

Public

# Consultation Feedback Response

Our response to comments received on the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report.

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## 1. Introduction and background

In March - April 2025, we conducted a statutory consultation to gather insights and suggestions on the scoping stage of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP). The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the baseline information proposed for the SEA, key issues and opportunities identified, and the proposed SEA Framework. SEA legislation<sup>1</sup> requires plan makers to consult with the statutory consultation bodies. These bodies, along with other relevant environmental organisations, were invited to consultation. The public will be invited to consultation during the public consultation stage of the SSEP, where the draft plan and the SEA Environmental Report will be published. This is expected to take place in Q2 2026.

The SEA Scoping Report comprised two documents: the main SEA Scoping Report and Appendix A which contained the Policy, Plan and Programme review. These documents were shared with consultees, who were also invited to a webinar where we shared an overview of the Scoping Report, and guidance on the consultation and how to access the documents.

The consultation generated 17 responses with a total of around 100 detailed comments, each one providing a breadth of valuable feedback and insight into our Scoping Report. Participants included the statutory SEA consultation bodies, other governmental organisations and environmental interest groups, representing the nations of Great Britain as well as Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Since the consultation closed on 30<sup>th</sup> April, we have reviewed all comments and, where appropriate, updated the scoping information for inclusion in the assessment stage of the SEA. The table below sets out a summary of this feedback, detailing the main areas of support as well as areas for further consideration.

## 2. Key considerations

In summary, respondents agree that the draft SEA Scoping Report is broadly sound and comprehensive. Through their feedback consultees have, however, asked for some areas of clarification, as well as making recommendations for consideration in the final scoping information used.

The key themes identified from the feedback are:

<sup>1</sup> Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004; Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005; Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Wales) Regulations 2004

- The SSEP zonal approach
- Plans, policies, and programmes review
- Baseline information
- Collaborations and alignment

These key themes are explored in more detail in the table below, including our considerations for each feedback area.

### 3. A Summary of Feedback Comments by Theme

Theme	Summary of Feedback Comments	NESO's Consideration
<b>SSEP Zonal Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was general acceptance of the use of the International Territorial Level (ITL) and marine plan areas for the SEA zones. However, there were concerns over the splitting of Scotland into terrestrial and marine zones, suggesting instead, the alignment with Transmission Owners' areas (SSEN Transmission and SP Transmission).</li> <li>• Interest in whether in-combination effects will be considered at this level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As specified in the scoping report, the zones were chosen and used for the sole purposes of presenting the information for the scoping stage of the SEA. It is anticipated that the regions and nations used for the later stages of the assessment process will be consistent with the zonal approach used for the SSEP.</li> <li>• In-combination effects will be considered during the subsequent stages of the SEA process where deemed appropriate for the strategic nature of the SSEP.</li> </ul>
<b>Plans, Policies, and Programmes Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were suggestions for greater consideration of policy areas relating to environmental opportunities (e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)/Marine Net Gain (MNG) Requirements and Environmental Local Nature Recovery Strategies); climate adaptation (e.g. Climate Act); nature-based solutions (e.g. Environment Act); and health and equity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where in-line with the level of detail deemed appropriate for the SEA for the SSEP, suggested plans, policies or programmes will be included in the review.</li> </ul>
<b>Baseline information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comments raised over additional data/detail to be considered (e.g. Priority Marine Features (PMFs), Annex I habitats, OSPAR-listed species and habitats, ferry routes, tidal stream renewables, cable projects, groundwater sensitivity,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data/detail will be amended in line with the strategic nature of the SEA for the SSEP. Data sources will be continuously updated where new relevant information is identified, and where necessary, the SEA framework will be revised before the assessment commences.</li> </ul>

	<p>PM2.5 targets and emissions, carbon storage).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comments raised over the level of detail (e.g. qualifying features and conservation objectives of biodiversity designations, listed buildings, historic battlefields, archaeological resources, designated landscapes).</li> <li>Suggestion to have noise as a separate SEA theme.</li> <li>Queries on consideration of cross boundary and cumulative impacts.</li> <li>There were comments raised on the need to consider future trends in baseline data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The level of detail was deemed appropriate given the strategic nature of the SSEP. Where appropriate, we will go into more detail during the subsequent stages of the SEA, and where necessary, the SEA framework will be revised.</li> <li>Noise aspects will be considered under the relevant themes of the SEA (e.g. community wellbeing, biodiversity and ecology, landscape).</li> <li>Cross boundary and cumulative impacts between SSEP regions and nation boundaries will be considered in the subsequent stages of the SEA.</li> <li>For future baseline, the assessments will consider the evolution of the baseline in the absence of the pathways being considered. This will be as and when data becomes available.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborations and Alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendations to align datasets between SSEP and SEA and collaboration and alignment with existing plans (e.g. English marine plans, TCE round 5).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SEA will utilise data and outputs from the evaluation framework and undertake additional qualitative approaches where appropriate, allowing for alignment between SSEP and SEA.</li> <li>Conversations and engagements are being undertaken with other SEP plan makers and other existing plans.</li> </ul>

## 4. Conclusion and next steps

We thank those consultees who have submitted feedback responses. The feedback received has helped shape the scoping information for SSEP's SEA. As we conclude the scoping stage of the SEA, we will move onto the next stage of the process, undertaking the assessment of the reasonable alternatives, and then the draft SSEP selected by the Secretary of State (SoS). The next publication from SSEP's SEA will be the SEA Environmental Report. This will be published during the public consultation stage of the SSEP, expected to take place Q2 2026.