

Our Ref: 01.01.01.01/205U
UKOP Doc Ref:1148950



Offshore Petroleum Regulator
for Environment & Decommissioning

GNI (UK) LIMITED
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Registered No.: 02827969

Date: 15th July 2021

Department for Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

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www.gov.uk/beis
bst@beis.gov.uk

Dear Sir / Madam

**THE OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, PRODUCTION, UNLOADING
AND STORAGE (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS
2020
GAS INTERCONNECTOR PIPELINES ROCK STABILISATION**

A screening direction for the project detailed in your application, reference PL/2077/0 (Version 3), dated 13th July 2021 has been issued under regulation 6 of the above Regulations. The screening direction notice, and any relevant conditions and comments are attached. A copy of this screening direction will be forwarded to the application consultees, the Oil and Gas Authority and published on the gov.uk website.

If you have any queries in relation to this screening direction or the attachments, please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED] on [REDACTED] or email the Environmental Management Team at bst@beis.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully



**THE OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, PRODUCTION, UNLOADING
AND STORAGE (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS
2020**

**SCREENING DIRECTION CONFIRMING THAT AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
ASSESSMENT IS NOT REQUIRED**

GAS INTERCONNECTOR PIPELINES ROCK STABILISATION

PL/2077/0 (Version 3)

Whereas GNI (UK) LIMITED has made an application dated 13th July 2021, under The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2020, and whereas the Secretary of State has considered the application and is satisfied that the project is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment; in exercise of the powers available under regulation 6, the Secretary of State hereby directs that the application for consent in respect of the project need not be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment, provided that the project is carried out as described in the application for the screening direction and in accordance with the conditions specified in the attached schedule.

In giving a screening direction under regulation 6 of the above Regulations, the Secretary of State accordingly gives his agreement to the Oil and Gas Authority to the grant of consent for the project as detailed in the application.

Effective Date: 15th July 2021



THE OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, PRODUCTION, UNLOADING AND STORAGE (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2020

SCHEDULE OF SCREENING DIRECTION CONDITIONS

The grant of this screening direction is conditional upon the screening direction holder complying with the following conditions.

1 Screening direction validity

The screening direction shall be valid from 15 July 2021 until 30 November 2021.

2 Commencement and completion of the project

The holder of the screening direction must confirm the dates of commencement and completion of the project covered by the screening direction. Notification should be sent by email to the Environmental Management Team Mailbox: bst@beis.gov.uk

3 Nature of stabilisation or protection materials

Rock deposits

27 tonnes of clean, inert rock material, containing minimal fines, (The quantity of rock deposited should be the minimum required to provide the necessary stabilisation or protection, and any surplus rock must be returned to land).

4 Location of pipeline and stabilisation or protection materials

As identified within the SAT application, 'Deposit of Materials' section.

5 Prevention of pollution

The holder of the screening direction must ensure that appropriate measures are taken to minimise discharges, emissions and waste, in particular through the appropriate use of technology; and to ensure that necessary measures are taken to prevent incidents affecting the environment or, where they occur, to limit their consequences in relation to the environment.

6 Inspections

Should the Department consider it necessary or expedient for an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to investigate whether the conditions of the screening direction are being complied with, the holder of the screening direction shall afford the inspector with such facilities and assistance as the inspector considers necessary to exercise the powers conferred by the regulations. The holder of the screening direction shall additionally ensure that copies (electronic or paper) of the screening



direction and any other relevant documents are available for inspection by the inspector at:

- a) the premises of the holder of the screening direction; and
- b) the facilities undertaking the project covered by the screening direction.

7 Monitoring

The results of any pre or post-placement surveys carried out to confirm the necessity for the deposits covered by the screening direction and/or to confirm the accurate positioning of the stabilisation or protection materials, must be forwarded to the Department following completion of the surveys

8 Check monitoring

Should the Department consider it necessary or expedient to undertake an independent monitoring programme to assess the impact of the project covered by the screening direction, the screening direction holder shall afford the Department with such facilities and assistance as the Department considers necessary to undertake the work.

9 Atmospheric emissions returns

Following completion of the project covered by the screening direction, the holder of the screening direction shall report all relevant atmospheric emissions, such as combustion emissions, using the appropriate Environmental Emissions Monitoring System (EEMS) reporting forms.

10 Deposit returns

The holder of the screening direction shall submit a report to the Department following completion of the deposit covered by the screening direction, confirming the quantity of materials deposited and the estimated area of impact, using the appropriate Environmental Emissions Monitoring System (EEMS) reporting form. Where no deposits are made, a 'nil' return is required.

11 Unauthorised deposits

Following completion of the project covered by the screening direction, the holder of the screening direction shall recover any materials accidentally or temporarily deposited on the seabed, such as debris, temporary containers, structures or deposits, or scientific instruments, and shall return the materials to land. If it is not possible to recover any of these deposits, full details of the materials remaining on the seabed must be reported to the Department in accordance with the requirements of Petroleum Operations Notice No.2 (PON2).

12 Screening direction variation

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In the event that the holder of the screening direction proposes changes to any of the particulars detailed in the application for a screening direction, the holder must notify the Department immediately and submit an application for a post screening direction amendment. The post screening direction must be in place prior to the amended proposals taking effect.



COMMENTS ON THE APPLICATION FOR SCREENING DIRECTION

Section 1

The attention of screening direction holders is drawn to the following provisions regarding The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2020.

1) You are deemed to have satisfied yourself that there are no barriers, legal or otherwise, to the carrying out of the project covered by the screening direction. The issue of a screening direction does not absolve the screening direction holder from obtaining such authorisations, consents etc that may be required under any other legislation.

2) The Department would draw your attention to the following comments:

N/A

3) All communications relating to the screening direction should be addressed to:

Out-of-hours emergency screening direction variations:

Telephone Met Office out-of-hours service (0330 135 0010) and ask to be connected to the Department's On-call Response Officer (Offshore Environmental Inspectorate).

Routine communications

bst@beis.gov.uk

or

Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment & Decommissioning
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
AB1 Building
Crimon Place
Aberdeen
AB10 1BJ

Tel [REDACTED]



SCHEDULE OF SCREENING DIRECTION DECISION REASONS

The Secretary of State has decided that, based on the information provided, the project is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The main reasons for this decision are:

1) Decision reasons

The following provides a summary of the assessments undertaken by OPRED to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for this project. It summarises the information considered, the potential impacts and sets out the main reasons for the decision made.

Characteristics of the Project

Having regard, in particular, to the matters identified at paragraphs 1(a) to (g) of Schedule 5 to the Regulations, the characteristics of the project are as follows.

Deposit of stabilising rock material on two gas interconnector pipelines (IC1 and IC2).

Description of project

The pipelines are two, large diameter gas interconnector pipelines between the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. These pipelines are approximately 200 kilometres (km) in length and are subject to two-yearly inspections via visual Remotely Operated Vessel (ROV) survey and side-scan sonar survey to determine if there are any freespans on the pipelines. The results of these inspections determines if and where rock stabilisation materials are required.

The placement of rock is undertaken from a marine vessel. Rock filled bags are lowered by crane to the seabed in specific locations, guided by ROV before the bags are opened, depositing the rock in the desired location. This method of rock placement is designed to ensure accurate placement of rock and cause minimal seabed disturbance. The deposit of rock will be undertaken within a 24-hour period and the maximum quantity of rock that may be deposited is 27 tonnes (IC1 - 5 tonnes and IC2 - 22 tonnes). The maximum area of impact is 24m².

No cumulative interactions are foreseen with any other existing or approved projects.

There is no risk to human health from the works to deposit the stabilising rock material on the seabed.

There is no credible potential for a major accident or disaster to affect this project.

Any wastes associated with the project will be handled in accordance with a waste management plan and no significant impacts are anticipated.



Location of the Project

Having regard, in particular, to the matters identified at paragraphs 2(a) to (c) of Schedule 5 to the Regulations, the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by the project has been considered as follows.

Pipelines IC1 and IC2 are located in the Irish Sea and travel from the Republic of Ireland to Scotland. IC1 travels from Loughshinny in Ireland to Brighthouse Bay in Scotland and IC2 travels from Gormanston in Ireland to Ross Bay in Scotland. Water depths along the lengths of the pipelines ranges from 20m to 130m. The Irish Sea is sheltered with only two relatively narrow 'windows' along the axes of the St George's and North channels and there are moderate to strong tidal currents between SW Scotland and the Isle of Man.

The seabed habitats along the pipeline routes are primarily thin sandy, gravelly sediments between the Isle of Man and Scotland, with thickening sand and deep circalittoral mud to the west. Both pipelines overlap or travel in close proximity to a number of conservation sites. IC1 overlaps with Queenie Corner MCZ (designated for subtidal mud and sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities) and travels close to South Rigg MCZ (a range of protected habitats and sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities) and Pisces Reef Complex SAC (designated for reef habitat). Further, IC1 travels close to the North Channel SAC and North Anglesey Marine / Gogledd M n Forol SAC designated for harbour porpoise which extend into offshore areas. IC1 also passes relatively close (6km) to the Irish Sea Front SPA (designated for Manx shearwater during the breeding season) and Luce Bay and Sands SAC (Large shallow inlets and bays, various dune habitats, sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time, mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide, reefs). In coastal areas, both pipelines cross the Solway Firth SPA, which supports important wintering divers including red-throated diver, common scoter and goosander. The project is locate close to the River Blandoeh SAC, designated Atlantic Salmon.

With regard to the sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities habitat, previous ROV surveys which are restricted to the pipeline corridor, have not noted the presence of sea-pens but have noted the presence of *Nephrops* burrows. Previous ROV surveys have not noted the presence of horse mussel beds.

The project will be undertaken at a time when several fish species may be found to be spawning or using the area as nursery locations.

Seabird distribution and abundance in the area varies throughout the year but a Manx shearwater population of European importance is supported by the Irish Front SPA (6km east of IC1). Concentrations of moulting auks are found throughout the Irish Sea from July through August, with guillemots and razorbills present in the area year-round.

Harbour porpoises are present in the area with a moderate density in July with other cetaceans present at low densities. Seals are not expected in any significant number



around the area of the pipelines.

There are no other oil and gas facilities or existing offshore wind developments in the vicinity of the two pipelines.

Shipping density in the area is classed as low to moderate.

The Irish Sea is extensively used for military testing and exercises. There is a Ministry of Defence range (Kircudbright) close to Ross Bay and a danger area extends out into the Solway Firth, just to the south of the pipelines. There are also Navy practice areas for air general, HM ships and submarine exercises which extend from the North Channel to the Isle of Man, close to where rock placement operations are expected.

The pipelines are crossed by a number of cables which were protected by rock during their construction.

Fishing activity within the area represents up to approximately 1.1% of the overall fishing effort in the UK. The placement of rock will be undertaken over a period of 24 hours and therefore will not significantly impact commercial fisheries.

Given the location of the project, the areas identified at paragraphs 2(c) (iii), (iv), (vi), (vii) or (viii) of Schedule 5 have not been given particular regard with respect to the project.

Type and characteristics of the potential impact

In accordance with paragraph 3 of Schedule 5 to the Regulations, the likely significant effects of the project on the environment have been considered. Potential impacts on the environment from the activities associated with the project were assessed, with particular focus on the predominant impacts resulting from physical presence of the installed deposits and seabed disturbance resulting from the deposit of those materials.

Other than the matters considered further below, there is not likely to be any significant impact arising from the project on population and human health.

The physical presence of the rock placement vessel along the lengths of the pipelines will be for a period of 24 hours. This will be mitigated by notices to mariners and no significant impact is expected.

The physical presence of the deposited rock will be mitigated by ensuring that a smooth berm profile is achieved. Historical activities show the rock will be below the level of the adjacent pipeline and no significant impact is expected for other users of the sea.

The deposit of rock on the seabed will lead to localised mortality of benthos, with the extent of this limited through the relatively small quantity of rock to be deposited and



the area that will be impacted (25m²). With respect to Queenie Corner MCZ this area of rock deposit would be equal to approximately 0.00002% of the MCZ. The impact is therefore not anticipated to be significant. Similarly no significant impact is expected on the Solway Firth SPA.

While vessel noise has the potential to impact marine mammals the predicted levels are below injury thresholds of all species. Due to the limited project duration and the existing general vessel traffic in the area there is unlikely to be any significant behavioural disturbance to marine mammals.

A diesel release from the rock placement vessel is not considered to be capable of having significant impact due to the limited quantity of diesel onboard and the nature of the oil which would evaporate relatively quickly upon release.

The original pipeline routes were selected to avoid wrecks and there will be no interaction with any wrecks in the vicinity of the pipeline.

While parts of the pipeline traverse the territorial waters of the Republic of Ireland and the Isle of Man there will be no significant impact due to the limited quantity and localised nature of deposits. There are no known cumulative impacts with other projects in the area.

Taking all the above determinations into account, the Secretary of State has concluded that the project is not likely to have a significant impact on the environment.