REPORT OF THE MARINE LICENCE VETTING COMMITTEE (MLVC)

on

FORESHORE LICENCE APPLICATION FOR INSTALLATION OF A SUBMARINE ELECTICITY INTERCONNECTOR BETWEEN IRELAND AND WALES BY EIRGRID

Dr. Terry McMahon
Chair, Marine Licence Vetting Committee
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EirGrid– Foreshore Licence Application for installation of submarine electricity interconnector between Ireland and Wales (MS51/4/516)

Background

In September 2008 Eirgrid submitted an application for a Foreshore Permit to facilitate the installation of a submarine electricity interconnector between Ireland and Wales.

A subsea cable is proposed from landfall on the North Wales coast to landfall at Rush North Beach along the route shown in Drawing EG_GIS02.mxd that accompanied the application. Two high voltage direct current (HVDC) cables are proposed to be laid in close proximity to each other within a corridor of 50m within the intertidal area and within a 500m.offshore. One or 2 separate fibre optic cables will be laid in the same corridor. The main cable will have a diameter of 150mm with a central core of copper with insulating layers. The return cable is of smaller diameter with the fibre optic cables smaller again. It is proposed to bury the cables below the seabed to protect them from accidental damage e.g. from trawling or anchors to a depth of 3m at beaches and shallow waters, 2m out to 8.5km and 1.5 metres for the remainder of the route. In areas where burial to these depths can not be carried out due to the presence of bedrock which cannot be avoided it is proposed to lay the cable on the surface and cover it with suitable armouring material such as concrete blocks, rock protection or "mattresses". Existing submarine telecommunication and power cable will be crossed following formal crossing agreements. Options for cable burial offshore include either simultaneous laying or burying of the cable using ploughs or use of separate vessels whereby one vessel creates a trench into which another vessel lays the cable. Exact details of the method(s) to be used will not be available until the final design stage is completed.

A transition joint pit is required at landfall due to the slight specification difference between the marine and land cable, which will continue from landfall to a converter station at Woodlands, Co. Meath. It is proposed that this transition joint pit (TJP) will be located above the high water mark at the car park at North Rush beach and constructed using reinforced concrete approximately 2-3m in depth, 15m in length and 3-4m wide with a cable entry point at either end. It is proposed to backfill the pit and reinstate the surface with no over ground structures remaining. Options for the cable installation across the intertidal and beach areas include the use of ducts depending on the type of cable to be used with two or three ducts of 400mm in diameter which can be laid in a single trench with a base of 3m. Cables can be laid without ducts by laying the cables in open-cut trenches. The construction process varies depending on the use or not of ducts. The existing coastal defences at Rush North Beach will need to be removed for a limited period to facilitate the works.

Before cable-laying operations commence it will be necessary to ensure that the route is free from obstructions e.g. discarded fishing gear identified during the pre-construction survey. A survey vessel will be used to clear all indentified debris in a pre-lay "grapnel run" during which a 1m x 1m heavy grapnel will be towed along the cable route. Debris retained by the grapnel will be collected onboard the vessel and disposed of in licenced onshore facilities.

Following cable burial a geophysical survey will be conducted to provide information on cable burial depth along the route.

Planning Permission

On 18th November 2008 an application for planning permission was submitted to An Bord Pleanala in accordance with Section 182(A) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006. Following an oral hearing held on 10th – 12th March 2009 planning permission was granted, subject to 17 conditions, in September 2009.

Public Consultation

A public notice concerning this Foreshore application was published in "The Irish Times" on 16th January 2009 and a copy of the application was available for public consultation at Balbriggan Garda Station, Co. Dublin for 21 days. No objections or representations were received during the public consultation period.

One objection, from Rush Community Council, was received on 27th July 2010 but was considered invalid as it was a late submission. In any event, the issues raised in this objection were dealt with during the Oral Hearing and, as noted above, planning permission was granted.

MLVC Considerations

The MLVC discussed this application at it's meeting on 20th May 2009.

The following documents were considered:

- Foreshore Licence Application and accompanying Environmental Report submitted by EirGrid
- Written submissions from DEHLG (NPWS, Underwater Archaeology Unit) and the Marine Survey Office.
- Applicants responses to submission from DEHLG

Additionally the MLVC considered that an Appropriate Assessment, to fulfil the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, was not required given that the

proposed cable route on the foreshore does not lie within any designated Natura 2000 site and that the works would not impact on any designated Natura 2000 site.

MLVC Conclusions

Having regard to:

- The strategic goals of the Government White Paper "Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland " 2007 to 2020 which includes "*delivery of the East-West Electricity Interconnector no later than 2012 which will provide 500 Megawatts of capacity and which will remain in State ownership vested in EirGrid*"
- The Environmental Report and environmental management and mitigation measures set out in the Environmental Report
- The Submissions received from DEHLG and the applicants responses to these submissions
- The location of the cable route on the foreshore which does not lie is not within any designated Natura 2000 sites and therefore an Appropriate Assessment under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive is not required

the MLVC concludes that, subject to compliance with the specific conditions set out below, the proposed works would not have a significant negative impact on the marine environment, would not adversely impact on marine Natura 2000 sites and therefore recommends that a permit be issued.

Proposed Licence Conditions

1. The Licensee shall use that part of the Foreshore the subject matter of this licence for the purposes as outlined in the application and for no other purposes whatsoever.

2. The Licensee shall notify the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government at least 14 days in advance of the commencement of the works on the foreshore.

3. The Licensee shall provide the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with details of the exact cable burial method to be used as soon as this information becomes available.

4. The Licensee shall ensure that all environmental management and mitigation measures detailed in Section 15 of the Environmental Report accompanying the application are implemented.

5. The Licensee shall liaise with Dublin Port Company, Drogheda Port Company and Dundalk Port Company during the cable prior to and during the cable laying phase of the proposed works.

6. The Licensee shall furnish the names/registered number of all vessels involved in the operation to the Marine Survey Office in Dublin to ensure compliance with respect to Irish Load line and other relevant vessel certification.

7. The Licensee shall arrange the publication of a Marine Notice giving general description of operations and approximate dates of commencement and completion.

8. The Licensee shall arrange the publication of a local marine notice giving general description of operations and approximate dates of commencement and completion in respect of near shore and landfall cable laying operations

9. An Exclusion Zone for marine mammals (whales, dolphins and seals) shall be established, extending to 500 metres away from the cable laying operations, prior to the commencement of operations. All cable laying operations shall commence during suitable weather and visibility to ensure that this Exclusion Zone can be achieved.

10. A qualified Marine Mammal Observer shall be on site during the commencement of all cable laying operations to ensure that the Exclusion Zone is clear of marine mammals.

11. The Marine Mammal Observer shall undertake thirty minutes of survey prior to commencement of the soft-start procedure to ensure that no marine mammals are within the Exclusion Zone.

12. Cable laying may continue if weather conditions deteriorate or if marine mammals enter the Exclusion Zone following the appropriate start up.

13. The Licensee shall engage the services of a suitably qualified archaeologist to carry out an inter-tidal survey of the landfall, incorporating metal detector survey, under licence from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. This survey shall be carried out well in advance of the proposed construction works.

14. An Exclusion Zones of 100 metres around known wrecks shall be established and the Licensee shall inform the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the event that route changes impinge on such Exclusion Zones.

15. The Licensee shall supply geophysical and geotechnical logs to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government from any further survey works along the route. The Licensee shall ensure that such reports are assessed by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist.

16. The Licensee shall inform the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government of the programme of works both before and after installation of the cable, including planned ongoing burial surveys.

17. The Licensee shall continue to advise the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government as pre-lay survey, burial and post-installation survey methods become available.

18. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government may require further archaeological mitigation should archaeological material be discovered during the programme of works.

19. In order to ensure the preservation of underwater archaeological sites and features the Licensee shall engage the services of a suitably qualified archaeologist to monitor all ground and seabed disturbance works associated with the development, including the car park works, pre-lay surveys, grapnel clearance works, any cable-laying works and any dredging operations. The archaeologist shall be licensed under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004.

20. Should archaeological material be found during the course of monitoring, the archaeologist may have work on the site stopped, pending a decision as to how best to deal with the archaeology. The Licensee shall be advised by the National Monuments Service with regard to any necessary mitigating action (e.g. preservation *in situ*, dive and/or geophysical survey or excavation). The licensee shall facilitate the archaeologist in recording any material found.

21. The National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government shall be furnished with a report describing the results of the monitoring.

22. An as constructed survey of the cable route shall be provided to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.