



MEDIA RELEASE

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Offshore wind energy marine bird study boasts successful pilot year

An offshore wind energy collaboration to better understand how large-scale development may impact marine birds has completed a successful pilot year identifying high-priority ornithological knowledge-gaps.

The Offshore Wind Strategic Monitoring and Research Forum (OWSMRF) led by six offshore wind developers – EDF-Renewables, Equinor, Ørsted, RWE (formerly innogy), ScottishPower Renewables, and Vattenfall – was launched 12 months ago following the announcement of the joint government-industry Offshore Wind Sector Deal which included plans to see offshore wind capacity reach 30 gigawatts (GW) by 2030.

Christie Paterson, Offshore Environmental Manager for ScottishPower Renewables, speaking on behalf of the offshore wind developers said: “More large-scale renewable energy, like offshore wind, will be vital to the UK reaching its net zero targets and to slowing down the impacts of climate change. As more capacity is developed, it will be key to analyse the cumulative effects on the environment, which is why the industry is working together to better understand, and mitigate, potential impacts.

“The first year focussed specifically on black-legged kittiwakes, and the work that was carried out will provide an important basis on which to prioritise further efforts to improve our understanding and to secure co-existence with offshore wind development.”

The pilot had the aims of: reducing uncertainty around wind farm collision mortality estimates; better understanding connectivity between wind farms and Special Protection Areas (SPA), and reducing uncertainty around modelling wind farm mortality on SPA populations. Three reports have been published, summarising existing evidence and identifying potential research opportunities for each aim, prioritising those likely to be most beneficial in reducing consenting risk.

Being delivered by JNCC, the initiative aims to improve the understanding of how UK marine bird populations are affected by offshore wind farms and reduce consenting risk for planned projects. The objective is to identify knowledge gaps and define high-priority scopes of work to address them.



John Goold, Director of Marine at JNCC said: “JNCC is delighted by the success of the OWSMRF pilot year and is grateful to all participants for their willingness to come together in the spirit of collegiality to identify key evidence needs and research questions. We look forward to continued collaboration, seeing the benefits of OWSMRF realised and seeing more opportunities developed to support the needs of this important sector”.

The pilot year has been a collaborative process with invaluable input from academics, regulators, consultants and stakeholders including Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Marine Management Organisation, Marine Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Natural Resources Wales.

The outcome of the pilot year has been the development of three high-priority scopes of work. These are to: review systems for monitoring bird collisions at offshore wind farms; conduct a feasibility study for large-scale deployment of mark recapture systems; and conduct a feasibility study for catching birds at sea to observe their behaviour and track movements.

The OWSMRF will continue to work to identify opportunities to fund the three high-priority scopes of work produced during the pilot year and on how to best evolve and continue to address key knowledge gaps that pose consenting risks to offshore wind projects in the UK.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

1. The Offshore Wind Strategic Monitoring and Research Forum (OWSMRF) pilot year ran from May 2019 to April 2020. All three reports are available on the OWSMRF website: <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/owsmrf/>
2. OWSMRF key stakeholders who identified critical knowledge gaps include Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural Resources Wales, Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Marine Scotland Science.
3. The wider OWSMRF stakeholders include ORJIP (Offshore Renewable Joint Industry Project, run by The Carbon Trust), The Crown Estate, Crown Estate Scotland, Marine Scotland, Marine Management Organisation, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.



4. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) is the public body that advises the UK Government and devolved administrations on UK-wide and international nature conservation. www.jncc.gov.uk

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Photo: Black-legged kittiwake (courtesy of Mark Lewis)

Caption: *Lack of evidence around cumulative impacts on protected populations of black-legged kittiwakes is a major consenting risk to UK offshore wind development.*