



Offshore Petroleum Regulator  
for Environment  
& Decommissioning

Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment & Decommissioning  
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[Department of Energy Security & Net Zero](#)

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Dear Stakeholder

## **National Site Network<sup>[1]</sup> and Marine Protected Area Network [2]**

If proposed activities are within, or could impact a designated protected area, to avoid potential delays in the Department determining applications, the Department advises that applications are submitted in advance of the 28-day review period as specified in current guidance. To determine applications, it is essential that all submissions consider the potential impacts on the relevant protected areas.

### **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in the Southern North Sea (SNS)**

A number of National Site Network sites are judged<sup>[2]</sup> to be in an unfavourable conservation status. If you are planning to use rig stabilisation or scour protection in the following National Site Network sites - Dogger Bank SAC, Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton SAC and the North Norfolk Sandbanks and Saturn Reef SAC, please be advised of following:

- To avoid adverse effects on the above sites, operators must avoid the use of materials that cannot be recovered, whilst meeting the technical and safety requirements of Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit (MODU) siting. For example, grout bags can be used for scour protection and are readily recoverable, however if rock placement is proposed or used, the operator will be required to recover the deposited material as far as is practicable.
- Where rig stabilisation or scour protection is required, the Department will expect operators to provide robust justification for any stabilisation options proposed (including if practical, for siting the MODU beyond site boundaries) and consider use of materials/options such as grout bags that can be removed following MODU departure, where these meet the technical and safety requirements of MODU placement. Where rock placement is required, the Department will expect operators to minimise the volume of rock deposited. Should rig stabilisation or scour protection be required for activities within the above sites, removeable methods that avoid permanent habitat change must be used, or should it be proposed that rock placement is used in these sites, the rock must be removed as far as is practicable at the end of the drilling campaign.

<sup>[1]</sup> "the National Site Network" means the network of sites in the United Kingdom's territory consisting of such sites as (a) immediately before exit day formed part of Natura 2000; or (b) at any time on or after exit day are European sites, European marine sites and European offshore marine sites for the purposes of any of the assimilated transposing regulations (SI 2017/1013).

<sup>[2]</sup> Relevant site Supplementary Advice on the Conservation Objectives (SACO) provided by Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies.

- Applications submitted to the Department will be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), which may include a full Appropriate Assessment (AA), and it is advised that applications are submitted at least 8 weeks in advance of operational start date. Operators must consider and assess the impacts of the proposed operations on any relevant National Site Network sites both alone and in-combination with other plans and projects.
- Further project-level HRA and AA will be carried out on the basis of the specific proposals set out in each application. However, in preparing their applications, operators should bear in mind the plan level conclusions and mitigation measures identified for certain Blocks/National Network Sites in the 1<sup>st</sup> Carbon Dioxide Storage Licensing Round and 33<sup>rd</sup> Seaward Oil & Gas Licensing Round, which may equally be relevant for extant licences and related activities undertaken in those relevant sites.
- Further information on the HRA and AA conclusions in relation to 1<sup>st</sup> Carbon Dioxide Storage Licensing Round and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Seaward Oil & Gas Licensing Round can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/1st-offshore-carbon-dioxide-storage-licensing-round-appropriate-assessment> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/33rd-seaward-licensing-round-appropriate-assessment>.

#### Southern North Sea (SNS) and East Irish Sea (EIS) Special Protection Areas (SPA's)

If you are planning to undertake activities which may affect bird species in relation to SPA's e.g. Liverpool Bay and Greater Wash, then applications will be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), which may include a full Appropriate Assessment (AA). It is advised that applications are submitted at least 8 weeks in advance of operational start date. Operators must consider and assess the impacts of the proposed operations, including vessel transiting on any relevant National Site Network sites both alone and in-combination with other plans and projects.

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<sup>[2]</sup> Marine Protected Area network established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act.

<sup>[3]</sup> Relevant site Supplementary Advice on the Conservation Objectives (SACO) provided by Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies.