether other appropriate consultees were contacted.
- The start of the public consultation period on the SEA 5 Environmental Report was the most widely and extensively advertised DTI SEA to date. This was partly in response to suggestions made by the SNH representative on the SEA Steering Group. The start of the consultation period was notified by email to all Steering Group members and to those registered to receive updates on the SEA website. The need for further expansion to the notification process will be discussed with the Steering Group.*

2.2.4 Issues raised on Section 2 SEA process

- a. WWF- UK Information is lacking on how the stakeholder inputs stimulated and contributed to alternative thinking within the SEA 5 process and how this affected decision-making.
- Suggestions that promote stakeholder participation and understanding are welcomed. Throughout the SEA process, stakeholder inputs have played an important role in determining the direction of the SEA and examples are given in Section 2.1 of the Environmental Report. Key stages of the SEA 5 consultation process are described in Section 2.6. In addition to a supporting document on the SEA website, Appendix 3 of the SEA 5 Environment Report summarised information from the stakeholder workshop with comments grouped under headings which relate to specific sections of the Report. However, mechanisms to improve the transparency of this process will be explored with the SEA Steering Group and at the Assessment Workshop.*

2.2.5 Issues raised on Section 4 The Draft Plan and Alternatives

- a. WWF- UK RSPB MCS No scenarios developed to enable alternatives to be properly envisioned and assessed. Concerned that more detailed alternatives not available.
- The identification of the alternatives described in Section 4.3 formed part of the initial scoping consultation and were considered "...reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme..." (Article 5.1 of the SEA Directive). The assessment itself was based on Alternative 2 (to offer the area for licensing) as this was "judged to represent the greatest scale of potential interactions and effects." (Environment Report Section 10.1). Mechanisms by which a fuller evaluation and comparison of alternatives can be achieved will be explored for future SEAs.*
- b. WWF- UK RSPB Clearer to explain possible activities by area rather than by activity type. Impacts from different levels of predicted activity (e.g. half or double that predicted) should be compared.
- The views of the consultees are noted. Whilst activity projections were presented according to activity type (e.g. seismic survey, exploration and appraisal wells), sufficient spatial information was also provided to identify likely areas of activity. The geology of the SEA 5 area is more complex than that of SEA 4 which resulted in many more sub areas being described. Consideration of the effects*

of licensing was based on the activity predictions given in Section 4.4 which represent the most likely levels of exploration and production activity. Section 11.3 included a comparison of predicted and actual activity levels for previous SEAs which provide a perspective on the validity of the predictions used. The SEA also concludes that if activity levels were substantially greater than those predicted the conclusions of the SEA "...would need to be revisited..." (Section 12.4).

- c. MCS Concerned that the Moray Firth will be the focus of seismic activity. *Section 4.4 states that the "...majority of the anticipated 2D and 3D activity is expected in Quadrants 11 to 18..." However, many operators include reprocessing of existing seismic data within work commitments when applying for licences and the DTI has actively promoted this for a number of years. New data are expensive to acquire and a new survey is usually only proposed if reprocessing of existing data is not an option. Given that "...the outer Moray Firth (Quadrants 11, 12, 13, 17, 18 & 19)... [has] been intensively surveyed in the past..." (Section 10.3.1), there are likely to be opportunities for reprocessing data. Regulation 4 of The Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations 2001 requires consent for prospecting or carrying out geological surveys by physical or chemical means. Any seismic activities judged individually or in combination with any other plan or project, to have a potentially significant effect on a relevant/potential conservation site would have to undergo an Appropriate Assessment prior to approval.*
- d. RSPB Future SEA consultations should explicitly include the draft plan in addition to the environmental report. The SEA 5 report and the SEA website should clearly distinguish between the environmental report and the draft plan.
- The ODPM Guidelines (2004) state that "While the Environment Report does not need to be issued as a separate document from the draft plan or programme, it must be clearly distinguishable from it." The inclusion of Section 4 Draft Plan and Alternatives within the Environmental Report was clearly signposted within the document. However, in order to improve clarity and understanding this issue will be reviewed for future SEAs.*

2.2.6 Issues raised on Section 6 Ecology

Plankton

- a. SNH Section 6.2.6 & 10.3.4 - Need to address the introduction of non-native species by ships' hull transfer. No mention of the IMO Ballast Water Convention.

The IMO Ballast Water Convention is described in Section 3.3 of the Environmental Report. Section 6.2.6 notes the “growing concern regarding the risk of alien species and the importance of protecting native biodiversity” and this was factored into the assessment process. The DTI recognise the importance of this issue but regard it as best addressed through international efforts since it affects marine transport in general.

Cetaceans

- b. WDCS Section 6.8 – WDCS highlighted a number of issues for clarification including the ‘snapshot’ nature of cetacean sightings data and the relevance of threats to all cetaceans in the area.
- The points of clarification are noted. The SMRU technical report provided an authoritative description of current understanding of the ecology of marine mammal species present in the SEA 5 area, the threats they face and their sensitivity to disturbance, contamination and disease. This report formed the basis for assessment of the impact of oil and gas activities arising from SEA 5 licensing on marine mammals in the area. Whilst the WDCS amplifications to information and text are welcomed they do not significantly change the basis of understanding on which the assessment was based. Note, data from the paper by Hastie et al. 2003 (Hastie, G.D. Barton, T.R., Grellier, K., Hammond, P.S., Swift, R.J., Thompson, P.M. & Wilson, B. 2003. Distribution of small cetaceans within a candidate Special Area of Conservation: implications for management. Journal of Cetacean Research and Management 5: 261-266) was included in the SMRU underpinning report which was a key source for the SEA 5 Environmental Report.*

2.2.7 Issues raised on Section 7 Coastal and offshore conservation sites

- a. RSPB
SNH Section 7.2 – RSPB and SNH made a number of suggestions and clarifications to tabulated data and text.
- The comments and suggestions of the consultees are noted. The RSPB site information presented for Orkney included only those sites judged coastal. Where to draw the line regarding the inclusion of primarily terrestrial conservation sites in the SEA is an ongoing source of debate and the RSPB/SNH comments will inform future SEAs. Whilst river sites with qualifying species with a marine part of their life cycle were not included, the importance of rivers in the area for salmon and sea lamprey was highlighted and described in Section 6.5.2.*

- b. SNH Concerned that sites of international importance for birds include Important Bird Areas (IBAs) as these have no status in law.
- The SNH view is noted. IBAs whilst non-statutory were identified in the Environment Report as they represent areas recognised as being of particular importance for birds. Whilst the majority of IBAs in the SEA 5 area are protected by SPA or Ramsar designations, there are a number without formal protection. It is the opinion of the DTI that the highlighting of IBAs is valid as they represent potential areas of sensitivity with regard oil and gas activities.*
- c. MCS Future SEAs should detail the location of Annex I habitats in the SEA 5 area. Helpful if the exact area of the SAC's were mapped rather than just providing points on the map. Also detailing all the terrestrial SACS is also not very helpful.
- Following SEA 3, JNCC suggested that those interested refer directly to the Annex I location graphics presented in Natura 2000 in UK Offshore Waters, JNCC Report 325, Johnston et al. (2002, and available at <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/Publications/JNCC325/intro325.htm#full>). This report was clearly signposted for this purpose in Section 7.4.2. Maps detailing the exact area of the coastal SACs were not included in the Environmental Report in the interests of report brevity and since the SAC site information provided in the underpinning Conservation Report for SEA 5 contained links to the JNCC website where site maps could be viewed. Terrestrial SACs were listed within the Environmental Report if the site either contained a marine component or interfaced with the marine environment e.g. contained a shoreline since these could be affected by, for example, a major oil spillage.*
- d. MCS While SEA 5 printed the list of OSPAR sites it did not fully assess the significance of impacts from the 23rd round against each of the habitats and species listed.
- The identification of and implementation of OSPAR MPAs was a consideration during the assessment process. The potential to cause significant change "to internationally or nationally protected or listed populations, habitats or sites" (as originally listed in SEA 4 Appendix 2 and also applied to SEA 5) was a screening criterion for the assessment and covered the OSPAR Initial List of Threatened and or Declining Species and Habitats.*
- e. MCS SEA did not include any comprehensive assessment of marine features and species that may be of national importance and receive protection accordingly.
- The SEA 5 Environment Report and underpinning Conservation*

Report did consider marine features and species of potential importance at various scales. The assessment process was informed by the recent completion of the Irish Sea Pilot and its recommendations (Section 7.4.3 of the Environment Report & Section 8.3 of the Conservation Report) as well as the current status of Biodiversity Action Plans for marine features and species. At present a provisional ('scoping') list of nationally important marine features has been produced. As a key stakeholder the DTI will monitor and facilitate progress towards a defined list of nationally important features. Various studies including those commissioned by the DTI as part of the SEA process have contributed substantially to improved understanding of the SEA 5 area and form a basis on which to take strategic decisions regarding future oil and gas licensing as well as individual project consenting.

2.2.8 Issues raised on Section 8 Users of the Sea and Coastal Environment

- a. TEBL Section 8.8.1 could be clarified that Stingray was deployed in 2003 for additional testing; and that a 10 unit Stingray deployment could be in place within 2 years of funding becoming available.
This clarification is welcomed.
- b. SNH No mention made of the proposed decommissioning of the Beatrice installation or the current/future use of the installation by the MOD.
The SNH comments are noted. The proposed decommissioning of Beatrice was not discussed since the timing of this is unclear and the proposals are subject to EIA and DTI review and approval with stakeholder input. The proposed decommissioning was treated as a project specific rather than strategic consideration based on discussions at the SEA 5 Assessment Workshop.
- c. SNH Possible interaction with renewable energy projects has not been adequately addressed. Given proposed wind farm and Demonstrator project at Beatrice and potential co-operation with other operators, why have the two issues of oil and gas and marine renewables not been considered together?
At present marine renewables in the SEA 5 area are at a very early stage of development and were described in Section 8.8 of the Environment Report and Section 10 of the Users technical report. The proposed Beatrice demonstrator project represents the most advanced of these renewable projects. Section 10.3.3.2 notes that "If major wind or other marine renewable energy developments occur in the future in the SEA 5 area, there will be the potential for cumulative footprints/exclusion zones that would require detailed assessment to

minimise interference with other users of the area, notably fishing and shipping.”

2.2.9 Issues raised on Section 10 Consideration of the Effects of Licensing the SEA 5 Area

General

- a. WWF- UK WDCS Environmental impacts of the subsequent decommissioning of anticipated development should be factored into the environmental impact discussion. Draft guidelines to mitigate impacts of decommissioning should be made a licence condition.
- The views of the consultees are noted. The potential effect of licensing of the SEA 5 area on “forecast decommissioning activities” formed part of the consideration of cumulative effects (Section 10.4). Recommendation 5 (Section 12.3) highlighted the “potential for effects on marine mammals during removal of suspended wellheads using explosives” and recommended that “PON 5 applications to the DTI for such activities should be supported by specific risk assessments for this aspect.” Under the Petroleum Act 1998, operators proposing to decommission an installation must submit a Decommissioning Programme with supporting Environmental Impact Statement to the DTI for approval prior to any works being commenced. Consultation is a required element of the process.*

Underwater noise

- b. JNCC Section 10.3.1.3. Provide details of DTI progress towards establishing criteria for determining limits of acceptable cumulative impact and subsequent regulation of cumulative impacts, including timescales.
- For a number of years the DTI has been promoting studies to further the understanding of the distribution of marine mammals in UK waters and the sensitivity to and effects of underwater noise. The discussion and establishment of criteria for acceptable cumulative effects is hampered by lack of evidence of cumulative effects. Oil and gas projects with the potential to generate significant underwater noise all require DTI consent(s), applications for which involve the JNCC and country agencies as appropriate. Where such projects could influence Natura 2000 sites a robust Appropriate Assessment would be required.*
- c. WWF- UK WDCS MCS More clearly detailed mitigation measures required to counteract potential impacts of noise on cetaceans. Specific mitigation measures such as passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) should be used, in addition to the increased requirement for marine mammal

- SNH observers (MMO). Mitigation measures require better industry compliance and their effectiveness to prevent acute effects remains unknown.
- Revised JNCC Guidelines for Minimising Acoustic Disturbance to Marine Mammals from Seismic Surveys were published in April 2004 and describe a series of mitigation measures to counteract potential impacts of noise on cetaceans and other marine mammals. These include details of start up procedures for seismic surveys and site survey/Vertical Seismic Profiling; the use of Marine Mammal Observers, and acoustic monitoring. The Guidelines indicate that any seismic operation within the Moray Firth will require dedicated experienced MMOs and that all such surveys taking place between 1st April and 1st October north of 57° will require 2 dedicated MMOs due to longer daylight hours. The Guidelines also state “that passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) should be used as a mitigation tool if sensitive species are likely to inhabit the proposed survey location.” The Guidelines give the Moray Firth (bottlenose dolphins) as an example of an area where PAM may be required. Recommendation 4 of the Environment Report (Section 12.3) states that “the assessment of underwater noise/vibration and proposed mitigation measures for development projects should be reflected as appropriate in Environmental Statements.” and the DTI will ensure that they are.*
- d. WWF- Evidence does not demonstrate an acceptably low risk of potential effects from underwater noise. Since available scientific evidence cannot clearly determine the significance of potential effects of seismic exploration on marine mammals, the precautionary principle should prevail.
- UK
WDCS
MCS
- The SEA recognised “the increasingly precautionary approach being taken internationally to marine noise” (Sections 10.3.1.3 and 12.1) and made a series of recommendations “to improve understanding of the receptor and effects” (Section 12.3). It also “recommended that the requirement for more precautionary (and if necessary prescriptive) regulation of underwater noise associated with seismic exploration is critically reviewed within the future SEA process.” However, given the recent strengthening of mitigation measures (primarily the JNCC Guidelines for minimising acoustic disturbance to marine mammals from seismic surveys) particularly in sensitive areas such as the Moray Firth (see also response to 2.2.9c) and the apparent lack of significant detrimental effects from previous seismic survey, the potential effects of underwater noise were judged on balance to be of acceptably low risk. This problem is recognised internationally and work is ongoing to try and fill these data gaps. In the meantime, the DTI will consent and manage these activities in a precautionary way and work towards reducing the environmental footprint of noise.*

- e. WDCS More helpful if Figure 10.2 indicated how many 2D and 3D surveys were represented by the yellow lines.
The WDCS view is noted. Figure 10.2 reflected seismic coverage of the SEA 5 area and aimed to highlight areas which had been intensively surveyed in the past. There are various other attributes of seismic surveys which would aid the assessment of effects such as season, number of surveys in an area in a year, size of source used etc. Efforts will be made to source and distil this information for future SEAs.
- f. WDCS Conduct dedicated cetacean surveys in areas exposed to the most intense seismic exploration. Note that whilst most energy from seismic airguns is at low frequencies, high frequency noise is also emitted incidentally and this is where small odontocetes greatest auditory sensitivities lie.
The SEA recognised the need for further research on the ecology of marine mammals in Recommendation 9 (Section 12.3) and the DTI accepts this recommendation. The nature and location of this research will be decided following consultation with relevant agencies and stakeholders including the JNCC and SMRU. The WDCS information on incidental high frequency noise is also noted. Section 3.1.2.1 of the underpinning report (Hammond et al. 2004) recognised that “the hearing ability of toothed whales is relatively poor at low frequencies; nevertheless there is sufficient high frequency energy in the output of airgun to make them audible at distances of >10km. In addition seismic arrays carry a network of high frequency transponders for positioning.”
- g. WDCS MCS Where is the evidence to show that there has or hasn't been an effect (from seismic) on Moray Firth bottlenose dolphins? Proposed seismic in combination with past seismic testing, pollution, habitat alteration, fishing and noise may be detrimental to the bottlenose dolphin population.
The Moray Firth bottlenose dolphins are one of the most well studied cetacean populations and their abundance and distribution are comparatively well known. The SMRU report for SEA 5 indicates that the population is small (estimated 129 individuals) and geographically isolated. Population models have predicted that the Scottish east coast population is likely to be declining at a rate of around 5% per annum. However, recently calculated estimates of abundance from 1990 to 2002 show no clear trend and the effect of the recently documented range expansion is currently being investigated. The DTI are aware of the sensitivity of this population (and other marine mammal species) to disturbance (from seismic or the cumulative effect of different activities).
- h. WDCS Data gaps and recommendations for research and mitigative

measures for cetaceans and the effects of underwater noise should be detailed in this SEA, with details of how they are being filled. *The Environmental Report does identify a number of information gaps concerning marine mammals (Section 12.2) and makes recommendations for priority areas for investigation (Section 12.3). The SEA process has resulted in the preparation of technical reports on marine mammals for each area covered as well as commissioning satellite tracking of harbour and grey seals along the east coast of the UK and in the Irish Sea. While the SEA process can result in the recommendation and promotion of work on marine mammals and underwater noise, the scope and design of such studies is seen as a collaborative exercise involving a range of stakeholders. The DTI would welcome WDCS and other participation in such study definition in the future.*

- i. WDCS Controlled exposure experiments for assessing the acoustic effects of noise on cetaceans should be conducted according to an internationally defined protocol that should now be developed. *The WDCS view is noted and fully supported by the SEA which recognises the “considerable practical and ethical difficulties” in conducting these experiments (Section 10.3.1.3).*
- j. WDCS Jepson *et al.* (2003) is an important piece of work, highly relevant to the issues in this SEA and should be discussed in more detail. *The Jepson et al. (2003) paper and ensuing correspondence was discussed in the Environmental Report in a subsection “Mass strandings of beaked whales and other cetaceans” in Section 10.3.1. Clearly debate and investigation of this subject is continuing and it should form one of the inputs to framing the studies referred to in response 2.2.9h above.*

Discharges

- k. WWF-UK Only considering the increment of discharges likely from a single licensing round produces a very piecemeal approach to the impact of discharges. Zero routine flaring should be stipulated as a requirement for all developments. Why were well test emissions excluded from the assessment?
- Within the assessment of cumulative effects (Environment Report Section 10.4), the incremental effect of potential discharges from the 23rd Round were assessed against discharges resulting from forecast activity in newly licensed areas; new exploration and production activities in existing licensed areas; existing production activities; forecast decommissioning activities, and legacy effects of previous E&P activities, post decommissioning. The cumulative and synergistic effects of potential discharges were also considered. The*

SEA notes that zero routine flaring is “now considered a realistic design target for planned developments” (Section 10.3.6.2). Well test emissions were not assessed in detail based on discussion at the Assessment Workshop (in addition such emissions are controlled through the DTI administered permitting process).

- I. WWF-UK Environmental impacts currently seen from existing Beatrice platform may increase by a factor of three in the area if potential new developments are brought online as a result of SEA 5 licensing. *The DTI disagree with the WWF-UK view as control and mitigation measures regulate effectively marine discharges from oil and gas activities (Section 10.3.4.6). These measures include the Offshore Chemicals (Pollution Prevention and Control) Regulations, 2002 a focus of which is the reduction of the use of hazardous chemicals. Through OSPAR the UK is committed to a 15% reduction in total discharge volume of oil in produced water by 2006 and there is a presumption against discharge from new developments. Discharges of organic phase drilling fluids and contaminated cuttings (with >1% “oil” on cuttings) are effectively prohibited, and studies of discharged WBM cuttings in the North Sea (and other dispersive environments) have concluded that ecological effects are minimal.*
- m. MCS All produced water should be re-injected as a condition of licence in line with OSPAR Recommendation 2001/1. Consent conditions must prohibit the discharge of oil based drill cuttings and other contaminated materials in line with OSPAR. All other anthropogenic sources of pollution, including water-based mud, should be reduced where possible and prevention or mitigation at source should form consent conditions. *The views of MCS are noted. See response 2.2.9k above.*

Atmospheric emissions

- n. WWF-UK The contribution to climate change foreseen as a result of the SEA 5 plan has been excluded from the assessment. The eventual emissions produced through use of the resources developed as a result of the licensing round are a very real indirect effect which has not been adequately dealt with.
- Section 10.3.6 described the sources, predicted emissions resulting from the SEA 5 plan and potential effect of those emissions. The contributions to greenhouse gas emissions directly associated with exploration and production activities were considered to be negligible in the context of industry, national and global emissions. The implications of the ultimate use of oil and gas production from UKCS for greenhouse gas emissions and UK commitments under the Kyoto Protocol were not considered by SEA 5 since these are subjects for a*

different appraisal forum (see also response 2.2.3a) .

Accidental events

- o. WWF-UK Report highlights only the “*incremental risk*”, although continuing to develop hydrocarbon resources in the area will only increase the already major risk of significant oil spills. High vulnerability of many areas (protected and otherwise) should not be overlooked.
- The SEA recognised this in terms of cumulative risk, “the major risk of significant oil spills is associated with tanker transport of crude oil and refined products” and that “while some control and response measures have been implemented...the residual risk remains relatively high.” By comparison “...the majority of oil spills most likely to result from [potential SEA 5] E&P operations will make an insignificant contribution to overall regional inputs” (Section 10.4). The DTI have adequate control and mitigation measures in place to reduce the risk of oil spills (see response 2.2.9p below). Through appropriate channels, the government will continue to push for greater international co-operation and regulation to reduce the risks involved with tanker transport. Section 10.3.8.5 described the ecological and economic effects of oil spills highlighting the high vulnerability of a number of areas and receptors.*
- p. RSPB The precautionary approach should be adopted and blocks for which the time it would take a spill to beach under worst case weather conditions is less than the minimum time needed to deploy containment measures (at least 24 hours) should be excluded from the licensing round.
- The RSPB view is noted. The SEA recognised that “minimum beaching times from some parts of the possible licence area with sustained 30 knot winds, are short and may not provide sufficient time for appropriate response measures” (Section 10.3.8.6). However, as stated in Section 10.3.8.8 “the DTI has regulatory mechanisms in place to require Operators to develop effective oil spill mitigation measures, covering organisational aspects and the provision of physical and human resources; and to refuse consents for specific activities (including exploration drilling and development) where adequate risk management cannot be provided.” See also response 2.2.11s regarding the potential for exploration and production from nearshore areas from the adjacent land.*
- q. MCS DTI or JNCC should assess whether the potential for environmental impact is greater in the region to the East of the Shetland and Orkney by shipping oil or by using oil pipelines and make recommendations and consent conditions accordingly.
- This assessment would be hypothetical since in the case of Orkney*

and Shetland the majority of oil is already pumped to the Flotta and Sullom Voe terminals via pipelines but then exported from there by tanker. Export of oil from any new stand-alone developments which could follow from 23rd Round licensing would be subject to detailed risk assessment and oil spill contingency planning as part of project consenting processes in which the DTI and JNCC are full participants.

- r. MCS The SEA states that there was no significant lasting impact of the Braer yet the oil in the sediment means that the langoustine fishery has still not been reopened.
- It was noted in Section 10.3.8.5 of the SEA 5 Environmental Report that studies of macrobenthic infauna following the Braer spill (Kingston et al. 1995) found no significant changes in benthic community structure, as characterised by species richness, individual abundance and diversity, which could be related to the areas of seabed affected by the spill. The Environmental Report also noted that this might have been because Braer oil was of such low toxicity that there was no significant disruption of the benthic community structure, or because the sampling programme was carried out too soon after the spill to enable the full effects of its impact to be detected. In recognition of this, DTI has conducted further sampling of the study area, ten years after the spill event, early results from which has indicated a substantial decline in sediment hydrocarbon concentrations and again an absence of benthic community effects.*

The SEA 5 Environmental Report also noted the impact of the Braer spill on fisheries and aquaculture. Note, the langoustine (Nephrops) fishery in the area affected by the Braer spill was fully reopened in May 2000. An Exclusion Zone was imposed by the then Scottish Office 3 days after the Braer grounded, and extended on the 27th January 1993 in order to protect the reputation of marine produce from areas of Shetland unaffected by the spill. The restrictions imposed after the Braer spill were progressively removed – restrictions on fin fish and farmed salmon were lifted in 1993, for crustaceans except Nephrops in 1994, for shellfish except farmed mussels in 1995. In May 2000 all remaining Braer related restrictions on fishing around the Shetland Islands were lifted by the Scottish Executive, based on the results of monitoring carried out by the Fisheries Research Services Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen.

Cumulative effects

- s. WWF- The assessment of cumulative effects is qualitative and lacks a
UK systematic, quantitative approach. There are a number of
MCS approaches which may improve stakeholder understanding (e.g. causal chain analysis, use of GIS, Marine Spatial Planning).

The views of the consultees are noted. The assessment of cumulative effects is fraught with difficulty, for example considerations of equivalence, significance and relative importance, coupled with often limited information on components of the ecosystem, their interactions and effects of human activities. The SEA process is continually evolving and suggestions that promote stakeholder understanding will be considered for future SEAs.

- t. MCS DTI need to fully consider the cumulative impact of the proposed licensing round with past and ongoing licensing e.g. the Buzzard oil field. Will the cumulative impact of additional E & P activity in the Moray Firth adversely affect the Bottlenose dolphin population?
- The assessment workshop (Appendix 2) considered cumulative effects as one of the screening criteria for the assessment. All potential cumulative effects were considered significant and were taken forward for further discussion within the SEA 5 Environment Report (Section 10.4). Whilst the DTI recognise the difficulties in assessing cumulative impacts (see response to 2.2.8q above) and the existence of significant information gaps (Section 12.2), the expert opinion utilised during the assessment process, the scale of existing and proposed activity, and the control and mitigation measures available would suggest no significant cumulative impact of additional activity in the Moray Firth.*

Potential socio-economic implications

- u. WWF-UK Terms 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' developed for financial predictions are inappropriate for use within an environmental assessment.
- The WWF-UK view is noted although the issue is really a semantic one since alternative would be for example high, medium or low.*

2.2.10 Issues raised on Section 11 Consideration of the Re-offer for Licensing of Blocks in the Previously SEAed Areas

- a. RSPB Previous SEAs should be audited to examine whether the actual level of environmental impact was more or less significant than predicted. Any areas identified as being more environmentally sensitive since original SEA should be excluded from re-offer.
- The process of auditing previous SEAs was discussed during the expert assessment workshop (Appendix 2) and forms an important component of the ongoing SEA process. Section 11 of the Environment Report provides a consideration of previously SEAed areas examining whether environmental perspectives have changed since the original SEA, the validity of original activity predictions and licensing to date. Section 11.4 concluded that new information had*

not “shown any new significant or unanticipated sources of significant effect that would alter the conclusions of ...earlier DTI SEAs.” Equally, “substantive new information has not appeared on areas or features identified during previous SEAs either for exclusion from licensing or if licensed to have additional controls put in place to mitigate potential effects.” The Darwin Mounds and the potential Annex I reef areas on the Wyville Thomson Ridge were the exceptions with studies having provided new understanding of these features. Recommended exclusions from previous SEAs remain valid for the consideration of the blocks to be included in the 23rd Round. The development of a strategy to assess whether environmental impact were more or less significant than predicted was a key recommendation of the SEA (Recommendation 7, Section 12.3) and is being taken forward through the Monitoring Committee established by the DTI (see response 2.2.3d for details).

- b. WDCS Inadequate precautionary approach taken in relation to the impacts of oil and gas exploration on cetaceans, particularly in SEA 4 which is nationally and internationally important for cetaceans.
- In both the consideration of re-offer (Section 11 of the SEA 5 Environment Report) and the previous SEA 4 Report, the importance of the SEA 4 area for cetaceans was clearly stated. The revised JNCC Guidelines for minimising acoustic disturbance to marine mammals from seismic surveys (April 2004) identified the area to the north and west of Shetland and Orkney as an area of high cetacean sensitivity and as a result more stringent mitigation measures apply (see also responses 2.2.9 c and d).*
- c. TEBL Suggests consideration of the (unlikely) potential spatial conflict for hydrocarbon and wave/tide resources in Shetland, Orkney, Pentland Firth and Scottish west coast.
- Noted.*

2.2.11 Issues raised on Section 12 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- a. RSPB Impact type assessment not sufficient to provide clear view of the likely significant effects on different receptors/components of the environment. Table in Section 12 should be expanded to cover issue/effect; receptor; impact; impact significance; and mitigation. *The RSPB view is noted. The receptor/component approach to assessment was used in the first DTI SEA and necessitated much repetition of information. In response to stakeholder comments on*

SEA 1, the impact basis to assessment was adopted for subsequent SEAs. However, in light of RSPB comments on previous SEAs, a cross-referenced summary table describing potential effects of implementation of the SEA 5 draft plan and potential receptors was included. The RSPB's constructive comments on the content of this table are welcomed and these will be taken forward for discussion with the SEA Steering Group.

Wider policy objectives

- b. WWF-UK
Useful to represent linkages to other relevant plans and programmes to ensure SEA 5 part of a coordinated attempt to address appropriate priority issues.
The DTI welcome the WWF-UK's constructive comments and these will be taken forward for discussion with the SEA Steering Group prior to future SEAs. The SEA concluded in Section 12.1 that "no significant effect of activities following the proposed 23rd Licensing Round is predicted on UK Government or other wider policy and commitments."
- c. WWF-UK
MCS
Releasing further licence blocks does not easily fit within UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy. Hold back licensing some blocks so that productive reserves are maintained for future lean times and possible energy crisis ahead. Licensing blocks for oil and gas may preclude development of other, less polluting sea uses and even forms of energy production.
This perspective is noted. SEA 5 was selected by the DTI as the next in the series because the geology of parts of the area is prospective for hydrocarbons and projections show the UK having a growing shortfall in both oil and gas supplied from the UKCS. By around 2006 the UK will be a net importer of gas and by around 2010 of oil (DTI Energy White Paper). Section 12.1 concludes that "Provision of oil and gas from UK resources will contribute to the security of national energy supply. Activities resulting from the implementation of the DTI's draft plan for further licensing would have positive socio-economic effects on Shetland, Orkney and north eastern Scotland as well as the UK as a whole." The UK government has a target of achieving 10% of UK electricity supplied by renewable energy by 2010 and the DTI will ensure that the resource available is developed in the best possible way in the overall interest of national energy policy. In considering whether consent should be given for oil and gas development the Department will take into account the potential of areas for renewable energy projects.

Information gaps

- d. RSPB
Temporal and spatial gaps in the offshore seabird at sea data sets

and much of the existing data is now old. Explain why plans to fill these gaps were not in place prior to and/or as part of SEA 5 and to detail plans to urgently address these issues in the future and for future SEAs.

The issue of the age and coverage of seabird data has been recognised through the SEA process and affects both conservation efforts and other users of the sea. For SEA 5, a review of divers, grebes and seaduck distribution and abundance was commissioned which expanded and revised an earlier JNCC report. Through the SEA process the ESAS database has been updated by the JNCC (completed) and a gap analysis commissioned (report due Q2 2005). The results of the gap analysis will be used to identify priority areas for further consideration. Aerial surveys of seabird distribution and abundance in the Round 2 wind leasing areas are underway, collaboratively funded by the DTI, developers and others.

- e. WDCS MCS WWF-UK Gaps in knowledge in relation to distribution and abundance of cetaceans and effects of noise pollution are so significant that no further licensing should go ahead until headway is made in filling these gaps. The Moray Firth should be excluded from licensing until research providing a better understanding of the effects of seismic available.
- This perspective is noted. However, by extension of this argument all new UKCS oil and gas activity (and by inference all other offshore activities) would be suspended - which is not supported by the available evidence and would be a misapplication of the precautionary principle. A range of surveys and studies are underway and planned to improve understanding of cetacean and other marine mammal occurrence (e.g. the DTI SEA funded satellite tagging of seals, and the forthcoming SCANS II survey) and effects of underwater noise (DTI/UKOOA and COWRIE projects on marine mammal hearing, noise characteristics and effects, and the DTI SEA study documenting ambient noise around the UK). The results of these studies will form part of the information base supporting licensing and activity consenting decisions. In addition, they will input to the framing of future surveys and studies to be funded through the DTI oil & gas, and offshore renewables R&D programmes, and other organisations. For the Moray Firth the revised JNCC guidelines provide for precautionary mitigation of any seismic surveys that might follow award of licences in the 23rd Round.*

Recommendations

- f. JNCC MCS DTI to describe how recommendations will be taken forward and give some indication of timetable of implementation. Provide justification for those recommendations not taken forward. Ensure that

recommendations are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed). SEA steering group should review the outcomes of the recommendations in greater detail.

The SEA Steering Group is considered to be the appropriate forum for the discussion of these issues.

Licensing

- g. MCS Object to licensing of any blocks which were not licensed during previous rounds due to conservation considerations.
- The MCS view is noted and accepted for the present. Section 12.4 states that "Previous SEAs had identified a few blocks recommended for exclusion from licensing on environmental grounds or until better information becomes available. These recommended exclusions remain valid for the consideration of the blocks to be included in the 23rd licensing round."*

Regulatory and other controls

- h. JNCC Recommendation 3 out of date as revised JNCC guidelines already published.
- Accepted. The revised JNCC guidelines have strengthened the mitigation measures required for seismic surveys particularly in areas of high cetacean sensitivity such as the Moray Firth and to the north and west of Orkney and Shetland. However, the effects of noise on marine mammals and its mitigation are an active subject and further revisions of the guidelines can be expected in due course.*
- i. JNCC Unable to find Section 10.3.1.7 within the SEA 5 document, assume that the SEA is referring to Section 10.3.1.7 in SEA 4.
- This was a typographic error, improvements to mitigation measures were described in Section 10.3.1.2 of the SEA 5 Environment Report.*
- j. JNCC Fully support Recommendation 4 and request details of how DTI intend to pursue this recommendation.
- The JNCC view is noted and the issue will be considered further with feedback provided through the SEA process.*
- k. JNCC Recommendation 5. PON 5 applications already subject to a specific risk assessment. Useful if DTI could provide an indication of when and how the PON 5 process may be improved.
- Accepted. It is suggested the potential for any improvements to the PON 5 process are initially discussed between the DTI and its statutory advisers.*

Environmental monitoring and understanding

- l. JNCC WWF-UK Indicate when and how Recommendation 7 will be achieved. Should concentrate specifically on monitoring impacts, not just discharges, and ensure that cumulative impacts are especially considered.
See response 2.2.3d for progress on this recommendation.
- m. WWF-UK Once monitoring of environmental indicators is underway, the SEA should detail what response will occur once results are available, e.g. who has overall responsibility for ensuring monitoring is assessed, how will the feedback loop work in reality, how will adaptive management techniques be used to reduce impacts, etc.
The comments of the WWF-UK are noted. The DTI recognise the importance of developing a strategy to monitor the environmental consequences of both the present draft plan and previous plans. See also response 2.2.3d.
- n. WWF-UK Recommendation 8. Operators awarded licences should be required to contribute to a research fund whose objective is to eliminate those areas of uncertainty about the environmental effects of hydrocarbon exploration and production.
The WWF-UK suggestion is noted. There are already a number of routes through which offshore environmental studies are funded including the DTI oil and gas R&D programme, collaborative funding (eg the AFEN programme; and the underwater noise JIP funded by the DTI and several oil companies) and direct funding by an operator. In addition, as several of the issues also apply to offshore renewable energy there are potential funding synergies for example, with the Wind Research Advisory Group and COWRIE.
- o. WWF-UK A condition of licence should be that potential operators contribute their ecological survey data, or alternatively Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) time, to surveying specific habitats within their survey block.
The WWF-UK comments are noted. Operators have in the past contributed greatly to the ecological information available for offshore areas of the UKCS. Through the Offshore Petroleum Production and Pipe-lines (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1999 and the Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations, 2001 there is the expectation that assessments will be based on adequate ecological information and that new surveys will be conducted where necessary (identified through scoping).

Overall conclusion

- p. JNCC DTI should proceed with the licensing as alternative 3. Also agree with conclusion that '*...no blocks from the areas with good*

hydrocarbon prospectivity have been identified for exclusion since individual project consenting is expected to provide adequate spatial and temporal controls. Recommended exclusions identified by previous SEAs remain valid for the consideration of the blocks to be included in the 23rd licensing round.

The views of the JNCC are noted.

- q. SNH Licensing within proximity to designated or proposed sites, and or where conservation species likely to be present, should be limited to individual applications and careful consideration given to the temporal span of licence consents in order to assess any impacts arising cumulatively.
The views of SNH are noted.
- r. MCS No blocks within 12 miles of the NE coast of Scotland and East of Shetland and Orkney should be licensed in line with the DTI's renewable policy that no offshore windfarms are licensed within 12 miles of the shore.
The SEA for the 2nd round of offshore wind leasing, proposed the exclusion of a coastal strip from all three strategic areas assessed. This strip had a minimum width of 8km but extended to 13km in areas of particular sensitivity. This exclusion was based on the potential impact of windfarms of the scale envisaged in the SEA scenarios on the seascape, birds, inshore fishing and recreational activities. The conclusions of the offshore wind SEA do not apply to SEA 5 since the nature and scale of activity scenarios are different and in particular since coastal blocks can potentially be explored/developed from land (but for this to occur, a block would have to be covered by a licence). By way of example exploration of Block 97/14 in Weymouth Bay and production from the Wytch Farm field extension under Poole Bay were both achieved by directional drilling from land. In addition, the DTI can attach restrictions to marine area licences which can include no marine activities in a Block. The SEA 5 assessment recognised the potential sensitivity of much of the coastal area to oil and gas activities, but did not find for blanket exclusion of areas since "individual project consenting is expected to provide adequate spatial and temporal controls" (Section 12.4).
- s. WWF- Areas identified as potential offshore SACs or found to include
UK nationally and internationally important species and habitats should
WDCS be excluded from development. Potential SAC sites for Annex II
RSPB species should be excluded from licensing as should potential
MCS OSPAR and nationally important sites. Special protection from
development should be given to protected areas (and proposed
seaward expansions) for birds and they should be excluded from
licensing. No blocks within or adjacent to the Inner Moray Firth SAC

should be licensed ie blocks 17 and 11/24.

The Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations 2001 *regulates UKCS offshore oil and gas activities with respect to the Habitats and Birds Directives. That offshore SACs and SPAs had not yet been designated was fully recognised by the SEA Steering Group and assessment team. The designation of SACs and SPAs does not preclude activities in an area – rather it requires that the effects of such activities be thoroughly considered through an Appropriate Assessment before consent(s) can be granted. Section 10 of the SEA 5 Environmental Report considered the potential effects of activities that could follow licensing, including effects on potential statutory conservation sites. The assessment concluded that in the event of offshore SACs and SPAs being designated in the SEA 5 area, project specific assessment (including Appropriate Assessment) and permitting procedures available to the DTI under existing legislation provided adequate control over exploration and production activities (including management of oil spill risks). The SMRU report for SEA 5 indicates that the resident population of bottlenose dolphins inhabits coastal waters of eastern Scotland from north of the Moray Firth to the Firth of Forth, i.e. they are not restricted to the Moray Firth SAC. The protection of this and other mobile species requires effective mitigation measures and controls throughout their range.*

- t. JNCC WWF-UK If new information shows coastal waters of SEA 5 to be of greater prospectivity expect the DTI to undertake a further SEA using revised activity estimates. WWF-UK find it difficult to see how this would work in reality
The views of the consultees are noted. As stated in Section 12.4, the conclusions of the SEA are “based on the projections of the likely scale and location of activities that could follow licensing, and would need to be revisited if activity levels were substantially greater or technologies changed.” The exact form of the re-assessment would be judged on a case-by-case basis following discussions with the SEA Steering Group and relevant stakeholders.
- u. WWF-UK If uptake of SEA 5 blocks is higher than expected should this trigger additional further SEA assessment (as cumulative impact will be expected to be bigger)?
Given the limited potential for commercial oil and gas reserves “uptake of the 382 blocks offered is expected to be less than 15%, with around 75% of these being Promote Licences and 25% Traditional Licences” (Section 4.4). Increased uptake of blocks would not necessarily trigger additional assessment as the SEA 5 assessment was based on the draft plan which included all blocks within the SEA 5 area. However, only if projected activities resulting

from this additional uptake were significantly greater than those predicted would additional SEA assessment be triggered. See also response 2.2.11t above.

2.2.12 Issues raised on Appendix 2 Expert Assessment Workshop

- a. RSPB Insufficient effort appears to have been put into assessing the impact of implementation of the plan or its alternatives. The actual assessment and the methods used have become summarised and almost 'lost' in an appendix. The process and the findings of the Expert Assessment workshop need to be communicated more clearly in the main report.

There has been no diminution in the effort placed on the assessment of potential implications of the DTI's draft plan and the assessment process was summarised in Section 10.1 of the Environment Report and Appendix 2. Previous SEAs have provided details of the assessment screening criteria and assessment matrices in relevant appendices. However, as the identification of strategic issues to be considered within SEA 5 was built on the outputs from previous SEAs it was decided not to repeat information presented previously. However, in light of the RSPB comment the presentation of the assessment process and findings of the assessment workshop within future Environment Reports will be reviewed.