Technical Appendix 8.3: Habitat Regulations Appraisal

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8.3.1 Introduction

8.3.1.1 Ramboll UK Limited (Ramboll) has been appointed by the Beaufort Wind Limited ('the Applicant') to provide a report to inform the Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA) of the proposed repowering of the existing Novar 1 Wind Farm (the 'Proposed Development') on land approximately 11 km north of Dingwall and 9 km northwest of Alness, near the Cromarty Firth in northern Scotland (the 'Site'). The location of the Proposed Development is shown in **Figure 1.1 (EIAR Volume 3a)**.

8.3.1.2 In England, Wales and Scotland, a National Site Network has been created comprising sites previously designated under the European Commission (EC) Nature Directives[1] (previously referred to as "Natura 2000" sites). These sites, which include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), continue to be designated through domestic legislation. In Scotland, this comprises the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994 (as amended)[2]. For developments requiring consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended)[3], relevant provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)[4] may also apply.

8.3.1.3 Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance 1971 ('the Ramsar Convention')[5]. There is no designated legislation for the protection of Ramsar sites. All the 51 Ramsar sites in Scotland are either SPAs, SACs or Sites of Special Scientific Interest ('SSSIs'). In a change to the previous policy position which is reflected in policy 4c of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)[6], the Chief Planner[7] has directed that all listed Ramsar sites in Scotland should be treated as if they were European sites for the purposes of land use change decision making. Although Ramsar sites do not form part of the National Site Network, many overlap with SAC and SPA boundaries, and Ramsar sites are in effect protected in the same way as SACs and SPAs under the 2017 Habitats Regulations as a result of policy. This shadow HRA has applied this updated policy to its assessment of the effects of the Proposed Development on Ramsar sites.

8.3.1.4 The Site lies within proximity of several designated sites, and overlaps with one, and therefore, the requirements of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ("the Habitats Regulations"), apply to the application for consent under the Electricity Act 1989. This Technical Appendix (TA) provides the information required pursuant to the Habitats Regulations[8]. The information provided in this document is intended to provide the competent authority (i.e., NatureScot) with the information it needs to consider the effects associated with the decommissioning, construction and operation of the Proposed Development on the SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites to establish whether the Proposed Development would have an 'Adverse Effect on the Site's Integrity' before it can be consented (commonly known as Habitats Regulations Appraisal).

8.3.1.5 In this case, Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) on SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information, therefore the competent authority is required to complete an Appropriate Assessment (AA) to consider the LSEs of the Proposed Development on the designated site, based on the site's conservation objectives. A conclusion must be drawn regarding the potential for Adverse Effects on the Designated Site's Integrity[9].

8.3.1.6 The Regulations impart a duty on competent authorities to carefully consider whether any proposals are likely to have a significant effect on a National Site Network or Ramsar site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

8.3.1.7 In most circumstances, permission may only be given for a plan or project that has a likely significant effect to proceed if it has been ascertained that it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any such designated site.

8.3.1.8 The procedure for assessment of projects that are not directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of the designation for conservation is an ordered process following a number of key stages.

8.3.2 Objective and Scope

8.3.2.1 The purpose of this Technical Appendix 8.3: Habitat Regulations Appraisal (EIAR Volume 4) is to:

- Describe the potential impacts of the Proposed Development upon the Novar SPA taking account of the ornithological features for which the site is designated and the conservation objectives, from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development, to identify LSEs (this assessment is known as the Stage 1 Screening). Cumulative developments within the same Zone of Influence (ZoI) as the Proposed Development, detailed in **Chapter 7: Ecology (EIAR Report Volume 2)**, have the potential to influence any LSEs from the Proposed Development; and
- Provide information to the competent authority to support an AA (undertaken as Stage 2 of the HRA) which will consider the potential for Adverse Effects on the Integrity of the Designated Site or the conservation objectives, taking account of mitigation measures proposed, the use of which could result in adverse effects on the integrity of the site or its conservation objectives being reduced or avoided.

8.3.2.2 It is considered that there is potential connectivity between the Proposed Development and Novar SPA, respectively. Indirect and direct adverse impacts from the Proposed Development are considered possible for the Novar SPA, as LSEs on its ornithological qualifying features and associated site integrity cannot be excluded. It has been determined that in the absence of mitigation, there will be LSEs on the Novar SPA and further assessment is required.

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[1] Birds Directive (Directive 79/409/EEC) 1979 (as amended). Available at: Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (codified version) [accessed January 2026].

[2] The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1994/2716/contents. [accessed June 2026].

[3] Electricity Act 1989, Section 36. Available at; https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/29/section/36. [accessed June 2026].

[4] The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents. [accessed June 2026].

[5] The Convention on Wetlands. Available at: https://www.ramsar.org/ [accessed January 2026].

[6] National Planning Framework 4. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/documents/ [accessed January 2026].

[7] Ramsar Sites: Ministerial Chief Planner letter – July 2025. Available at : https://www.gov.scot/publications/ramsar-sites-ministerial-and-chief-planner-letter-july-2025/ [accessed January 2026].

[8] The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents [accessed January 2026].

[9] In this case, integrity is taken to be the 'coherence of the site's ecological structure and function, across its whole area, or the habitats, complex of habitats and/or populations of species for which the site is designated'.

8.3.2.3 As set out in the EIA Scoping Report, and agreed through the scoping process, along with the Novar SPA which is crossed by the Proposed Development, the following receptors have been scoped into the assessment and discussed in stage 1 of the HRA process, but further assessment will not be required:

- All qualifying features of Ben Wyvis SPA, Morangie Forest SPA, Cromarty Firth SPA and Moray Firth SPA;
- Ornithological features of the Cromarty Firth Ramsar, Moray Firth Ramsar and Dornoch and Loch Fleet Ramsar; and
- Ecological features of Ben Wyvis SAC.

8.3.2.4 This Technical Appendix should be read in conjunction with the accompanying chapters, **Chapter 7: Ecology (EIAR Report Volume 2)**, **Chapter 8: Ornithology (EIAR Report Volume 2)** and **Chapter 3: Site Description and Proposed Development (EIAR Report Volume 2)** for a full description of the Proposed Development.

8.3.3 Limitations

8.3.3.1 This report has been prepared by Ramboll exclusively for the intended use by the Applicant in accordance with the agreement between Ramboll and the Applicant defining, amongst others, the purpose, the scope and the terms and conditions for the services. No other warranty, expressed or implied, is made as to the professional advice included in this report or in respect of any matters outside the agreed scope of the services or the purpose for which the report and the associated agreed scope were intended, or any other services provided by Ramboll.

8.3.3.2 Ramboll has been commissioned to identify potential impacts on relevant designated sites as a consequence of the Proposed Development. This **Technical Appendix: 8.3: Habitat Regulations Appraisal** does not address any other potential environmental impacts that may result from the Proposed Development. Refer to **Chapter 7: Ecology (EIAR Volume 2)** and **Chapter 8: Ornithology (EIAR Volume 2)** for a full list of scoped-in effects.

8.3.3.3 In preparation of the report and performance of any other services, Ramboll has relied upon publicly available information, information provided by the Applicant and information provided by third parties. Accordingly, the conclusions in this report are valid only to the extent that the information provided to Ramboll was accurate, complete and available to Ramboll within the reporting schedule. Ramboll does not accept any liability for the accuracy or otherwise of any information derived from secondary sources; however, reasonable endeavours have been made to verify information obtained in this way.

8.3.3.4 This report is based on the assessment of the Site, the boundaries of which are shown in **Figure 1.1 (EIAR Volume 3a)**. If the Proposed Development extends to land additional to that shown on the drawing, or the proposals change, the findings may need to be revised.

8.3.4 Assessment Methodology

8.3.4.1 The HRA process comprises four main stages:

- Stage 1 Screening to identify the likely effects of a project on a National Site Network or Ramsar site and consider whether the effects are likely to be significant;
- Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment to determine whether the integrity of the National Site Network or Ramsar site will be adversely affected by the Proposed Development;
- Stage 3 Assessment of Alternative Solutions to establish if there are any that will result in a lesser effect on the National Site Network or Ramsar site; and
- Stage 4 Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI) and Compensatory Measures to establish whether it is necessary for the project to proceed despite the effects on the National Site Network or Ramsar site, and to confirm that necessary compensatory measures are in place to maintain the coherence of the National Site Network.

8.3.4.2 The term Habitats Regulations Appraisal encompasses both the initial screening stage and, where required, the follow-on Stages 2 – 4.

8.3.5 Stage 1 - Screening

8.3.5.1 Under the first stage, it is necessary for the competent authority to examine whether the proposals will result in any 'likely significant effect' on the internationally important features of relevant designated sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

8.3.5.2 If it can be objectively concluded that there are not likely to be significant effects on relevant designated sites, no further assessment is necessary, the outcome should be documented and agreed, and permission should not be refused on the basis of the assessment.

8.3.5.3 If any 'likely significant effects' are identified, or where it remains unclear whether effects will be significant, the assessment procedure should follow on to Stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment).

8.3.5.4 Measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of a plan or project on a designated site should not be considered at this screening stage, and instead these must be considered as part of an Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2). An exception to this is where the mitigation proposed is integral to or embedded in the project in order for the project to ensure compliance with an identified piece of legislation (other than the Habitats Regulations) or policy, as opposed to being required to avoid or reduce impacts to the specific features of the designated site.

8.3.5.5 Should it be determined that (in the absence of mitigation/avoidance measures) a plan or project will result in 'likely significant effects' on a designated site (or that such effects cannot be ruled out), the competent authority should proceed to the next stage (Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment), where further assessment is required.

8.3.6 Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment (AA)

8.3.6.1 An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is undertaken by the competent authority to determine potential effects of a project upon the integrity of the National Site Network or Ramsar sites. It should provide and analyse sufficient information to allow NS as the competent authority to determine whether the Proposed Development will or will not adversely affect the integrity of the National Site Network or Ramsar sites.

8.3.6.2 AA should exclusively focus on the qualifying features of the National Site Network or Ramsar site, and it must consider any impacts on the conservation objectives of those qualifying interests. It should also be based on and supported by evidence that can stand up to scientific scrutiny. EC guidance states that without proper reasoning the assessment does not fulfil its purpose and cannot be considered 'appropriate' and therefore cannot be consented. In terms of what is reasonable, guidance states "*to identify the potential risks, so far as they may be reasonably foreseeable in the light of such information as can be reasonably obtained*"[10].

[10] NatureScot (2001). Natura casework guidance: Consideration of proposals affecting SPAs and SACs.

8.3.6.3 In undertaking an AA, there are two phases:

- a scientific evaluation of all the LSEs of the project on the relevant qualifying interests of a National Site Network or Ramsar site; and
- a conclusion based on outcomes of the scientific evaluation as to whether the integrity of a National Site Network or Ramsar site will be compromised.

8.3.6.4 The emphasis for AA is to prove that no adverse impacts due to a project will occur which would undermine a National Site Network or Ramsar site's integrity. Site integrity can be defined as: "*The coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area that enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was classified*"[11].

8.3.6.5 The assessment will also consider any avoidance or mitigation measures which will be implemented to avoid or reduce the level of impact from the project. The competent authority may also consider the use of conditions or restrictions to help avoid adverse effects on site integrity.

8.3.6.6 If the AA concludes that the integrity of the National Site Network or Ramsar site would be adversely affected, consent can only be granted if there are no alternative solutions, IROPI is applicable and compensatory measures have been secured.

8.3.7 Stage 3 Onwards

8.3.7.1 Under Stages 3 and 4, it is necessary for the competent authority to assess if there are any alternative solutions to the proposal, and whether there are IROPI to justify granting authorisation for the plan or project notwithstanding the predicted adverse effects on site integrity. If these tests are passed, authorisation may be granted subject to appropriate compensation measures being secured.

8.3.8 Stage 1 Screening

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

8.3.8.1 A number of SPA sites are situated within the 20 km buffer zone on either side of the Site, as shown in **Figure 8.1: Ornithological Designated Sites (EIAR Volume 3a)**, where qualifying species have potential connectivity with the Proposed Development and where surveys recorded flights of qualifying species within the Ornithology Field Survey Area (defined as a 2 km buffer surrounding the Proposed Development). These sites are:

- Novar SPA[12] - crosses the Access Route of the Site[13];
- Ben Wyvis SPA[14] - 3.3 km southwest of the Site;
- Cromarty Firth SPA[15]- 7.8 km southeast of the Site;
- Morangie Forest SPA[16] - 9 km east of the Site;
- Inner Moray Firth SPA[17]- 19 km southeast of the Site;
- Moray Firth SPA[18]- 19 km southeast of the Site;
- Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA[19] - 19.9 km southeast of the Site; and
- Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA[20]- 19.9 km southeast of the Site.

8.3.8.2 The current baseline is outlined below, based on the results of the desk study and field surveys undertaken for the Proposed Development.

Desk study

8.3.8.3 Desk study data was requested and purchased from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Highlands Raptor Study Group (HRSG) to inform the baseline on capercaillie and breeding raptors. RSPB data confirmed two active capercaillie leks were recorded overlapping with the proposed Access Route for the Proposed Development with both located within the Novar SPA. HRSG records confirmed two hen harrier breeding territories within the desk study area, approximately 838 m north and 838 m southeast of the Site boundary. Further detailed information provided by RSPB and HRSG is presented in **Technical Appendix 8.2: Ornithology Confidential Results (EIAR Volume 4)**. The ornithological desk study area (DSA) included all statutory designated sites up to 20 km from the Site where bird features are qualifying features, including SPA and Ramsar sites were considered. This area is considered to represent the Zone of Influence (ZOI)[21] in which impacts on sensitive ornithological features from the Proposed Development could occur.

Field surveys

8.3.8.4 Ornithological field surveys were undertaken for the Proposed Development between September 2023 and August 2025 inclusive. The ornithological field survey area (FSA) included the Site and a 2 km buffer around the Site. The DSA and FSA were defined based on CIEEM published guidance[22] and the embedded definition of ZOI on ecological and ornithological features. Target species included Schedule 1 species (Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) and SPA qualifying species. Surveys yielded numerous records of the target species, species which are known to be regularly present in the area.

8.3.8.5 Flight activity (Vantage Point (VP)) surveys were undertaken at four VP locations between September 2023 and August 2025. The surveys recorded bird species which are also qualifying interests of the Cromarty Firth SPA, Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA, Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA and Inner Moray Firth SPA. The VP survey results are presented in **Figure 8.4c: Vantage Point Survey Results: Other Target Species (EIAR Volume 3a).** Of those species, hen harrier flights were the most numerous, including 13 flights of birds flying involving 13 individual birds in total.

[11] NatureScot (2014). Natura casework guidance: How to consider plans and projects affecting Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

[12] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Novar SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8662 [accessed January 2026].

[13] Crossed by the Access Route of the Proposed Development.

[14] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Ben Wyvis SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8470 [accessed January 2026].

[15] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Cromarty Firth SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8488 [accessed January 2026].

[16] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Morangie Forest SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8549 [accessed January 2026].

[17] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Inner Moray Firth SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8515 [accessed January 2026].

[18] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Moray Firth SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/10490 [accessed January 2026].

[19] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Dornoch Firth SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8490 [accessed January 2026].

[20] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/9190 [accessed January 2026].

[21] The area over which ecological features may be subject to significant effects as a result of the Proposed Development and its associated activities.

[22] CIEEM, 2018. Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine. Available at: https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Combined-EclA-guidelines-2018-compressed.pdf [Accessed: January 2026]

Five flights were seen near the northern sections of the Site, south of Loch Morie, in the immediate vicinity of the Site, where male and female birds were observed hunting. Two flights were recorded within the Site, including a ringtail and an adult male hunting solo. Four further flights were recorded at the southeast corner section of the Site, where adult male birds were seen displaying. All of these flights included segments at potential collision height (PCH) The other qualifying species recorded was an osprey which was seen commuting between Loch Glass and Loch Morie where the flight recorded was crossing the proposed Turbine Array at PCH in the immediate vicinity of the proposed Turbine 1. Other Schedule 1, (but not SPA qualifying species), were recorded during VP surveys regularly using the areas, however these Schedule 1 species are not considered as part of this HRA as they are not SPA qualifying features.

8.3.8.6 Moorland Breeding Bird Surveys (MBBS) were undertaken between April and July 2024, comprising of four visits during the early breeding season (early April to early May), mid breeding season (mid-May to mid-June), and late breeding season (mid-June to Mid-July). The surveys recorded bird species which are also qualifying interests of the Cromarty Firth SPA, Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA, Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA, Inner Moray Firth SPA and Moray Firth SPA. Of the SPA qualifying species, hen harrier was the most frequently recorded with a total of 8 records during surveys. A possible hen harrier territory was identified with a male bird displaying south of Loch Morie, approximately 500 m north of the Site. Two records of osprey were recorded. One occurrence of red-throated diver was recorded off-Site more than 1 km away from the Proposed Development. MBBS survey results are presented in **Figure 8.5: Moorland Breeding Bird Survey Results (2024) (EIAR Volume 3a)** and **Figure 8.6: Breeding Raptor Survey Results (2024) Confidential (EIAR Volume 5)**.

8.3.8.7 Breeding Raptor surveys were undertaken between April and June 2024, consisting of three visits in the early breeding season. The surveys recorded qualifying bird species of the Cromarty Firth SPA, Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA, Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA and Inner Moray Firth SPA. Of the SPA qualifying species hen harrier records were most numerous, including seven flights in total. Two flights of single birds were recorded in June 2024, including a long flight crossing Loch Morie in a north-south direction and one flight in the same area, between the loch and the Site. Both flights occurred off-Site. These flights occurred in the same area where possible breeding territory for hen harrier was identified during MBBS surveys. The hen harrier territory was confirmed, and a nest location was identified within this area. The nest location is shown on **Figure 8.6: Breeding Raptor Survey Results Confidential (EIAR Volume 5)**. A further four flights were recorded near the west/northwest section of the Site, in the immediate vicinity of the proposed Turbine 1. Four single flights were recorded, three in May and one in June. Two of these flights occurred on-Site, two of them off-Site. One occurrence of a single osprey was recorded on a long flight north of the Site, off site. This flight is shown on **Figure 8.6: Breeding Raptor Survey Results Confidential (EIAR Volume 5).**

8.3.8.8 The reasons for designation and the qualifying features of the SPA are outlined in Table 8.3.1.

Table 8.3.1: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the SPA

Site	Reasons for Designation	Qualifying Features	Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)
Ben Wyvis SPA	Breeding dotterel *Charadruis morinellus*	Dotterel	**OUT**: The Site is located approximately 3.3 km from Ben Wyvis SPA. Habitat and ornithological surveys identified no areas of suitable breeding habitat for dotterel within the Site. Breeding bird surveys were undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance and encompassed the peak breeding period for dotterel. Although the species can be challenging to detect due to its low-density distribution, variable site occupancy and use of upland habitats, survey coverage was considered sufficient to provide a robust assessment of the survey area. No dotterel was recorded during surveys. Although the Site lies within 3.3 km of the SPA, it does not provide suitable breeding or associated foraging habitat for the qualifying breeding population and is therefore not functionally linked to Ben Wyvis SPA. No significant effects on this SPA are predicted, and dotterel is excluded from further assessment.
Novar SPA	Breeding capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*	Capercaillie	**IN**: The Proposed Development overlaps with the designated site, where the proposed Access Route crosses the Novar SPA for approximately 3 km, along its western edge, and the SPA is approximately 3.5 km from the Turbine Array. Although no observations were made of the species during surveys, RSPB desk study data confirms the presence of two active leks within the Novar SPA and overlapping with the proposed Access Route, together with records indicating presence of the species within the wider areas surrounding the Proposed Development and Novar SPA. Due to the Proposed Development Access Route overlapping with the SPA and confirmed presence of the qualifying capercaillie population, a likely significant effect on the qualifying interests of the Novar SPA cannot be excluded.
Cromarty Firth SPA	▪ Annex 1 species; ▪ Migratory waterfowl; and ▪ Waterfowl assemblage.	Annex 1: ▪ Osprey Pandion haliaetus; ▪ Common tern Sterna hirundo; ▪ Whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus*; and ▪ Bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*.	**OUT**: Of the qualifying species of the Cromarty Firth SPA, only osprey was recorded flying in the vicinity of the Proposed Development. There is potential connectivity between the Site and the SPA, however the species was recorded only on three occasions during the two-year survey period. It is considered that disturbance-related activities for the Proposed Development would fall

Table 8.3.1: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the SPA

Site	Reasons for Designation	Qualifying Features	Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)
		Migratory: ▪ Greylag goose *Anser anser* Waterfowl: ▪ Redshank Tringa totanus; ▪ Curlew Numenius arquata; ▪ Knot Calidris canutus; ▪ Red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator*; ▪ Scaup Athya marila; ▪ Pintail Anas acuta; ▪ Wigeon Anas penelope; ▪ Greylag goose; ▪ Bar-tailed godwit; ▪ Whooper swan; ▪ Dunlin Calidris alpina alpina; and ▪ Oystercatcher Haematopus ostralegus.	outwith the disturbance distance for osprey associated with the Cromarty Firth SPA.
Morangie Forest SPA	Breeding capercaillie	Capercaillie	**OUT**: The SPA lies 9 km east of the Proposed Development, with the Novar SPA located between. Therefore, impacts on capercaillie in the vicinity of the Proposed Development are limited to those in the Novar SPA. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to lie outwith the disturbance distance of the qualifying feature.
Inner Moray Firth SPA	▪ Annex 1 species; ▪ Migratory species; ▪ Waterfowl assemblage.	Annex 1: ▪ Osprey; ▪ Common tern; and ▪ Bar-tailed godwit. Migratory: ▪ Greylag goose; ▪ Red-breasted merganser; and ▪ Redshank. Waterfowl assemblage: ▪ Curlew; ▪ Goosander Mergus merganser;	**OUT**: Of the qualifying species of the Inner Moray Firth SPA, only osprey was recorded flying in the vicinity of the Site. There is potential connectivity between the Site and the SPA, however only a single flight was recorded during the two-year survey period. It is considered that disturbance-related activities for the Proposed Development would fall outwith the disturbance distance for osprey associated with the Inner Moray Firth SPA.

Table 8.3.1: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the SPA

Site	Reasons for Designation	Qualifying Features	Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)
		▪ Golden eye Bucephala clangula; ▪ Teal Anas crecca; ▪ Wigeon; ▪ Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo; ▪ Redshank; ▪ Red-breasted merganser; ▪ Greylag goose; ▪ Bar-tailed godwit; and; ▪ Oystercatcher.	
Moray Firth SPA	▪ Non-breeding Annex 1 species; and ▪ Migratory species.	Non-breeding Annex 1 species: ▪ Great northern diver *Gavia immer*; ▪ Red-throated diver *Gavia stellata*; and ▪ Slavonian grebe *Podiceps auritus*. Migratory species: ▪ Greater scaup *Athya marila*; ▪ Common eider Somateria mollisma; ▪ Long-tailed duck *Clangula hyemalis*; ▪ Common scoter *Melanitta nigra*; ▪ Velvet scoterMelanitta fusca; ▪ Common goldeneye *Bucaphala clangula*; ▪ Red-breasted merganser; and ▪ Shag Phalacrocorax aristotelis.	**OUT**: Of all the qualifying species of the Moray Firth SPA, only red-throated diver was recorded on one occasion during the two-year survey period. The record was outwith the disturbance distance for the qualifying species and suitable foraging and breeding habitats are available at nearby lochs.
Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA	▪ Annex 1 species; ▪ Migratory species; and ▪ Waterfowl assemblage.	▪ Annex 1 species: Osprey; and ▪ Bar-tailed godwit. Migratory: ▪ Greylag goose; and ▪ Wigeon. Waterfowl assemblage: ▪ Curlew; ▪ Teal;	**OUT**: Of all the qualifying species of the Dornoch Firth and Loch SPA, only osprey was recorded on three occasions during the two-year survey period. Although there is potential connectivity between the Site and SPA, the record was out-with the disturbance distance for the qualifying species and suitable foraging and breeding habitats are available at nearby lochs.

Table 8.3.1: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the SPA			
Site	**Reasons for Designation**	**Qualifying Features**	**Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)**
		▪ Scaup; ▪ Redshank ▪ Wigeon ▪ Greylag goose; and ▪ Bar-tailed godwit.	
Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA	Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*	Breeding hen harrier	**OUT**: Hen harrier breeding territories were confirmed from the desk study and field surveys, as well as there are numerous records of hen harrier within the SPA from the baseline surveys. it is unlikely that these are the qualifying species of the Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA. The core foraging range for hen harrier is 2 km with a maximum distance of 10 km during breeding season. Connectivity between the Site and qualifying species of the SPA is unlikely.

Ramsar Sites

8.3.8.9 A number of Ramsar sites are situated within the 20 km buffer zone on either side of the Site, as shown in **Figure 8.1: Ornithology Designated Sites (EIAR Volume 3a)**, where qualifying species have potential connectivity with the Proposed Development and where surveys recorded flights of qualifying species within the Ornithology Field Survey Area (defined as a 2 km buffer surrounding the Site). These sites are:

- Cromarty Firth Ramsar[23] - 7.8 km southeast of the Site;
- Inner Moray Firth Ramsar[24] - 19 km southeast of the Site; and
- Dornoch Firth Ramsar[25] - 19.9 km southeast of the Site.

8.3.8.10 The reasons for designation and the qualifying features of the Ramsar are outlined in Table 8.3.2.

Table 8.3.2: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the Ramsar Site			
Site	**Reasons for Designation**	**Qualifying Features**	**Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)**
Cromarty Firth Ramsar	▪ Annex 1 species; ▪ Waterfowl assemblage.	Annex 1: ▪ Osprey; ▪ Common tern; and ▪ Whooper swan. Migratory: ▪ Greylag goose Waterfowl: ▪ Redshank; ▪ Curlew; ▪ Knot; ▪ Red-breasted merganser; ▪ Scaup; ▪ Pintail; ▪ Dunlin; ▪ Wigeon; ▪ Greylag goose; ▪ Bar-tailed godwit; ▪ Whooper swan; ▪ Dunlin; and Oystercatcher.	**OUT**: Of the qualifying species of the Cromarty Ramsar only osprey was recorded flying in the vicinity and also partly on Site. There is potential connectivity between the Site and the Ramsar: Osprey was recorded on three occasions during the three-year survey period: commuting on one occasion and partly on Site; during the MBBS surveys on one occasion, and during the Breeding Raptor surveys on one occasion. It is considered that disturbance-related activities for the Proposed Development would fall outwith the disturbance distance for osprey associated with the Cromarty Firth Ramsar
Inner Moray Firth Ramsar	▪ Annex 1 species; ▪ Migratory species; and ▪ Waterfowl assemblage.	Annex 1: ▪ Osprey; ▪ Common tern; and ▪ Bar-tailed godwit. Migratory: ▪ Greylag goose; ▪ Red-breasted merganser; and ▪ Redshank. Waterfowl assemblage: ▪ Curlew; ▪ Goosander; ▪ Golden eye; ▪ Teal; ▪ Wigeon; ▪ Cormorant; ▪ Redshank; ▪ Red-breasted merganser; ▪ Greylag goose; ▪ Bar-tailed godwit; and; ▪ Oystercatcher.	**OUT**: Of the qualifying species of the Inner Moray Firth SPA, only osprey was recorded flying in the vicinity of the Site. There is potential connectivity between the Site and the SPA, however only three flights of this species were recorded during the two-year survey period. It is considered that disturbance-related activities for the Proposed Development would fall outwith the disturbance distance for osprey associated with Inner Moray Firth Ramsar.
Dornoch Firth Ramsar	▪ Annex 1 species; and ▪ Waterfowl assemblage.	Annex 1 species: ▪ Osprey. Waterfowl assemblage: ▪ Curlew; ▪ Teal;	**OUT**: Of all the qualifying species of the Dornoch Firth and Loch Ramsar, only osprey was recorded on three occasions during the two-year survey period. Although there is potential connectivity between the Site and Ramsar, the record was

[23] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Cromarty Firth RAMSAR. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8418 [accessed January 2026].

[24] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Inner Moray Firth Ramsar. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8430 [accessed January 2026].

[25] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Dornoch Firth Ramsar. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8420 [accessed January 2026].

Table 8.3.2: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the Ramsar Site			
Site	**Reasons for Designation**	**Qualifying Features**	**Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)**
		▪ Scaup; ▪ Redshank; ▪ Dunlin; ▪ Oystercatcher; ▪ Wigeon ▪ Greylag goose; and ▪ Bar-tailed godwit.	outwith the disturbance distance for the qualifying species and suitable foraging and breeding habitats are available at nearby lochs.

8.3.8.11 The baseline conditions and key constraints will not be elaborated further as the Ramsar sites have been scoped out at this stage.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

8.3.8.12 The Ecology Study Area comprises the FSA and a 5 km buffer around the Proposed Development which represents the ZOI in which impacts on ecological features could occur. The Ben Wyvis SAC[26] is roughly 2.5 km west of the Site at its closest point, as shown in **Figure 8.1: Designated Sites (EIAR Volume 3a)**. The reason for designation and qualifying features of the SAC is outlined in Table 8.3.3

Table 8.3.3: Designation Criteria and Qualifying Features of the SAC.			
Site	**Reasons for Designation**	**Qualifying Features**	**Initial Screening of Impact Pathways (Screen IN or OUT)**
Ben Wyvis SAC	Sensitive habitats	Habitats: ▪ Acidic tree; ▪ Alpine and subalpine heaths; ▪ Blanket bog; ▪ Upland habitats; ▪ Dystrophic and oligotrophic lochs; and ▪ Vascular plant assemblage.	**OUT**: There is not considered to be potential for connectivity with the Proposed Development and the SAC. The SAC is separated from the Access Route by a ridge of higher ground and extensive stand of commercial forestry and/or Loch Glass. There is potential that temporary deer displacement may occur on Site and cause deer to overgraze the SAC as a result. However, deer density on Site is low and therefore it is not likely to have significant impact on the SAC. **Technical Appendix 7.3: Deer Management Plan (EIAR Volume 4)** discusses this in further detail.

8.3.8.13 The baseline conditions and key constraints will not be elaborated further as the Ben Wyvis SAC has been scoped out at this stage.

8.3.8.14 Justification of Initial Screening Results

8.3.8.15 Based on the initial screening outlined above, the following designated site have been identified as requiring further consideration to assess potentially significant effects:

- Novar SPA.

8.3.8.16 Tables 8.3.4-8.3.6 details the baseline information, all screened potential likely significant effects for this site, and conclusion on LSE for the Novar SPA.

Table 8.3.4: Baseline Information for the Novar SPA	
Factor	**Information**
Relationship between Designated Sites and Proposed Development	▪ The Novar SPA overlaps with the Access Route for roughly 3 km, and the SPA is approximately 3.5 km southeast of the wind Turbine Array at its closest point.
Relationship with other National Site Network or Ramsar Sites	The Novar SPA has no overlap with other National Site Network or Ramsar Sites.
Qualifying Features	▪ Breeding capercaillie.
Conservation Objectives[27]	The conservation objectives of the SPA are to: ▪ Avoid deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying species (capercaillie) or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained; and ▪ Ensure for the qualifying species that the following are maintained in the long term: – Population of the species as a viable component of the site; – Distribution of the species within the site; – Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species; – Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species; and – No significant disturbance of the species.
Condition[28]	▪ Breeding populations of capercaillie have a 'Favourable maintained' status.
Threats[29]	▪ No negative pressures recorded.

Table 8.3.5: Screening of Potential Likely Significant Effects for Novar SPA	
Key Issues and Relevant Threats	Justification
Nest or Lek Destruction	Construction phase: RSPB desk study data confirms the presence of two active capercaillie leks overlapping with the existing Access Route, and records of capercaillie within the wider area surrounding the Proposed Development and Novar SPA. Although Access Route works would result in

[26] NatureScot Sitelink (2026). Ben Wyvis SAC. Available at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8205 [accessed January 2026].

[27] Conservation Objectives for Novar SPA. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/special-protection-area/8662/conservation-objectives.pdf [accessed January 2026].

[28] SEPA Site Condition Monitoring database. Available at: https://informatics.sepa.org.uk/ProtectedNatureSites/ [accessed January 2026].

[29] EPA Site Condition Monitoring database. Available at: https://informatics.sepa.org.uk/ProtectedNatureSites/ [accessed January 2026].

Table 8.3.5: Screening of Potential Likely Significant Effects for Novar SPA	
Key Issues and Relevant Threats	Justification
	only limited tree removal, it cannot be ruled out that nests or leks of protected/qualifying ground nesting capercaillie, could possibly be destroyed during vegetation clearance associated with construction work. The existing Access Route is within the Novar SPA and any works are within an area where qualifying capercaillie ground nesting species are potentially nesting or lekking. Decommissioning phase: The effects of decommissioning phase are considered to be identical to the effects of the construction phase. Operational phase: There is no potential for nest destruction to occur during the operational phase.
Disturbance/Nest or lek disturbance	Construction phase: RSPB desk study data confirms the presence of two active capercaillie leks overlapping with the existing Access Route, and records of capercaillie within the wider area surrounding the Proposed Development and Novar SPA. There is potential for construction works to have an impact on the breeding success of SPA qualifying capercaillie. Capercaillie are highly sensitive to human disturbance while lekking and breeding and evidence shows they will abandon their nests due to human activity[30]. Adverse effects could result from disturbance associated with construction works, including noise, light and air pollution, which could lead to the displacement of sensitive species. Displacement and/or avoidance of the area could occur in the short to medium term, until the completion of construction works. As such, LSE cannot be discounted, therefore this effect has been screened in for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. The Site is also located within the foraging range of this species; therefore, the species could also be disturbed while foraging on the ground. Operational phase: There is no potential for disturbance/nest disturbance to occur during the operational phase.
Collision Risk	There is potential for collision risk to occur during dispersal, or if birds are moving between the SPA and other suitable habitat outside the SPA. No quantified collision risk assessment is possible as there were no records of capercaillie during the two-year VP surveys. It is unlikely that capercaillie will disperse to the Turbine Array as it is largely unsuitable habitat for a forest bird and capercaillie are non-migratory, sedentary species that prefer open canopy woodlands. However, although rare, capercaillie will fly over open ground. Subsequently, there is potential that capercaillie will fly over the Turbine Array while dispersing to suitable habitat that is nearby the Proposed Development. The collision risk is anticipated to be low during the construction and operation phase. With no evidence of capercaillie flights, lack of suitable habitat in the vicinity, and building upon an existing wind farm collision risk is unlikely. As such, LSE can be discounted, therefore this effect has been screened out for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.
Effects supporting habitats	Construction phase: Construction activities have the potential to degrade or destroy sensitive habitats through excavation, compaction or modification (e.g. vegetation removal). The proposed Access Route upgrades would cause both temporary and permanent habitat loss. Capercaillie are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss as they have very specific habitat conditions for foraging and breeding. It is considered likely that the Proposed Development would significantly affect capercaillies' access to or the availability of supporting habitat. As such, LSE cannot be discounted, therefore this effect has been screened in for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. Operation phase: There is no potential for effects supporting habitats during the operational phase.

Table 8.3.6: Conclusion for Novar SPA	
Alone	Construction phase: Construction activities have the potential to directly impact the qualifying features of the Novar SPA, since the Proposed Development is structurally and functionally linked to the SPA, while the proposed construction to the Access Route would take place within the boundaries of the SPA. Potential nest or lek destruction/disturbance of ground nesting vulnerable capercaillie present in the area could occur as proposed Access Route upgrades will fell woodland that is potential lek sites and breeding territory for the SPA qualifying capercaillie. Capercaillie are highly sensitive to human disturbance, and breeding success is likely to be affected by construction activities. Although there is suitable supporting habitat within the wider site, capercaillie have very limited suitable habitat and limited range. Disturbance such as noise, vibration, pollution and increased traffic and personnel in the area are likely to disturb the populations in the vicinity of the Site and Access Route upgrades. Disturbance impacts are expected to be **medium term** and **reversible**. With regards to habitat loss, capercaillie are specialist species and are only able to survive in a narrow range of conditions. Suitable habitats are very limited as well as distribution of the species. Although potential habitat loss is small in scale relative to the remaining functioning and intact habitat in the SPA, the impact has the potential to be significant due to the vulnerability of the species. The adverse effects of habitat loss are expected to be **long term** and **permanent** and would likely affect the conservation objectives of the qualifying features or the integrity of the SPA from the Proposed Development alone.

[30] Review of Capercaillie Conservation and Management. NatureScot. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/review-capercaillie-conservation-and-management-report-scientific-advisory-committee#2.3.+%C2%A0Factors+affecting+breeding+success+(Objective+a.3) [accessed January 2026].

	Operational phase: Although collision risk is anticipated to be low, collision mortality of an individual of this species would be an adverse effect as the Site is known to support a small population of approximately 13 individuals.[31] However, due to the existing wind farm, lack of suitable habitat within the Turbine Array, and no evidence of capercaillie flights there is evidence that collision risk would be unlikely for this species. **A significant effect is considered likely** due to the construction of the Proposed Development alone.
In combination with other plans or projects	Potentially adverse cumulative construction effects are likely from construction of the Proposed Development alongside the construction of the Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm, Beinn Tharsuinn Wind Farm, Braelangwell Wind Farm, Creachhan Wind Farm, Glasa Wind Farm, Lochluichart Extension 2 Wind Farm, Tarvie Wind Farm and particularly Ceislien Wind Farm that is immediately adjacent to the Site to the east. The proposed Ceislein Wind Farm proposes to use the same Access Route through the Novar SPA. Cumulative habitat loss, and the loss of foraging, lekking and breeding grounds, together with increased disturbance associated with additional construction works, could adversely affect the ornithological features, particularly if construction periods of the developments within a relatively small area overlap. **Significant cumulative effects are likely** on Novar SPA and qualifying capercaillie. Increased cumulative disturbance could potentially affect their breeding success from effects in combination with the above developments located in the immediate vicinity to the Site. As such, LSE cannot be discounted, therefore this effect has been screened in for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.
In the absence of mitigation, are the proposals likely to have a significant effect on the designated site?	
Yes, decommissioning/construction/operational, and cumulative effects have been **screened in** for the Novar SPA for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment for further consideration as the effect is likely to be significant.	

8.3.9 Conclusion

8.3.9.1 This appraisal has been prepared to provide information to the competent authority to allow it to undertake its own assessment regarding the potential for the Proposed Development to result in adverse effects on designated sites, in accordance with the HRA process required under the Habitat Regulations.

8.3.9.2 The effects of the Proposed Development have been assessed using the available desk study and field survey information and professional judgment.

8.3.9.3 The Stage 1 screening assessment considered that the Proposed Development alone will have a likely significant effect on the qualifying features or integrity of the Novar SPA. It is therefore deemed necessary to progress to Stage 2 (AA).

8.3.9.4 The potential for cumulative effects has been considered in relation to Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm, Beinn Tharsuinn Wind Farm, Braelangwell Wind Farm, Ceislien Wind Farm, Creachhan Wind Farm, Glasa Wind Farm, Lochluichart Extension 2 Wind Farm and Tarvie Wind Farm. It is likely that adverse cumulative effects on designated sites and their qualifying features in the absence of mitigation would be significant.

8.3.10 Stage 2-Appropriate Assessment

8.3.10.1 The Stage 1 Screening Assessment identified the following designated sites where significant effects are likely to occur in the absence of mitigation:

- Novar SPA

8.3.10.2 The likely significant effects were as follows:

- Indirect and direct impacts during the construction stage of the Proposed Development; and
- Cumulative construction effects from the Proposed Development and the Ceislein Wind Farm.

8.3.10.3 An assessment of the likely significant effects on the integrity of the site in view of its conservation objectives is set out below.

Novar SPA

8.3.10.4 Potential indirect and direct impacts from construction of the Proposed Development and Access Route upgrades are likely to impact the breeding capercaillie SPA population. RSPB desk study data confirms the presence of two active leks overlapping with the proposed upgraded Access Route, as well as records of capercaillie within the wider area surrounding the Proposed Development and Novar SPA. The proposed Access Route upgrades, including sections within the SPA, includes felling of 75 individual trees, albeit only 22 of these trees located within the SPA boundary. As such, although direct habitat loss would be minor, given the close proximity of two identified lek sites and the consequent likelihood that nest locations will also occur in the vicinity, indirect impacts of construction activities from disturbance and displacement of capercaillie are likely. The disturbance impacts that may arise from noise, vibration and visual disturbance associated with construction activities are likely to disturb capercaillie within the vicinity of the Site as the species is highly sensitive to human disturbance. Habitat loss within the SPA is limited to some individual trees along the Access Route however this species has limited distribution and is highly sensitive to habitat loss. Cumulative habitat loss, loss of foraging, lekking, and breeding grounds, together with increased disturbance associated with construction works from the proposed Ceislein Wind Farm and the proposed Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400kV Connection are likely to impact the Novar SPA.

8.3.10.5 It is assessed that in the absence of mitigation during the construction stage, there would be potential for an adverse effect on the Novar SPA from indirect and direct impacts alone and in-combination with other projects, such as disturbance and habitat loss, arising from construction activities due to the proximity of the Proposed Development as well as works required within the SPA.

8.3.11 Mitigation

8.3.11.1 The Appropriate Assessment considered the following designated sites as requiring mitigation:

- Novar SPA.

8.3.11.2 A schedule of mitigation has been established for the potential habitat loss and disturbance impacts during the construction stage of the Proposed Development. It is considered that the implementation of the below measures would address the potential adverse effects on the integrity of the Novar SPA, arising from direct impacts from habitat loss and indirect impacts from disturbance (noise, vibration and visual) during the construction stage of the Proposed Development.

[31] Novar SPA Citation. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/special-protection-area/8549/spa-citation.pdf [accessed January 2026].

Decommissioning and Construction Environmental Management Plan (DCEMP)

8.3.11.3 A DCEMP would be developed to provide a framework for the management of environmental impacts arising from the decommissioning of the existing Novar 1 Wind Farm and the construction of the repowered wind farm. The DCEMP would be finalised by the Applicant, the contractor and a suitably qualified Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) in consultation with the relevant authorities, as the design for the Proposed Development is established prior to the commencement of construction. The measures laid out in the DCEMP would aim to reduce environmental impacts from the decommissioning and construction phases of the Proposed Development such as noise, lighting and dust impacts to non-significant levels.

8.3.11.4 Standard practice construction methods, including noise control measures such as avoidance and/or minimisation of overlap of noisy activities would be detailed to ensure the integrity of the SPA, so as not to be affected by disturbance. The DCEMP would provide specifications for the appropriate timing of the works. A coordinated approach to construction timing and access management will be secured through the DCEMP, including alignment between the Proposed Development and other developments utilising the Access Route to minimise cumulative disturbance, particularly during sensitive periods for capercaillie. It is proposed that the works would be programmed to take place *outside* the breeding season (March - August inclusive), to avoid the key sensitive period for capercaillie (qualifying breeding species of the SPA). Mitigation for protected species would further be laid out in a Species Protection Plan (SPP).

Species Protection Plan (SPP) and Timings of Works

8.3.11.5 A bespoke SPP for birds but focussing on capercaillie would be included in the DCEMP. The proposed scope is summarised below:

- Pre-felling and pre-construction surveys would be carried out by suitably qualified ornithologists to identify whether the woodland close to the works is in active use by capercaillie following best practice methods[32];
- To avoid unnecessary disturbance of capercaillie, the Applicant would liaise with relevant bodies to ensure that other monitoring surveys for capercaillie are not also proposed concurrently. If they are, the option of using the data from those would be pursued;
- Works would be undertaken under direct supervision of a suitably qualified ECoW with the following key roles:
  - Inspect Site if capercaillie are encountered;
  - Toolbox talks to Site staff;
  - Watching brief to ensure that construction stays outwith the specified no works zone;
- Works would avoid the breeding season, covering the capercaillie lekking, nesting and chick rearing period, between March and August inclusive when the species is most sensitive to disturbance; and
- A presumption to avoid permanent fences within known capercaillie woodlands. However, where fences are unavoidable, even if only temporarily, these would be fitted with fence markers to make them more visible to reduce the risk of capercaillie flying into them and being killed or injured.

Woodland Replacement

8.3.11.6 Although tree removal along the Access Route would be very low, it will result in the loss of a small area of woodland within the SPA. This loss is not considered to affect the integrity of the SPA, having regard to the limited extent of the habitat affected and the implementation of mitigation measures. Measures to minimise and offset effects would include woodland restoration and replanting proposals, as set out in **Technical Appendix 7.4: Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (EIAR Volume 4).** Woodland planting would be undertaken off-site within the wider Novar Estate, currently proposed within the northern fringe of the Novar SPA in an area of degraded Scots pine woodland. A minimum of 0.7 ha of native woodland planting is proposed, with the aim of restoring and extending existing woodland habitat. Final planting locations and extent would be confirmed within the final Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Plan (BEMP). The woodland planting would contribute to maintaining the extent and function of the woodland habitat suitable for capercaillie. In addition, the proposed planting would deliver biodiversity enhancement by improving the condition and extent of woodland habitat within and adjacent to the SPA, resulting in a net increase in higher value woodland."

8.3.12 Cumulative Impacts

Ceislein Wind Farm

8.3.12.1 An application for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the installation of up to 11 wind turbines, a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure was submitted in March 2026 to the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (Reference: ECU00005174)[33]. The development would be installed approximately 8 km northeast of Dingwall, within the Highland Council local authority area. This application is currently in the consultation stage.

8.3.12.2 The development is located less than 1 km east from the Site boundary and is proposed to share part of the Access Route with the Proposed Development. This site has connectivity and overlaps with the Novar SPA primarily along the Access Route. The EIAR concludes that no likely significant effects on the qualifying capercaillie population of the Novar SPA, or on the habitats supporting this species, are predicted.

8.3.12.3 Although no significant effects were predicted for the proposed Ceislein Wind Farm when considered alone, the potential for significant effects may arise when assessed in combination with the Proposed Development and other projects. It is considered that the Proposed Development and the proposed Ceislein Wind Farm have the potential to give rise to significant in-combination effects on the Novar SPA in the absence of mitigation, in relation to disturbance and habitat loss effects with the shared Access Route. Potential indirect and direct impacts are discussed in Table 8.3.6.

8.3.12.4 However, it is considered that appropriate control/mitigation measures would be implemented at the design stage and during construction for both the proposed Ceislein Wind Farm and the Proposed Development, which would address the potential significant in-combination effects arising from the shared use of the Access Route. As such, following mitigation, it is considered **unlikely** that the proposed Ceislein Wind Farm and Proposed Development would result in any **significant in-combination effects** leading to adverse effects on the integrity of the Novar SPA.

[32] Guidance Licensing Capercailie survey methods. NatureScot. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-07/Guidance-Licensing-Capercaillie-survey-methods.pdf [accessed January 2026].

[33] Scottish Energy Consents Unit (2024.) Ceislein Wind Farm Application Details (Reference: ECU00005174). Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00005174 [accessed June 2026].

Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400kV OHL Connection

8.3.12.5 An application for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the installation of a new 400kV OHL connection, spanning approximately 173 km, was submitted in August 2025[34]. The development would be installed between proposed new substations at Banniskirk in the area of Spittal and Fanellan in the area of Beauly, with a connection via a proposed new substation at Carnaig near to the existing substation at Loch Buidhe. The development further includes permanent diversion works required for approximately 18 km of existing 132kV and 275kV OHLs to enable construction of the development, including the temporary diversion works required to construct the permanent diversion, and ancillary development and associated works. The application is currently in the consultation stage.

8.3.12.6 The development is proposed to overlap with the eastern extent of the Proposed Development and to share the Access Route with the Proposed Development. The proposed alignment has connectivity with the Novar SPA as it is located approximately 1.9 km west of the designated site. The EIAR predicted significant habitat loss effects for capercaillie associated with the Novar SPA through a reduction in available foraging and roosting habitat, potential fragmentation and reduced dispersal beyond the SPA boundary.

8.3.12.7 The Proposed Development would involve the removal of 22 trees within the Novar SPA and a total of 75 trees along the Access Route. Due to the overlapping use of the Access Route, it is considered that the Proposed Development and the proposed Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400kV Connection have the potential to have significant in-combination effects on the capercaillie population associated with Novar SPA as a result of loss of habitat, disturbance and displacement in the absence of mitigation due to the limited distribution and sensitivity of the species to habitat loss. Potential indirect and direct impacts are discussed in Table 8.3.6.

8.3.12.8 However, it is considered that appropriate control/mitigation measures would be implemented at the design stage and during construction for both the Proposed Development and the proposed Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400kV Connection, which would address the potential significant in-combination effects. As such, following mitigation, it considered **unlikely** that the Proposed Development and the proposed Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400kV Connection would result in any **significant in-combination effects** leading to adverse effects on the integrity of the Novar SPA.

8.3.13 Conclusions

8.3.13.1 This section provides conclusion for the competent authority (NatureScot) to consider in its Appropriate Assessment.

8.3.13.2 Table 8.3.7 describes whether, with the implementation of secured mitigation measures, there would be an adverse effect on the integrity of the designated sites from the Proposed Development.

Table 8.3.7: Summary of Outcomes for Designated Sites with the Adoption of Mitigation

Designated Site	With the implementation of mitigation, will the proposal in-combination with other plans or projects result in an adverse effect on integrity of a designated site?
Novar SPA	No

[34] Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (2025). *Spittal to Beauly 400kV OHL Connection (Application Ref. ECU00006008)*. Energy Consents Unit Portal. https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00006008. [Accessed June 2026]