

Environmental surveys completed: Intertidal ornithology and benthic at landfall

Ornithology

Why do we need these surveys?

As part of our Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), we need to assess the potential impacts on intertidal birds around the area where the cable(s) lands onshore (the landfall). To make sure that we can adequately assess these impacts, we need to ensure we have enough baseline information on the bird species in the specific areas we are considering for landfall. This enables us to assess the right species, as different species can be affected differently so need different considerations (for example some are more sensitive to disturbance).

The overall aim of the surveys was to establish which bird species, including those of conservation concern, are utilising the habitats within and near to the proposed cable landfall location(s) during the passage and winter periods of 2023/4.

What was done?

A team of experienced ornithologists from the environmental consultancy SLR Consulting Ltd took counts and notes on the behaviour of the birds in the intertidal zone by using binoculars and a telescope and walking a transect along the coast once an hour across the tidal cycle. The area covered by the transects includes all bird habitats within the potential landfall areas, plus a buffer of 500m. Surveys were undertaken between September 2023 and March 2024 and consisted of 12 visits (two per month), each having a minimum of six hours of survey.

Results

The total species identified in the surveys were 62, including both common and abundant species (such as oystercatcher) and more uncommon species (such as Manx shearwater, where only two individuals were counted). 14 of the species identified are identified as 'Red' in the Birds of Conservation Concern Isle of Man, meaning these species are of greatest conservation concern. This status will be taken into consideration as part of our assessments.

Next steps

Our team of ornithologists are looking at the data collected and will use the intertidal bird surveys as an additional data source to inform the baseline characterisation and understanding of species present within the landfall areas. This also feeds into assessments, such as identifying species for inclusion in modelling, and for consideration of potential birds' displacement impacts in the intertidal zone during cable laying. The survey report and the full intertidal ornithology assessment will be published in March 2025 as part of the Offshore and Intertidal Ornithology chapter of the

Environmental Statement, which we will submit as part of our application for Marine Infrastructure Consent

Benthic

Why do we need these surveys?

As part of our Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), we need to assess the potential impacts on benthic habitats around the area where the cable(s) lands onshore (the landfall). To make sure that we can adequately assess these impacts, we need to ensure we have enough baseline information on the habitats and ecology in the specific areas we are considering for landfall.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the intertidal habitat composition and habitat distribution to enable us to adequately assess any impacts to intertidal habitat.

What was done?

A team of two senior marine scientists from the environmental consultancy APEM Ltd completed the surveys over the 29th and 30th of September 2023 to coincide with spring low tides. This enabled them to survey the maximum extent of the intertidal area (between Mean High Water and Mean Low Water) at the proposed landfall locations. The survey methodology followed standard industry guidance and habitat codes were assigned for each different habitat, along with detail of any notable species. Photographs of each habitat or feature of interest were taken, along with estimates of percentage cover within the environment. A GPS unit was used to plot that habitats and features so that results of the survey could be mapped.

Results

The sites surveys supported a diverse range of habitats with between 18 habitats recorded at Douglas beach, 16 habitats recorded at Port Skillion and 17 habitats recorded at Groudle Bay. One species on the OSPAR list of threatened and/or declining species and habitats, the dog whelk, was found during the survey, and two non-native species were identified (the Australasian barnacle and red harpoon weed).



Next steps

The results of the benthic intertidal surveys have been given to our benthic ecology specialists who are undertaking the assessments as part of the EIA. These results have given them a detailed and site-specific understanding of the habitats that are present in the landfall areas and will ensure that the impacts that are assessed are relevant to the habitats present in the area and any specific sensitivities these habitats might have.