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Foreshore Section
Department of Housing, Planning and Local
Government
Newtown Road
Wexford

SSE Renewables
Red Oak South
South County Business Park
Leopardstown
Dublin
D18W688

4th August 2020

Dear ██████████

RE: FS 006983 – FORESHORE LICENCE APPLICATION BY SSE RENEWABLES FOR SITE INVESTIGATION

SSE Renewables (SSER) acknowledges receipt of the redacted public submissions document relating to the public consultation undertaken 25 June – 23 July 2019. We are grateful to the members of the public who reviewed the foreshore Licence Application and welcome the comments received.

In order to help to address fishing concerns, SSER will commence engagement with local fishing organisations in the Celtic Sea area ahead of planned survey works to address concerns with respect of the marine survey operations. Organisations that will be consulted include but are not limited to the South East Regional Inshore Fisheries Forum (SERIFF), Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), the Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO), the Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation (IS&EFPO), the Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation (IS&WFPO) and the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO).

SSER will also endeavour to identify any local fishermen that are not members of the above organisations but that use the proposed application area. It is our intention to ensure that all members of the public, interest groups and relevant bodies are kept fully informed and engaged prior to and during any proposed survey works. To start engagement, we have appointed a Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO) to consult with the relevant fishing groups, fishermen and boat owners in online meetings and briefings. These online meetings will take into consideration the restrictions currently in place due to the Coronavirus. Once these restrictions are lifted, the plan will be to visit the effected stakeholders and engage directly.

The following pages provide responses to specific concerns outlined in the public submissions. The FLO will help to ensure that these and other concerns of fisheries organisations and individual fishermen are considered, and appropriate actions taken to minimise or avoid any interactions with ongoing fishing activities in the area whilst proposed survey operations are undertaken.

Yours sincerely,

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Project Manager – Offshore Development

SSE Renewables is a trading name of SSE Renewables Holdings Limited which is a member of the SSE Group.
The Registered Office of SSE Renewables Holdings Limited is Red Oak South South County Business Park
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Directors: Mark Ennis (British), Klair Neenan, Barry O'Regan, Jim Smith (British) & Stephen Wheeler

Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) Submission

Concern 1: Impact on the Celtic Sea

From the information set out in the application it is likely access to the fishing grounds would be restricted during key fishing periods. This is not acceptable from the CSHMAC's point of view and should the application be granted it should be done so on the basis there would be no interruption or disturbance of fishing activities.

Response:

To minimise the risk associated with poor winter weather conditions, SSE Renewables plans to carry out most of the proposed site investigation works between April and October annually within the five years following the award of a Foreshore Licence. We are aware of the seasonal fishery November to March and will not operate in the area with any sound source such as bathymetric survey equipment while the fleets quota is being caught or spawning is complete in order to protect the spawning stock.

Concern 2: Impact on Celtic Sea Herring Stock

Scientific advice has highlighted that recruitment in the Celtic Sea Herring stock has declined in recent years and the stock biomass has decreased as a result.

The latest scientific advice (provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES)) contains the following recommendation "Activities that have a negative impact on the spawning habitat of herring should not occur, unless the effects of these activities have been assessed and shown not to be detrimental (ICES, 2013, 2015a). There has been an increase in marine anthropogenic activity. Activities that have a negative impact on the spawning habitat of herring, such as dumping of dredge spoil, extraction of marine aggregates (e.g. gravel and sand), and erection of structures in the vicinity of spawning grounds are a cause for concern (see for example Groot, 1979, 1996; ICES, 2003, 2015a). This is because a gravel substratum is an essential habitat for herring spawning."

The concerns in relation to the impact of these types of activities is shared by a number of those involved in the marine sector as evidenced by the recent request by the Pelagic Advisory Council (an EU body) which has requested ICES to set up a specific working group to assess the impact of works such as those proposed in the application on the delicate Herring spawning grounds.

The CSHMAC is of the view the works proposed in the application fall within those advised against in the ICES advice and therefore should not be allowed within the Celtic Sea Herring spawning grounds.

Response:

The Foreshore Licence Application relates only to the proposed survey works which will be a temporary, short-term activity. Any future construction phase of the proposed project will be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA process would ensure that any significant effect on the environment of any proposed offshore wind farm is assessed. The process would be expected to include an assessment of data acquired following pelagic environmental surveys which will help to establish what open sea species are present within the proposed wind farm site.

The proposed surveys will have a minimal effect on the seabed. The proposed surveys will be a short-term and temporary activity and will not cause any permanent change to the seabed. Furthermore, the proposed seabed sampling as part of survey works are likely to be carried out between the months April and October, outside of the pelagic herring and sprat spawning seasons (November - March) and therefore, will not have a significant effect to spawning habitats.

The assessment of effects (Ref: LF000037-REP-002_P2278_R4673_Rev4) have concluded that the marine survey will not have a significant impact on fish species. As stated under section 4.5.1.1: "Any loss of individuals (adults or juveniles) within the immediate area of the survey is considered to be unlikely and given the wider geographic extent of the spawning and nursery areas, the effect will be slight. Therefore, the effects of the marine survey the Celtic Sea Herring Stock have been assessed and shown not to be detrimental."

IASC SLIOGAGH DUNGHARBAIN TEO Response

Concern 1:

No pollution of any sort can take place as this would cause significant losses to the whole bay of over 600 HA of oyster producers commercially producing here for over 40 years.

Response:

There will be no planned marine discharges and as discussed in Section 2.7 the survey contractor and vessels will follow international and national statute on pollution control and prevention including MARPOL guidance (International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships).

Concern 2:

We also have a state-of-the-art nursery production on site for our oyster seed and any water pollution in the bay would cause significant losses to our production going forward for a number of years.

Response:

There will be no planned marine discharges and as discussed in Section 2.7 the survey contractor and vessels will follow international and national statute on pollution control and prevention.

Concern 3:

Analyse of sediments will have to be taken to ensure that sediment disturbance will not release anything that would act as a predator to the oyster industry in the bay.

Response:

This Foreshore Licence application is for a marine survey only, therefore sediment disturbance associated with grab/core sampling will be minimal, see Section 4.2.1 of [Ref: LF000037-REP-002_P2278_R4673_Rev4]. Samples collected will be chemically analysed to determine if there is any contamination. This information will be used to inform any future Environmental Impact Assessment.

Concern 4:

All Drilling and all other works would need to adhere to low water tide times so as no sonar damage would occur to the oysters.

Response:

The application area lies 5km south east of the Bannow shellfish waters, 11km east of Dungarvan Harbour and 10km east of Waterford Harbour (Checkpoint/Arthurstown/Creadan Head). Any sound generated during survey activities will propagate with distance. Therefore, noise generated by survey activities will not affect oyster beds within the designated shellfish waters. In addition, the MarLIN (The Marine Life Information Network) sensitivity assessment for oysters, records their sensitivity to underwater sound changes as 'not relevant'. Not relevant is recorded when evidence suggests that there is no direct interaction between the pressure and the habitat (biotope) or species.

Concern 5:

Sediment would have to be released out on an ebbing tide.

Response:

As discussed in application file LF000037-REP-002_P2278_R4673_Rev4, Section 2.3.4, any cuttings from borehole drilling are expected to fall back down the hole. In addition, application area lies 5km south east of the Bannow shellfish waters, 11km east of Dungarvan Harbour and 10km east of Waterford Harbour (Checkpoint/Arthurstown/Creadan Head). Therefore, any small quantities of sediments suspended during sample acquisition will be naturally be re-dispersed and will not be detectable beyond background conditions.

Concern 6:

There can be under no circumstances any release spillage of hazardous materials that would cause detrimental effect to the oyster industry.

Response:

There will be no planned marine discharges and as discussed in application file LF000037-REP-002_P2278_R4673_Rev4, Section 2.7 the survey contractor and vessels will follow international and national statute on pollution control and prevention including MARPOL guidance (International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships).

Concern 7:

All aspects would have to be carried out under a severe safety assessment done first and all producers in the bay would have to be made aware of all activities and results of such findings.

Response - As discussed in application file- LF000037-REP-002_P2278_R4673_Rev4, Section 2.8.3 - Health, safety and environmental protection shall be given foremost consideration in the execution of the work and shall be promoted in a proactive and highly visible manner throughout the survey campaign.

Concern 8:

Any losses in the oyster industry caused by the construction of site or ongoing activities of that site is unacceptable.

Response:

Please note that this Foreshore Application relates to marine survey and therefore there is no planned construction as part of this application. The proposed construction phase of the project will be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Concern 9:

Prohibit all access to all areas and surrounding location of all Oyster beds in the bay.

Response:

As discussed in application file LF000037-REP-002_P2278_R4673_Rev4, Section 4.9.1.2, given that the application area lies 5km south east of the Bannow shellfish waters, 11km east of Dungarvan Harbour and 10km east of Waterford Harbour (Checkpoint/Arthurstown/Creadan Head) Shellfish Water, survey activities will not affect these shellfish waters.

Concern 10:

This area is also renowned for the Brent Geese feeding here for the winter period on the grassland area, if these structures were to cause interference to these it would be a loss of great environmental value to the bird population of the area.

Response:

The Foreshore Licence Application relates only to the proposed survey works which will be a temporary, short-term activity. The proposed construction phase of the project will be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). For the proposed survey works the Natura Impact Statement concluded that there is no potential for a likely significant effect on the Brent goose within Ballyteige Burrow SPA and Bannow Bay SPA. See Appendix A.

Concern 11:

The oyster bay here in Dungarvan Bay is one of the biggest areas in Ireland and the oysters that are being produced in the bay are classified as the 'Speciele' oyster. Any construction works or otherwise that would interfere with this industry be it by means of testing, cable laying, and all associated works cannot be allowed or tolerated.

Response:

As discussed above, proposed marine survey works are located 11km east of Dungarvan Harbour Shellfish Water. Therefore, survey activities will not affect this area.

Redacted Submission 18**Response:**

Many thanks for this detailed response outlining your concerns for this Foreshore Licence application for marine survey. Please note that your wider concerns in relation to any potential construction phase of the Project will be addressed as part of a separate application which will supported by further studies, ongoing consultation with Stakeholders and full Environmental Impact Assessment.

