

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /  
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee  
Cynhyrchu ynni adnewyddadwy yng Nghymru / Renewable energy generation in Wales  
RE01

Ymateb gan Cyd-bwyllgor Cadwraeth Natur (JNCC) / Evidence from Joint Nature  
Conservation Committee (JNCC)

### **Overview of JNCC involvement in marine renewables**

JNCC has responsibility for nature conservation in the offshore marine environment, which begins at the edge of territorial waters and extends to the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS). JNCC play a key role in supporting government and industry to use the offshore environment sustainably and, in the context of this note, by advising on the impacts of offshore industries and contributing to strategic work around the evidence base for offshore renewable energy.

JNCC works closely with conservation agencies, the UK and devolved governments, NGOs and research institutes providing evidence-based scientific advice on the effects of offshore renewable installations on the marine environment. The work area is rapidly growing as we work towards renewable energy targets including Net Zero by 2050, whilst striking a balance with UK Government commitments to halt biodiversity decline.

JNCC has a specific advice function for offshore waters, yet this function varies across the UK for renewables developments. Advice for offshore wind development in English and Scottish offshore waters is delegated to Natural England (NE) and NatureScot respectively, primarily to streamline the customer interface. This means that they provide advice directly to regulators on our behalf, although JNCC continue to provide advice on offshore nature conservation issues directly to NE and NatureScot where required. In Welsh and Northern Irish offshore waters the responsibility for advising regulators and developers remains with JNCC.

The Marine Management Team (MMT) in JNCC includes a number of specialist scientific advisers, including marine mammal scientists and ornithologists, who support this advisory function. The staff involved also provide advice to different regulators on a range of other offshore industries including oil and gas, aggregate extraction and cabling which enables JNCC to provide consistent and proportionate advice across industries and apply knowledge gained in the different sectors where applicable. The role of MMT is to provide advice at all stages of the application process (pre-application, application and examination, and consent decision) as well as providing post consent advice for the lifetime of the projects (for example on post consent monitoring of impacts). JNCC are actively providing advice on the Valorous and Erebus floating wind projects in the Celtic Sea as well as Awel y Môr (fixed wind) and Menter Môn (tidal stream).

With competing demands on the marine space there is increasing focus on the more strategic initiatives. JNCC sit on a number cross-Government groups providing oversight at a UK level and steering research towards knowledge gaps which, when filled, aid in more robust decision making (Table 1). In relation to the recommendations of the renewable energy deep dive (6f) JNCC is

playing an active part in the Offshore Transmission Network Review which is looking at the way that the offshore transmission network is designed and delivered at a UK level under the themes of early opportunities, pathways to 2030, enduring regime and multi-purpose interconnectors. JNCC is also actively advising the Crown Estate on the Habitat Regulations Assessment for round 4 offshore wind developments (areas of which are adjacent to Welsh offshore waters) and also work being undertaken on the leasing of Floating Wind in the Celtic Sea, which is in its infancy. Recommendation 7c. of the renewable energy deep dive focuses on identifying marine and terrestrial evidence gaps. JNCC has led the development of the Offshore Wind Environmental Evidence Register (OWEER) which is the first ever UK-wide register of offshore wind evidence gaps. This database, hosted by The Crown Estate, has identified gaps under the themes of ornithology, marine mammals, fish and benthic as well as an over-arching theme. There are plans for further updates to the register in June and December 2022 and Natural Resources Wales have actively contributed to the register.

JNCC sat on the stakeholder reference group (SRG) for the Welsh Marine Plan, providing specialist advice on drafts of the marine plan and associated documents and commenting on the public consultation. JNCC are still a member of the SRG, which is revisiting the topic of strategic resource areas (as mentioned in recommendation 8 of the renewable energy deep dive), and will provide nature conservation advice as appropriate.

With our UK coordination role in mind JNCC is in a prime position to understand the strategic evidence and research needs across the UK in order to better assess, mitigate and manage the environmental impacts from offshore renewable developments. As part of our UK-coordination role, JNCC chair a number of SNCB Marine Industry Groups, providing a forum for representatives from each of the four countries to discuss and collaborate on such strategic issues.

Working in partnership with industry, JNCC have delivered evidence-based reports and technical guidance on how to measure and mitigate potential adverse impacts on marine receptors, and this has led to (and continues to lead to) improved Environmental Impact Assessments. Furthermore, JNCC advises on plan-level assessments for offshore wind (for example, leasing rounds in England and Wales), supports the relevant statutory nature conservation bodies advising on individual developments when requested and delivers strategic evidence that underpins environmental assessments for offshore renewables development (see links below for some examples).

Our advice continues to influence government, policy-makers, regulators and companies involved in renewable energy to develop evidence-based policies and decision-making, which balances the needs for green, sustainable energy with protecting our marine environment and the species that it supports.

*Table 1: JNCC Involvement with Offshore Renewable Energy Groups*

Group	JNCC Role
ScotWind Technical Advisory Group	General and ornithological expertise advising on solutions to issues identified in the Habitat Regulations Assessment
Offshore Wind Evidence and Change Programme (OWEC) (The Crown Estate)	Member of the OWEC Programme Steering Group and OWEC NERC OW Science Programme Group.

	<p>Provision of specialist advice on the R4 leasing round and upcoming leasing round for floating within the Celtic Sea.</p> <p>JNCC led the development of the Offshore Wind Environmental Evidence Register which is the first ever UK-wide register of offshore wind evidence gaps and also sit on the OWEC programme Steering Group.</p> <p>Specialist expertise being provided for numerous projects including North Sea Net Gain Project, Cumulative Impact Assessment (ornithology headroom) and Future UK Offshore Wind Deployment Scenarios.</p> <p>Also providing technical review of research proposals funded under the programme.</p>
Offshore Wind Enabling Actions Programme (OWEAP) (Defra)	<p>Member of the OWEAP Programme Board and member of the over-arching groups on derogation, underwater noise, net gain and better data which identify evidence gaps and oversee projects funded by OWEAP.</p> <p>Currently leading a research project funded by OWEAP on continued development and maintenance of the Marine Noise Registry.</p> <p>Member of the Cross Government Derogation Group looking at long-term and strategic solutions to compensation.</p>
Benthic Rapid Action Group (BRAG) (BEIS)	Member of this cross government (and cross industry) group looking at short-term solutions for benthic compensation (mainly around cabling).
Benthic Strategic Action Group (BSAG) (Defra)	Member of this cross government (and cross industry) group looking at strategic solutions for benthic compensation.
Pathways to Growth (reports to the Offshore Wind Sector Deal)	Member of the over-arching co-ordination group looking at common issues across the UK.
Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council (SOWEC)	Not a member of SOWEC but JNCC do attend workshops and provide advice on specific themes e.g. HRA Derogations and review of seabird strategic compensation options.
Moray Firth and Forth & Tay Regional Advisory Groups	Observer member of these groups which focus on post consent issues.
Aberdeen Bay Expert Group	Involved in choosing research projects as a member of the Steering Group and we have had involvement in ornithology projects.
Scottish Marine Energy Research Programme (ScotMER)	Formed to improve understanding and assess the environmental and socio-economic implications of offshore renewable developments. Member of the

	Coordination Group and then provide specialist advice to the research groups (ornithology, marine mammals, benthic ecology, fish and fisheries and socio-economics).
BEIS Offshore Transmission Network Review (OTNR)	Member of the OTNR working group providing specialist input in terms of the offshore environment.
National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO) Environment Group	JNCC role to advise on offshore marine environment issues.
Seabed Users Development Group	Informal grouping of marine industries with interest and commitment to sustainable development within the UK's marine environment which JNCC attend on an ad-hoc basis.
Offshore Renewables Joint Industry Programme (ORJIP)	JNCC provide specialist advice on Project Expert Panels for research projects on ornithology and marine mammals as well as contributing to the wider stakeholder process.
National Grid Ventures	Group promoting Multi-Purpose Interconnectors as a pathway for a more integrated offshore grid. JNCC role to advise on offshore nature conservation.
Offshore Wind Strategic Monitoring and Research Forum (OWSMRF)	JNCC provide technical secretariat for this ornithology specific forum.

### **Links to some examples of reports, guidance and strategic outputs**

[Marine Mammals and Noise Mitigation](#)

[Marine Noise Registry](#)

[Natural England and JNCC advice on key sensitivities of habitats and MPAs in English Waters to cabling in proposed R4 leasing areas](#)

[Offshore Wind Environmental Evidence Register](#)

[Red Throated Diver Energetics Project](#)

[Offshore Wind Strategic Monitoring & Research Forum](#)