



Scottish Natural Heritage
All of nature for all of Scotland

Appendix 1: Appropriate Assessment Response from SNH

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17 February 2009

Dear David

Appropriate Assessment - Finalised Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan

Thank you for inviting comments from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on your appropriate assessment of the above Plan. On behalf of SNH, I would like to say that your approach to the assessment is good, comprehensive and easy to follow.

I have attached some detailed comments in an Annex and can confirm we have no substantive concerns about your conclusions. However, on one point, we have suggested some alternative wording.

Once again, can I thank you for the considered way in which you have approached this exercise, which has made our contribution all the more straightforward.

Yours sincerely

Ewen Cameron
Operations Manager
Grampian Area



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Annex

SNH comments on the Draft Appropriate Assessment for the Finalised Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire (excluding the Cairngorms National Park Area) Structure Plan 2007 – 2030

- 3.3 Fig 1 – Both Loch of Skene and part of Ythan Estuary and Meikle Loch are also Ramsar sites, but I don't think these "missing" designations will materially affect your conclusions in the appropriate assessment.
- 7.3 – as you have mentioned elsewhere, as it is a strategic document, the Structure Plan does not provide approval in detail for development, as Local Plans and some individual projects will still need their own appropriate assessment. This is a crucial point in achieving the plan's aims and I expect it is one you, and your Council, will have to emphasise quite a bit.
- 8.2 – The Birds Directive should be mentioned as well – it's the one that relates to SPAs. Can I suggest the first sentence reads - *SNH have been consulted at every stage of the Structure Plan process, and have expressed their satisfaction that the finalised Structure Plan has undertaken the assessments required by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended)*. These regulations cover the requirements of both the Birds and Habitats Directives.
- Appendix 3: Screening Matrix (Plan Elements) – given your own observation on the sensitivity of the River Dee SAC to abstraction and pollution, aim 3 could have a significant effect for at least actions b and d.
- Appendix 3: Screening Matrix (Plan Elements) - Sustainable development and climate change, target 3. It is possible that abstraction up to the currently licensed limit could have a significant effect on Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Atlantic salmon, especially if summers become drier and warmer. Accordingly, these should be screened in for b and g. However, we do acknowledge that the appropriate mechanism for addressing this would probably be an appropriate assessment which the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) would carry out in the event of either a review of the existing abstraction licence or an application for a new one. You may wish to make that point in your appropriate assessment.
- Appendix 3: Screening Matrix (Plan Elements) – I could not find the relevant section in the draft plan relating to pages 18, 19 and 20 in this appendix, so cannot comment on the reasons for screening in or out.
- Appendix 5: Appropriate Assessment – For a number of sites, in the column headed Potential Development Issues, you have included the statement – “Due to the nature of the site it is highly unlikely development would be proposed on the SAC (or SPA)”. We believe that experience shows it is the content and quality of the Plan Aim or Policy that deters inappropriate development, rather than the simple fact of designation itself. This may be especially important in Aberdeenshire with only some 6% of its area carrying a SSSI/Natura designation; about half the national average.

- Appendix 5: Appropriate Assessment - River Dee SAC. The fifth “set” of Potential Development Issues relate primarily to water abstraction. The 3rd entry under “safeguarding” (Target 3 of the Sustainable Development and Climate Change) states *“To avoid having to increase the amount of water Scottish Water are licensed to take from the River Dee, as a result of the new developments proposed in the plan.”* Abstraction is a fundamental issue and one which SNH has flagged as a concern for some time. Under certain circumstances, abstraction up to the limit currently licensed, could have a significant effect on Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Atlantic salmon. Once again, we do acknowledge that the appropriate mechanism for addressing this would probably be an appropriate assessment which SEPA would carry out in the event of either a review of the existing abstraction licence or an application for a new one. Again, you may wish to make that point in your appropriate assessment.

- I don’t know what you mean by “water sourcing technology”, in relation to target 4, and cannot comment whether it is an appropriate safeguard.

- Appendix 5: Appropriate Assessment - Loch of Strathbeg SPA & Ramsar. We agree with your conclusion that it is not only the impact of an individual windfarm proposal that needs to be considered, but its cumulative effect along with the large number of other proposals/developments in the north-east. The pink footed geese which roost at the Loch of Strathbeg SPA forage widely across the surrounding farmland, and it is their movements across the foraging areas that make them vulnerable to collision.

- Appendix 5: Appropriate Assessment - Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch SPA. We would like to observe that the master planning approach taken with the redevelopment of the old Newburgh Quay was a good example of how the potential impact of associated waterborne recreation and its adverse effect on this site was identified at an early stage.