



Wind Energy Ireland Consultation Response - Draft South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan for ORE

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INTRODUCTION

Wind Energy Ireland (WEI) would like to thank the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Draft South Coast DMAP consultation published on the 3rd of May 2024.

WEI welcome that the draft SC-DMAP not only facilitates the progress of the site for Offshore Renewable Energy Support Scheme (ORESS) 2.1, but will also be in place for the staged delivery beyond the immediate timescale associated with Phase 2. This wider approach should allow the SC-DMAP to underpin a genuine plan-led and strategic model for ORE development in the South Coast region beyond 2030 and set a positive precedent for future DMAPs. To achieve this, will require that the DMAP process aligns with broader policy already in place and developing.

In the context of seeking to achieve ambitious deployment targets, it is vital for the ORE South Coast DMAP to be adopted at pace to maintain positive political, public and supply chain momentum after a long period of uncertainty and to avoid any unnecessary delays to the ORESS 2.1 auction. However, need for rapid progress must not come at the expense of compromising the quality and robustness of the DMAP or associated impact assessments.

To safeguard the integrity of the DMAP and subsequent consenting of ORE projects, it will be essential for DECC to assure itself that the final DMAP and accompanying impact assessments are robust. WEI understands that processes are in place to address feedback received during this consultation period and that clarifications could be provided in final reporting (including the Appropriate Assessment Determination to accompany the DMAP) where appropriate. It is for DECC to consider whether, in light of all consultation responses received, any further work or reporting may also be needed to ensure that the final DMAP is robust and, if so, to address the implications of this.

The tight four-week turnaround time the department faces for reviewing consultation response creates several crucial challenges. The limited timeframe could lead to a rushed review process and important submission insights could be overlooked or undervalued. Additionally, this is compounded by the fact that the review of submissions on the draft T&Cs for the ORESS 2.1 auction will also be taking up a lot of departmental bandwidth. WEI would request that every effort be made to allocating additional resources to manage the workload as effectively and efficiently as possible. Finally, we advocate for the optimisation of renewable energy production from within the SC-DMAP. Commercial and technical deliverability before the mid-2030s must play key roles in influencing site selection on Ireland's south coast Identifying more areas of potential offshore wind within the SC-DMAP will allow the government more flexibility in achieving those goals.

In an effort to be as clear and concise as possible in our response, we have opted to include our key concerns within the survey questions put forward by DECC.

WHO WE ARE

WEI is Ireland's largest renewable energy organisation with over 200 members who have come together to plan, build, operate and support the development of Ireland's onshore and offshore wind generation. We work to promote wind energy as an essential, social, economic, and environmentally friendly part of the country's low-carbon energy future. As a leader in Ireland's fight against climate change, wind energy creates and maintains jobs, invests in communities, and reduces CO₂ emissions and contributes to our security of energy supply.

SC-DMAP CONSULTATION SURVEY QUESTIONS

Do you agree with the 4 maritime areas identified for future offshore wind development in the draft SC-DMAP? If not, why?

1. Identifying Maritime Areas for offshore wind development

Yes, WEI broadly agrees with the four maritime areas identified for future offshore wind development. We do however wish to raise a number of concerns regarding the application of the area selection methodology as detailed below.

WEI is pleased that DECC has listened to concerns outlined in our previous submissions in respect of Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2 (OREDP II) and the South Coast DMAP Proposal regarding the flaws of using reductionist approaches to identify areas for ORE development based on individual constraints and exclusions, rather than balancing constraints with opportunities and positively seeking to deploy offshore renewable energy in the most appropriate areas. We therefore broadly welcome the layered opportunities and consolidated constraints analysis methodology undertaken through GIS to identify maritime areas A-D, which we consider represents a balanced and logical approach. In overall terms we consider that the Maritime Areas Identification Report accompanying the Draft DMAP outlines a logical methodology to aggregate GIS data layers, derive a consolidated constraint layer and apply this alongside technical opportunities mapping.

WEI is however concerned over a lack of transparency in the application of the methodology, as the data workbook containing the topic-specific criteria used to assign constraint ratings 1-5 spatially was not published until 7th June, merely seven days prior to the consultation deadline, despite Section 7.4.6.3 of the SEA Environmental Report published on 3rd May directing readers to this for further details. Given the very short period between publication of the data workbook and the close of this consultation WEI has not been able to review the scorings and associated justifications in detail, which is unfortunate as these scorings underpin the entire methodology for the selection of areas for ORE development, but we would observe that many of the justifications provided are brief and in some cases include subjective judgement regarding impact acceptability. WEI requests that DECC assures itself of the robustness of all assigned scorings and associated justifications prior to the adoption of the final South Coast DMAP.

WEI understands that the area selection methodology was underpinned by use of 1-5 scoring levels across environmental constraints, as outlined in Table 2.3 of the Maritime Area Identification Report, with technical constraints either scored on the same basis or using a binary approach (1/5) as appropriate. However, the "*rating rationale*" presented in Table 2.3 to justify each level of scoring is generic so does not readily translate to individual constraint layers and the actual scoring data applied spatially to areas or polygons has unfortunately not been published alongside the consolidated constraint mapping.

WEI also notes that the online GIS viewer (published after the commencement of this consultation) does not include the scored constraints as layers. The environmental data layers figures provided in Appendix B of the Maritime Areas Identification Report provide a useful overview of consolidated constraints but again these do not provide any visibility of where individual constraints were assigned a rating of 5 such that these areas were automatically excluded, irrespective of any other factors. It is therefore difficult to cross-match the scorings provided in the data workbook with the consolidated constraint maps in the Maritime Areas Identification Report and is not possible to identify how individual and consolidated constraint scores have been applied spatially to each area or polygon within the GIS constraints map. This means that it is not currently possible to confirm why some areas of seabed have been excluded from consideration in the identification of maritime areas for ORE. This should be addressed through incorporating the scored constraint layers within an online GIS viewer which should accompany the final South Coast DMAP to provide transparency regarding how individual and consolidated scorings have been applied to specific areas.

In respect of the protection of designated sites in the area selection process, section 6 of the Draft DMAP suggests that "*Natura designations were included in the area specific assessment carried out to identify the Maritime Areas*". However, the Maritime Areas Identification Report only briefly notes that a 2km buffer was applied around the Seas off Wexford Special Protection Area (SPA) "*due to environmental sensitivity*", with no justification provided for the use of this distance. It is therefore unclear why a 2km buffer is considered to be either necessary or sufficient as a form of mitigation and what influence this has on potential adverse effects from offshore wind development on the SPA. Given the immediate proximity of Area A – Tonn Nua to the Seas off Wexford SPA, to avoid generating consenting risks for the ORESS 2.1 project these uncertainties need to be addressed through the provision of a robust rationale for the application of the 2km buffer.

Turning to the consideration of potential seascape and landscape impacts, there is some obfuscation as Figure B.15 within the Maritime Areas Identification Report appears to show that tiered distances from shore were used to assign seascape and landscape constraints, yet, the use of any specific distance from shore buffers is neither stated nor justified in the report. The data workbook published on 7th June confirms that a 0 - 5 km distance from shore has been assigned a constraint score of 5, thereby automatically excluding this coastal strip, with a constraint score of 4/5 uniformly assigned to all seabed lying 5 – 24 km from shore. It is of significant concern that these arbitrary scorings in respect of potential landscape and seascape effects have been made without reference to any factors other than distance. We also note that Section 8.3.2 of the SEA Environmental Report inappropriately conflates distance to shore ranges with potential landscape impacts and re-states flawed assumptions previously presented within the OREDP II SEA Scoping Report (2022), which WEI previously responded to. Please also refer to WEI's recent briefing paper regarding distance to shore considerations, which

has been shared directly with DECC and which explains why it is fundamentally flawed to exclude viable and environmentally suitable areas from ORE development simply on account of arbitrary distance from shore thresholds.

WEI is concerned that insufficient attention may have been afforded to the consideration of potential cumulative effects within the Draft DMAP and accompanying impact assessments, which could undermine the robustness of the plan and subsequent consenting processes. To the limited extent that cumulative or in-combination effects have been addressed, this appears to focus on interactions between areas B - D rather than also considering Area A – Tonn Nua. Whilst logical in relation to sequential development within the DMAP area alone, this approach fails to account for potential cumulative impacts between development in Area A and other projects out with the scope of the DMAP, including from offshore wind development through the UK Crown Estate’s ongoing Round 5 - Celtic Sea leasing process. To safeguard plan robustness, the relevance and implications of the Crown Estate’s Celtic Sea leasing round need to be more clearly addressed within the final DMAP and accompanying impact assessments.

Wake Effects within SC (and other) DMAPs

The wake effect is the aggregated influence on the energy production of the wind farm, which results from the changes in wind speed caused by the impact of the turbines on each other. It is important to consider wake effects from neighbouring wind farms and the possible impact of wind farms which will be built in the future.

With the move in Ireland to a ‘Plan Led’ approach to ORE development within DMAPs and the recent publication of maps showing areas A- D in relative close proximity to each other, DECC now needs to state a clear policy statement in this document on how wake effects arising between projects developed within these plan led areas will be considered and regulated.

This is a particularly urgent issue for the Tonn Nua (Area A) project as it will be auctioned in the upcoming ORESS 2.1 process and will need to precisely understand how potential wake effects from other adjacent, subsequent projects will impact its business case going forward. This policy remedy needs to be referenced in the ORESS 2.1 Ts & Cs also for clarity.

As the location of Areas A-D are unlikely to dramatically change at this stage of the consultation process, and as there is no clear timeline / sequence for the development of the other ORE areas B-D, any policy remedy will need to be retrospective in design. This policy will need to clearly state the requirement for subsequent projects in the DMAP, where possible, to mitigate for adverse impacts or if that is not possible to compensate for revenues lost through wake effects on existing or already contracted / consented projects.

Possible Remedy Options

Recourse through the planning process

In the UK (a relatively mature market) we are seeing the start of a pattern of existing projects making submissions through the Development Consent Order (planning) process on proposed new adjacent projects highlighting the potential impact of wake effects on their production and related revenues.

This has been seen to some extent on onshore wind developments in Ireland and is not desirable to have ORE developers objecting to other wind projects in such a public forum. (At least the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines provide some guidance on 'Windtake'). Given the Plan Led direction of the ORE industry and the DMAP process, leaving disputed circumstances between projects to the relevant planning authority is not a good approach.

MARA

Another approach could be a condition in the MAC granted by MARA to ensure adjoining projects are not financially or technically impacted but this seems to be along the same lines as the allowing the planning authority to decide disputes and is also not an optimal approach. At any rate MARA would need a policy direction to allow them become involved.

UAEC

Another solution could be the use of the UAEC mechanism (for ORESS 2.1 project) to keep the existing project(s) business case whole. However, this would be an open-ended guarantee and would take away any requirement for adjoining new projects to mitigate their impacts initially and so probably not attractive to the State. It also would potentially not be applicable to future non-grid connected projects.

Co-Existence Approach

Given the document goes into specific detail on the requirement for ORE to co-exist with other marine users, there is space for this co-existence argument to be extended to regulate the relationship between new and existing ORE projects within the DMAP.

The document already requires ORE developers to engage with fishermen and to mitigate the effects of the ORE project on their activity SF1. Further, SF3 requires ORE developers to enter into an agreement (FMMS) with fishermen to formalise the management and mitigation measures required. *'A Fisheries Management and Mitigation Strategy (FMMS) shall be prepared by developers of proposed ORE projects..'*

This concept and policy is also set out in the NMPF under Co-existence and states:

'6.1 Co-existence Objective

- *To encourage effective use of space to support existing and future sustainable economic activity through co-existence, mitigation of conflicts and minimisation of the footprint of proposals.*

Planning Policy - Co-existence Policy 1

Proposals should demonstrate that they have considered how to optimise the use of space, including through consideration of opportunities for co-existence and co-operation with other activities, enhancing other activities where appropriate.

If proposals cannot avoid significant adverse impacts (including displacement) on other activities they must, in order of preference: a) minimise significant adverse impacts, b) mitigate significant adverse impacts, or c) if it is not possible to mitigate significant adverse impacts, proposals should set out the reasons for proceeding'

Suggested draft policy on wake effects could mirror this approach and should follow this logic with the exception of including a compensation mechanism;

Policy Objectives for subsequent ORE projects and wake effects in DMAPs

Any subsequent ORE proposals that are close to or could affect existing ORE projects or sites held under a permission or that are subject to an ongoing permitting or consenting process for ORE should avoid significant adverse impacts on these projects. If proposals cannot avoid significant adverse impacts they must, in order of preference;

a) minimise significant adverse impacts,

b) mitigate significant adverse impacts, or

c) if it is not possible to mitigate significant adverse impacts and the proposals wish to proceed, proposals should set out how they will compensate the affected ORE project(s) for production loss due to wake effects

Subsequent projects will then know the policy provision is there to keep the 'existing' project(s) whole and can calculate this cost into their own financial model / business case. This will avoid any objections being raised at planning stage between projects. Some mediation of the policy may be required and this would be the responsibility of DECC (or its appointees) as the sponsor of the Plan Led approach.

Finally, there are issues relating to Maritime Area Consents (MAC) related to the draft South Coast DMAP that are either explicit (for ORESS 2.1 for example) or yet to be clarified, for future ORESS or non-grid limited access to seabed.

Cable routes / corridors (and 'islanded' projects)

At present the South Coast DMAP excludes cable corridor and sub-station infrastructure locations for all 4 sites. We understand that EirGrid is likely to be the responsible authority for making the application for a site investigation for a cable corridor route and ultimately a MAC for the development of the cable infrastructure from the sites to the shoreline. The alignment between EirGrid applications and the developer programmes is of the utmost importance. Whilst we anticipate that EirGrid will be in a strong position to be awarded a MAC, the timescales for achieving these are a significant risk to a developer. There is also the outside chance that EirGrid do not obtain the MAC and no clarity on what would happen to the project(s) if this scenario were to occur.

Non-grid requirements

There is an absence of any guidelines and a timetable on the non-grid route to market, which is fundamental to the delivery of the 2GW non-grid limited projects. We would like to see the guidelines and timetable presented in the South Coast DMAP. There is also uncertainty over whether DECC will specify the off-taker or whether developers will be at liberty to make their own partnerships? We need to see a clear and streamlined process within the DMAP that reflects the level of risk for the non-ORESS offtakers.

Like the above point, it is unclear whether EirGrid will be responsible for the infrastructure relating to non-grid offtake (sub-stations and cables) and whether EirGrid requires an application for a grid connection in these circumstances.

LCOE for sites B, C and D will be higher due to the sea conditions (depth etc) and therefore LCOH off the South Coast of Ireland will be higher. We would advocate for MAC processes and fees to be flexible to reflect different kinds of risks between non-grid and grid connected offshore wind developments. We are however in favour of a ‘competitive’ MAC process in the future, in advance of any required verification of (or guidelines for) offtake / route to market. We strongly request that a working group is established for the 2 GW non-grid limited capacity and that a timeline is prepared to provide developer certainty as soon as possible.

2. Sustainable development and environmental protection

Do you agree that the draft SC-DMAP policy objectives and governance approach, including for environmental protection, will support and guide its sustainable and coherent implementation?

Policy Objectives

While we generally support the approach of the draft South Coast DMAP plan to establish objectives to guide future development of the plan led approach, it is important that these are appropriately worded so that there is clear understanding of what is required of all relevant stakeholders and in particular the developers of the project areas. The provisions / objectives of the draft SC-DMAP will have an impact on the way projects are prepared for a planning consent application, constructed, and managed long term within designated development areas of the DMAP. Where the Government has a clear objective as to how it wants offshore wind farms designed and managed, this needs to be unambiguously stated so there will be no confusion in the assumptions of ORESS 2.1 bidders and beyond. The language of the objectives is therefore critical and should be more concise and legalistic in style (for example, “the developer shall” as opposed to “the developer should” etc.).

As this is a plan-led process, it will be imperative that there is ongoing involvement / regulation provided for by the State to ensure the objectives of the DMAP are achieved. In addition, how the objectives of the DMAP are to be understood by the consenting authority when considering a consent application must be transparent and coherent to avoid misinterpretation or assumptions being made in relation to any of the objectives set out in the plan. We have highlighted (bold and underline) some of these objectives below where the language is somewhat unclear.

Objective	Current description	Comment
WQ1	“.....To protect and improve water quality.....”	How can and will this be assessed?
ML2	“...Projects brought forward under this plan should minimise electromagnetic field (EMF) in the marine environment	How can and will this be assessed? There will a technical requirement for cable sizing of any project –

		not clear what will be required of the project.
CC1	<p>“...To support Ireland’s climate and renewable energy objectives by providing for ORE development. In addition to delivering renewable energy, projects <u>should demonstrate the integration of a multi-benefit approach into their project</u>, which may include the delivery of carbon sequestration, biodiversity enhancement, coastal management, water quality management or other ecosystem services through the project design and/or mitigation</p>	What level of benefit will be acceptable to the relevant Planning Authority based on this statement?

Policy Objectives for Overarching Environmental Protection (OEP)

We would recommend that these policy objectives are reviewed in light of what specifically they are requesting / requiring the projects to be developed within the DMAP to do.

For example, OEP 3 states that *“To contribute to the ecological enhancement of the marine environment, projects should, through a project-specific Nature Enhancement and Rehabilitation Plan, provide for ecological enhancement and recovery of the marine environment **that goes beyond measures required for project mitigation and which contribute to European, national and local biodiversity policies**, including any National Nature Restoration Plan, and are commensurate with and proportional to the scale/footprint and potential environmental effect of the project. Projects which incorporate features that enhance or facilitate species adaptation or migration, or natural native habitat connectivity **will be supported**, subject to the outcome of statutory environmental assessment processes and subsequent decision by the competent authority, and where they contribute to the policy objectives of this SC-DMAP.”*

This does not provide sufficient clarity to a developer who will need to cost such works into a project design. This objective needs to be reconsidered and appropriate language used to make it either a condition of development in a DMAP, or an aspirational addition.

Separately, MS 1 states that *“To ensure that statutory reviews of the SC-DMAP and projects brought forward under this Plan must consider the evolution of baseline conditions, which includes additional future national protected sites, e.g., Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and European Sites, e.g., marine SPAs and SACs and data from regional level survey activity and projects.”*

It is our view that this cannot be applied to Area A, as it would create too much uncertainty to the project development process following on from auction bidding. Clarity is required as to whether this objective would specifically be relevant to Areas B-D.

Governance Structure: We note that a detailed governance structure is proposed whereby:

1. The Minister of the Environment, Climate and Communications will be the Competent Authority as per the definition in the MAP act.

2. An Implementation Programme Board will be established within 6 months of the DMAP. This will be the key group who will ensure that the DMAP plan objectives are delivered. This group will be supported by
 - Marine Ecosystems and Ornithology Working Group- to include participation of Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, National parks and Wildlife Services and the Marine institute
 - Technical Working Group- to include participation of Maritime Area Regulatory Authority; Eirgrid; MAC holders and Dept of Transport.
 - A Collaborative Forum (all stakeholders not defined) which will meet bi-annually.

We note that governance structure has been proposed as a result of mitigation in the SEA and this is welcome, as it demonstrates robustness in the process. However, we have the following observations with respect to what is proposed:

1. Membership of Groups needs to be understood. Given that there are a number of groups and levels within the governance structure it will be important to understand who will be allocated to what group, what the reporting hierarchy will be and how/where decisions will be made. We believe that industry representation will be required and while we note that MAC applicants will be on the 'Technical Working Group' we feel that broader representation will be required, in particular to support the broader implementation of the SC-DMAP and delivery of objectives. We also believe that the input of other stakeholders such as eNGOs; the fishing industry and relevant community groups will be invaluable. Relevant expertise needs to be considered right across these groups and a balance should be struck between government and other stakeholders. However, duplication of effort and bureaucracy must be avoided. An option to dissolve or change groups should be allowed within the Terms of Reference.
2. Timelines need to be clarified for establishment of governance structure and work programme as the ability to deliver maritime sites B, C and D will be dependent on this. Currently the Draft SC- DMAP states that Implementation Programme Board will be established within 6 Months of the published DMAP. It is not clear however when the relevant working groups will be established. What is noted is that the Regional Level Assessments which will be the baseline required to develop sites B, C and D will be informed by the working groups. So, a reasonable assumption on this basis is that site B, C and D may be available for auction by 2026/2027. However, if we are to consider the ambition that was outlined in the North Seas Energy co-operation 'Tender planning programme'¹ which was published in November 2023, 3 sites will be auctioned in 2025 in Ireland for a total of 3.2 GW. This will include both grid and no-grid opportunities. Given that the only opportunity for future development of ORE in Ireland is via the draft SC DMAP, it could be assumed that these three sites will be B, C and D. However, given the timelines outlined in the draft SC DMAP the opportunity to auction this level of capacity does not seem possible. Therefore, it would be hugely beneficial if DECC could provide some clarity and roadmap with respect to the planned timelines of BC and D.

¹ [231117 NSEC tender planning - November 2023_0.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

3. The Terms of Reference for the Implementation Programme Board should allow for the consideration of future DMAPs. While we recognise that the focus of the Implementation Programme Board will be the South Coast, the opportunity to continue work on other areas for DMAP development should not be missed. What we want to ensure is that lessons learned from the South Coast DMAP can be easily transferred for development of other DMAPs. In addition, we are conscious that Ireland is not large and the need to replicate groups for similar processes in different regions may not be pragmatic, in particular given that the nature of the maritime space is not regionalised. We therefore propose that ToRs are flexible to include development of all areas and all DMAPs.
4. Finally, we note that the Implementation Programme Board will also *'feed into the governance model for Project Ireland Marine 2040, a marine governance group,'*. More details on this process would be appreciated. In addition the Draft SC-DMAP notes that *'Government will further establish two working groups to aid the accelerated emergence of floating offshore wind in Ireland in future DMAPs, comprising a State-Industry forum to facilitate collaborative engagement and guide relevant elements of the ORE Future Framework policy statement, and an additional technical group focused on delivering a floating offshore wind demonstrator project'* but it is not clear how the Governance Structure for the SC DMAP will interact with these groups.

With respect to Governance of the draft SC-DMAP plan development we note the following:

1. The Process followed for SEA scoping did not adhere to best practise of allowing public consultation on the planned approach for the assessments of the SC DMAP. While we note that public consultation is not mandatory at scoping stage for a SEA, we do believe it is beneficial to include the opportunity to comment at an early stage of an assessment. We are particularly disappointed that the ORE sector was not permitted the opportunity to contribute, where it now appears that the application of specific constraints within the area selection process was discussed with relevant bodies.
2. The Plan to develop robust system for managing all data is welcome- but some consideration is needed with respect best practise in collecting, collating and sharing this data. The draft SC-DMAP states that *"In addition, MAC and development permission holders for Maritime Areas A, B, C and D are required to share data that has been obtained pursuant to a licence or authorisation granted by the State, or referred to or relied upon in a development application (where possible having regard to third party copyright and other legal restrictions), for the GIS data repository."*

While we are not opposed to sharing data and see enormous value in ensuring most efficient use of it to better inform all users in the marine space, we see some challenges with respect to when and what data is shared. In particular, the potential to require data in advance of planning application submission. Best practise in other jurisdictions is that this data is shared post consent application or in the case where no planning application is made, 5 years after survey is completed. Similar conditions are already applied within DECC (e.g. with respect to

surveys conducted for offshore oil and gas exploration). We would recommend that data policy under the DMAPs aligns to this best practise and stipulate that data will not be required in advance of planning submission.

Furthermore, any data programmes co-ordinated by government should ensure that data collected is to required industry standards and is third party verified. In addition, duplication of effort should be avoided at all costs. We are aware that aerial survey data has been collected by individual developers for significant tranches of the Draft South Coast DMAP likely over multiple seasons. This data should be targeted for procurement by DECC, in advance of a specific programme being rolled out for areas A-D. Finally, NPWS should provide guidance on data viability. Currently there is a lack of clarity on the length of term that baseline data is viable for offshore projects and how validation data can be collected. This clarity should be provided ASAP. WEI suggest that further industry engagement and consultation is held on the data sharing timing and requirements.

3. While there is relatively good clarity with respect to the site selection for A, B, C and D and how it is likely that sites will develop over time via iterations of project planning what is not clear is how the overall plan will react to iterations with respect to regional level assessments and National assessment for instance with respect to delivery of climate action plan and targets. Currently the Draft SC DMAP takes account of requirements under the current Climate Action Plan 2024 and demonstrates how it will contribute to commitments for future targets. However, it does not appear to address how climate policy changes will be considered in future iterations. In addition, it does not appear to align with the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) from the point of view of accelerating renewable deployments via Renewable Accelerated Areas (RAA). We would recommend that draft SC-DMAP should include options for sites to be considered as RAAs in particular if sites are being rolled out sequentially and sufficient time has been afforded to collect data to update assessments.
4. It is not clear from the Draft SC- DMAP what the competitive processes for B, C, and D will be. We understand that a MAC will be required by a developer to progress a site planning application for these sites and the nature of these awards will be decided by the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority. We understand that this a "*competitive MAC award' process, pursuant to Sections 93 and 103 of the MAP Act on either a phased or non-phased basis*". Ideally, we would like to understand how and when this process will be decided.

We are aware that via the published Future Framework the following actions will be progressed:

Action 10: Explore the feasibility of implementing a competitive MAC framework with consideration to requirements under the MAP Act including appropriate criteria and indicative timelines for implementation.

Action 12: Design and develop a successor support scheme to ORESS, and obtain State Aid clearance, to be in operation from 2026-2030. This successor support scheme will be subject to domestic and international demand assessment.

Therefore, clarity on how these actions and governance processes are expected to be accommodated in the SC DMAP should be clearly outline in the draft plan.

DMAP Validity Period

WEI previously recommended revisiting the DMAP validity time period. The intention, as set out in the DMAP Proposal (2023) was that once the DMAP was formally adopted, it would only be valid for 6 years and then would need to be renewed, with DECC noting that the entire DMAP process would need to be undertaken again as part of this renewal process. This requirement has been set out within Chapter 3 of the MAP Act, which states²:

Reviews of DMAPs, etc. 26. (1) Subject to subsection (2), a competent authority (D) shall, not later than six years after a DMAP (being a DMAP for the time being in force) prepared by the competent authority (D) was first published, carry out a review thereof and, following the completion of the review, either— (a) prepare and publish, in accordance with this Part and the MSP Directive, a new DMAP to replace the first-mentioned DMAP, or (b) in circumstances where the competent authority (D) decides not to prepare and publish such new DMAP, as soon as is practicable after making that decision, prepare a statement setting out the reasons why the competent authority (D) has made that decision and publish the decision on its website. (2) (a) The Minister may issue a policy directive under section 8 requiring a competent authority (D) to review under subsection (1) a DMAP prepared by the competent authority (D) and to carry out such review in accordance with the provisions of the directive. (b) The competent authority the subject of a policy directive referred to in paragraph (a) shall comply with the directive.

In terms of point (b) highlighted above, WEI would, seek to understand from DECC if this therefore means that the MAP Act allows for circumstances where the competent authority decides not to prepare and publish a new DMAP, where robust reasoning has been publicly communicated.

Regardless, WEI are of the view that appropriate assurances will be needed that during any possible renewal process, the ORESS 2.1 site, and any future sites, will be unaffected (i.e., the site will remain as it will have been awarded and that there will be no impact to significant progress made in terms of design and planning following award). WEI would point to the following Netherlands example – the 2022-2027 Programme specifically notes that “*Wind farm zones in which wind farms have already been constructed or are planned to be constructed, or in which there are (preliminary) site decisions, or where according to the Roadmap for Offshore Wind Energy 2030 site decisions are planned, will remain wind farm zones*”³.

² [pdf \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/)

³ [North Sea Programme 2022-2027 - Noordzeeloket UK](#)

WEI would note that there several deliverables required between MAC award and development consent, the exact timeline for these is dependent on a number of different factors, some of which we have outlined below. WEI have previously shared an industry project programme timeline with DECC in relation to ORESS 2.1 specifically, indicating the activities required and the typical time periods for completion of each task. This timeline remains under continuous review by industry.

- (i) Issues which may impact project delivery timelines:
 - a. Legal challenge during the development consent could potentially **add 12-14 months** to the timeline.
 - b. Potential seasonal delays to offshore development works could result in **up to 8-9 months** being added to the timeline.
 - c. Typically, two years of aerial surveys are sufficient for consent, however there is potential for this requirement to be extended by **an additional 12 months**.

The above activities have the potential to add between 12 and 30 months to the development timeline, so WEI would highlight that there is a significant potential for the awarded ORESS 2.1 site to not have secured development consent within the 6-year validity period of the DMAP.

Therefore, WEI would suggest that consideration should be given to aligning the DMAP validity timelines with the revised timelines in the Planning and Development Bill⁴ for renewing terrestrial development plans, which have been extended from every 6 years to every 10 years. **Given the development timelines associated with offshore development, a 10-year timeline would be more appropriate.**

3. Promoting shared use of the sea

Do you agree that the draft SC-DMAP includes sufficient provisions for co-existence between offshore renewable energy and other maritime activities?

WEI fully support the Draft SC-DMAPs promotion of co-existence between ORE and other marine activities and fully appreciate that successful co-existence is key to a sustainable ORE industry in Ireland. WEI's observations on co-existence are set out below.

The draft SC-DMAP states that *"To maximise coexistence opportunities to as great an extent as possible, the draft Plan provides that mandatory permanent exclusions on additional activities or usages within Maritime Areas identified for future ORE development should not be imposed save relating to safety or in other exceptional circumstances."*

More critical detail is required on this statement as it is open to individual interpretation as it currently reads. A developer could reasonably suggest, for example, that cable routes need to be avoided where a fishing vessel is considering trawling in a wind farm, as sandwaves may periodically expose cables and the crew could be put in danger if the fishing gear were to snag.

⁴ <https://assets.gov.ie/242339/8c70c3b4-9303-4c72-905d-6fbe0bed5296.pdf>

The SC-DMAP also states (via CO2) that *‘Developers of ORE projects and transmission infrastructure shall accurately map their respective development sites, including electricity export and inter-array cables as laid post development. This location and coordinate data shall be made available to MARA and other maritime users, including fishers, in a format that can be downloaded on navigation systems including a suitable plotter format which can be installed within fishing vessels.’*

The location of offshore infrastructure will be made available to MARA in an agreed format. WEI would note that it is not the responsibility of the developer to provide the data in a format that is suitable to navigation systems on fishing vessels as that may involve multiple requests in different formats. WEI suggest that MARA lead on disseminating this information once provided in the agreed form to MARA.

Under SF 1 on the draft Plan, it states that *“Developers of proposed ORE projects and transmission infrastructure within the SC-DMAP area should maintain a record of engagement with Irish-registered fishers and the wider seafood sector regarding proposed survey activity and should optimise infrastructure design and layout to maximise opportunities for co-existence with fishing and seafood activity. **Where feasible, a reduction of potential adverse impacts should be investigated through avoiding areas of identified high fishing activity or, failing this, through minimising and/or mitigating impacts on fishing activity, including through optimising windfarm layout to facilitate coexistence.**”* This language highlighted in red above will create potential issues in the planning phase of projects by suggesting that fishermen’s input needs to be considered when the windfarm layout is being designed – WEI suggest this is removed. The text prior to this is sufficient to require consultation on the windfarm / infrastructure design with the local seafood sector.

SF 3 of the draft Plan states that *“A Fisheries Management and Mitigation Strategy (FMMS) shall be prepared by developers of proposed ORE projects and transmission infrastructure, in consultation with identified local fishing interests. **All efforts should be made to agree the FMMS with those interests.** Those interests must also undertake to engage with developers and provide spatial information in a timely manner to enable completion of the FMMS. The FMMS should identify management and mitigation measures for each commercial fishery that can establish within a reasonable timeframe to developers of prospective offshore wind projects and transmission infrastructure, through the provision of spatial information, that they would be adversely affected by the development. The FMMS will be updated and amended by developers throughout the lifetime of a project as appropriate and as necessary.”*

This proposal allocates the “burden of co-existence” onto the developer of the project. In the current setting on a plan-led approach that has pre-determined the development areas, this is not an appropriate or an acceptable approach. If co-existence is to be fostered in a plan-led system, the sponsor (DECC) or its appointees, must regulate this space and mediate to achieve a solution where necessary. WEI would recommend that DECC describe this process for regulation in the final SC-DMAP.

Further, the interested developers in ORESS 2.1 will need to understand all their costs when bidding into the auction, including possible mitigation payments for affected fishermen / marine users of Tonn Nua (or any other co-existence provisions that have a monetary value). It is incumbent on DECC, in

this plan-led scenario, to provide guidance on the level of mitigation payments that can be levied where a "...FMMS shall be prepared by developers..."

The final comment in relation to SF 3 – *"The FMMS should identify management and mitigation measures for each commercial fishery that can establish within a reasonable timeframe to developers of prospective offshore wind projects and transmission infrastructure, through the provision of spatial information, that they would be adversely affected by the development"* This statement does not make sense and it is unclear what the FMMS should do. In addition, clarity is required on how DECC expect adverse impacts on commercial fisheries to be determined, *i.e.* through the EIA process or some other means?

Finally, related to SF 6 and SF 7, WEI would highlight that inter-array cables and export cables are extremely costly and crucial pieces of infrastructure in ORE. Every effort is made in the design phase to ensure the cables are protected at installation and for the lifetime of the project. However, the ground conditions on every metre of their routes are central to this solution. It is sometimes not possible to bury cables (e.g., due to a rock outcrop) or keep cables buried in sandy substrate (e.g., due to sandwaves) on a project – both of such ground conditions are present this site / export route. Ordinarily high-risk areas of the cable route will be prioritised for protection / protection maintenance where it is deemed the cable may be at risk of becoming exposed and damaged by fishing or other marine activities.

As some non-static fishing grounds are highly variable, SF 6 and SF 7 seem to imply that every metre of the inter-turbine arrays and export line will need to be designed to be capable of being over-fished or over-trawled for the lifetime of the project.

This has very serious implications to the design, maintenance and cost of the cable network and therefore WEI would strongly encourage the wording in these 2 clauses to be much more explicit so that developers clearly understand what they need to provide for when designing the cable array for the upcoming ORESS 2.1 auction and beyond. The industry would be willing to provide DECC with example costing on the level of cable protection and maintenance required so a high-level cost benefit study could be completed to understand the cost of unimpeded fishing activity across a windfarm project.

Further, SF 7 refers to *"impacted seafood sector members and Irish-registered fishers"* but doesn't define what this includes *i.e.* is it referring to the wider value chain (if so, how is the impact expected) or non-Irish registered vessels fishing in the Irish Jurisdiction. If so, how does it see engagement taking place with non-Irish vessels or their representative organisations.

Finally, while WEI fully support co-existence with the fishing industry, the ultimate decision on whether fishing can take place safely within the boundary of a wind farm must be determined by navigational risk assessments and approved by the Marine Survey Office (MSO).

In relation to Tourism and Recreation, WEI welcomes the recognition of Failte Ireland's 2019 research which found little evidence of negative impacts on tourism from visible renewable energy development. However, it is unclear how this has been factored into the identification of Maritime

Areas and the Draft SC-DMAP. While MS 1 refers to Marine Protected Areas (MPA), it is WEI's recommendation that MPAs are also included under co-existence and how it is intended that both ORE and MPAs will interact. Clarity is also required on the legislative hierarchy for protected sites (as Natura 2000 sites and MPAs will be governed by different pieces of legislation).

While covered under Land and Sea Interactions, shipping is an important sector that merits inclusion under co-existence. WEI supports the recommendation in the Maritime Area Identification Report that DECC commissions a shipping and navigation study for the SC-DMAP proposal area as the report states that shipping and navigation routes are a key factor in the development area selection and a study would inform project level plans for developers within the Maritime Areas as well as inform on the cumulative impact from the development of all four Maritime Areas. The Maritime Area Identification Report also states that some rerouting of traffic may be possible following detailed site-specific assessments. In this plan-led model, it is imperative that the agencies with responsibility for navigational safety fully understand and agree on the mitigation measures that are required to ensure that there are no insurmountable constraints / challenges at the project level. This approach should be applied to all areas where State agencies have responsibilities.

4. Maximising Benefits for All

Do you agree that the plan-led framework set out in the draft SC-DMAP will effectively support and drive economic and employment opportunities, including opportunities along the south coast?

Delivering offshore wind energy will drastically cut our CO₂ emissions. It will make Ireland more energy independent. It will attract several billion euro in investment into Ireland and create thousands of long-term and sustainable jobs, particularly in our coastal communities. This is how we deliver the clean energy, the affordable energy and the secure energy that Irish families, communities and businesses want and which they deserve.

Offshore wind projects are already working with local communities. The response so far has been extremely positive with communities welcoming the enormous economic benefits and the opportunity to contribute to decarbonising our energy supply. In addition, the projects offer the possibility of bringing direct community benefits in the form of Community Benefit funds. The Community Benefit Fund is a requirement of the financial support package that offshore wind projects receive.

Each project is mandated to put in place a fund worth €2 per MWhr for 20 years for site A- An Tonn Nua this will equate to about €7M per annum for 20 years (assuming a capacity factor of 0.45). The funds are administered independently of the project and are required to have community representation on the boards to ensure the funds are managed and distributed fairly and transparently. Rules around the funds can be found on the SEAI website. While we note that there is likely to be a change with respect to the facilitation of the Community Benefit Fund, from the Ts&Cs of the ORESS to the conditions in a MAC, we agree that a fund should be facilitated by projects in the SC DMAP. We would suggest that DECC provide clarity ASAP on this transfer to ensure that developers can plan to facilitate the fund and communities' expectations are appropriately managed. There has

been some confusion as to how and when this fund might be delivered on the south coast which needs to be

WEI agree that the development of ORE within the geographical area of the South Coast DMAP will deliver positive benefits. This is based on the experience in other markets such as Great Britain and Europe. The UK Offshore Wind Skills Intelligence Report 2022⁵ illustrates the economic benefits through the view of the “UK Offshore Wind workforce at the end of 2021 and an analysis of the likely future workforce requirements in this sector out to 2030”. Further economic benefits are addressed in the report by The European Technology & Innovation Platform on Wind Energy (ETIPWind)⁶. The social benefits in the reports are discussed in the context of employment and avoided CO2 emissions which also addresses the delivery of environmental benefits. BVG’s report shares this positive outlook noting “that the south coast region captures between 66% and 70% of the total Irish GVA and employment benefits associated with the south coast DMAP”⁷.

As identified in the recent report “[Building our Potential: Ireland’s Offshore Wind Skills and Talent Needs](#)” (January 2024), the size of the potential presents an attractive opportunity in terms of Gross Value Add (GVA) and FTEs to the Irish economy. To deliver Ireland’s capacity target of 37 GW by 2050, has the potential to add at least 38 billion to the Irish economy over the lifetime of all installed wind farms. WEI supports BVG’s report findings that there is a substantial economic opportunity for both the South Coast and Ireland in total. It’s worth keeping in mind that 80% of economic and employment benefits will come during the operational phase of the projects⁸. Thus, providing long term beneficial impacts to the South Coast of Ireland for decades to come.

We must however note that the Maritime Areas Identification Report acknowledges that Maritime Area A is not located in the area with the lowest LCOE and has been pushed further offshore. Similarly, areas B-D are technically challenging and not currently feasible for development, with projects not expected until the mid-2030's. The logical outcome of this deliberate strategy to locate fixed-bottom ORE within deeper waters further from shore is that ORE deployment in Ireland will be more expensive and slower than it could otherwise be.

Finally, the development of the South Coast DMAP could provide up to 5.6 GW of energy, that’s equivalent to our current national peak electricity demand of 5.54 GW. Delivering offshore wind energy at this scale will drastically cut our CO2 emissions and ensure energy security and when appropriate export of clean renewables to the EU market. Overall, this DMAP will deliver clean, affordable and secure energy that Irish families, communities and businesses want and deserve.

ENDS

⁵ Offshore Wind Industry Council, (2022), ‘Offshore Wind Skills Intelligence Report 2022’, Link: <https://sectormaritimo.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/V5a-Final.pdf>

⁶ Available at: https://etipwind.eu/1.pdf?content_type=application%2Fpdf&disposition=inline%3B+filename%3D%22230531-CWER-final-version1.pdf%22%3B+filename%2A%3DUTF-8%27%27230531-CWER-final-version-1.pdf

⁷ BVG, (2024), ‘South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan: Regional Economic impact of offshore wind development’, pp 4.

⁸ BVG, (2024) ‘South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan: Regional Economic impact of offshore wind development’, pp 29.