



Ein cyf/Our ref: WQ88893

22 September 2023

Dear Janet Finch-Saunders MS,

Thank you for your question tabled on 23 August, relating to what assessment the Welsh Government has made of the impact of removing wind turbines from the seabed on marine biodiversity.

The need for offshore wind is driven by our ambitious net zero targets. As owner of the seabed, The Crown Estate (TCE) identifies potential areas for developments that require a seabed lease, including offshore wind. In doing so, it has regard to environmental, social, and economic considerations and ensures its approach aligns with policies set out in the Welsh National Marine Plan.

As responsible seabed owners, TCE must ensure compliance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations and the Conservation of Offshore Habitats and Species Regulations. To support delivery of net zero targets, to help de-risk and accelerate consenting of offshore wind across the UK, TCE has established a range of expert groups, advising on the potential impacts of offshore wind on the environment, including the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change Programme. Through this programme a number of significant projects have been commissioned to improve our understanding of the potential impacts of offshore wind, how these can best be managed and, also, the opportunities developments may provide to support marine biodiversity and ecosystem resilience over the long term. The projects will also improve the overall evidence base which informs marine consenting processes. My officials and staff from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are engaged in the various groups, ensuring the evidence needs and interests of Wales are reflected and taken into consideration.

The regulatory processes that apply in the marine environment are well-established and robust. For significant infrastructure projects, developers and regulators are required to fully assess the impact of a development through its whole life – construction through to the removal of assets at the end of their life.

The removal of structures from the seabed is a marine licensable activity under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. NRW administers marine licences on behalf of the Welsh Ministers and in doing so must have regard to the protection of the environment, human health and prevent any interference with other sea users. Before determining any application for a marine licence to develop an offshore windfarm or for the removal of

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

offshore wind turbines, NRW assesses any potential impacts as a result of the activity on the marine environment. In determining an application to remove wind turbines, NRW will make its decision in accordance with the Welsh National Marine Plan which includes policies related to the protection of Marine Protected Areas and wider marine ecosystems.

The Secretary of State also has a role in the assessment of impacts on the marine environment in Wales, through the Development Consent Order process for energy projects over 350MW and through the decommissioning of renewable energy structures, required under the Energy Act 2004. When considering any decommissioning plan under this Act, I expect the Secretary of State to consult and have regard to any advice provided by NRW and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee as statutory nature conservation advisors for Welsh waters.

Yours sincerely



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Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change