

Public

Strategic Energy Planning Environmental Assessments

Commitment to Carry Out Environmental Assessments

As part of our [strategic energy planning works](#) the National Energy System Operator (NESO) is conducting statutory environmental assessments for some of the plans we are delivering. The assessment/s that are appropriate for the plans being delivered include:

- Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)
- Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

Strategic Environmental Assessment

An SEA is a systematic process to evaluate the likely significant environmental and socio-economic effects of proposed policies, plans and programmes. An SEA also considers reasonable alternatives and inter-relationships with other plans and programmes. An SEA provides for transparent decision making, requiring public consultation and publication of results of the consultations in decision-making.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

An HRA is a statutory process, it is an iterative series of assessments, that may be required under an EC 'Habitats' Directive for any plan or project that could affect European designated sites for nature conservation. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance)

Marine Conservation Zone Assessment

An MCZ assessment is also a statutory process to understand if a project or activity will impact on an MCZ (or Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Scottish waters). An MCZ is an area that protects a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. This assessment process runs alongside other relevant legislative regimes like an HRA.

Difference Between a Habitats Regulations Assessment and a Strategic Environmental Assessment

The HRA considers effects of a particular plan or project on the environmental features and nature conservation objectives of European designated sites. The SEA considers environmental and socio-economic consequences of a particular plan with the aim to drive sustainable development. HRAs and SEAs also have different signing off processes on completion.

The Plans

Each plan has distinct aims, objectives and overall timelines. In order to adequately appraise these plans, and abide by relevant environmental regulations, each SEP plan will have its own environmental assessments. The commitment and scope of each plan is as follows:

- **Strategic Spatial Energy Planning (SSEP):** has been asked to carry out the assessments as part of their [commission](#). The assessments cover onshore and offshore generation (spatial zones).
- **Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP):** It has been recommended for the Centralised Strategic Network Planning (CSNP) to carry the assessments out by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem). The assessments cover onshore and offshore transmission reinforcement works.
- **Offshore Coordination (OC):** It is not mandated for Offshore Coordination (OC) as part of the Holistic Network Design (HND)/Holistic Network Design Follow Up Exercise (HND FUE) commission. However, given the size and scope of the design exercise, carrying out these assessments will ensure our recommendations have given the appropriate level of consideration to environmental concerns. The assessments cover marine works to the onshore interface point associated to the HND and HND FUE offshore designs.

Each plan's position and progress with each of their respective environmental assessments are at different stages. This is because their individual work programmes are at different points of their development and the environmental assessments are all separate processes, some have started, and some are yet to start.

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Strategic Spatial Energy Planning

The Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) will be a Great Britain -wide plan that will map potential zonal locations, quantities and types of electricity and hydrogen generation and storage over time. We will be undertaking an SEA, HRA and MCZ assessment on the SSEP.

Centralised Strategic Network Plan

The Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP) will provide an independent, coordinated, and longer-term approach to wider transmission network planning in Great Britain. Initially, this will focus on the electricity transmission network – onshore, offshore and interconnectors. To enable an efficient future energy system, the CSNP, guided by the SSEP and Future Energy Scenarios (FES) will strategically plan the electricity, and in future gas, transmission network. Ofgem have recommended that the options assessment developed under the CSNP should include consideration of environmental impacts. These will take the form of an SEA, HRA and MCZ assessment.

Offshore Coordination

The Offshore Coordination (OC) team are pulling together an HND Implementation Plan which covers all the latest GB network designs captured within Holistic Network Design (HND) and Holistic Network Design Follow Up Exercise (HNDFUE) (as of the end of August 2024), including Innovation and Targeted Oil and Gas (INTOG) and Celtic Sea. The OC HRA, MCZ and SEA assessments will be undertaken on this overarching HND Implementation Plan.



What's next?

As work continues to progress in Strategic Energy Planning with our environmental assessments, we are committed to sharing periodic updates here.