

BACKGROUND

In 2016, North Seas Energy Ministers signed a Political Declaration on energy cooperation. One of the four working areas for collaboration is Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). To assist with the delivering of MSP objectives, an environmental working group was asked to develop a common environmental assessment framework (CEAF).

DEVELOPMENT OF CEAF

Since 2017, seven North Sea bordering countries are involved in developing CEAF. A pilot CEAF will be tested in the EU co-funded Strategic Environmental Assessment North Sea Energy project (SEANSE). By the end of 2019, the CEAF tool will be released, along with recommendations on how to apply this within Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) procedures. The CEAF instrument developed in this project should be considered as a prototype that can be refined and developed in subsequent years.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The project is being carried out by the following governmental organisations: Rijkswaterstaat, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (the Netherlands) in cooperation with Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency (Germany), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (UK), Marine Scotland (Scotland UK), Ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire (France), Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate (Denmark), Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (Norway), Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (Belgium).

Get to know CEAF: www.noordzeeloket.nl
and SEANSE at: www.northseaportal.eu

COMMON ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

an instrument for
assessing cumulative
impacts from offshore
renewable energy

OBJECTIVE

The Common Environmental Assessment Framework (CEAF) is an instrument for assessing cumulative impacts of offshore renewable energy, particularly wind energy in the North Sea. This instrument is designed to develop coherent wind energy plans for the mid- and long-term, that meets the conservation requirements of protected wildlife populations. CEAF can be used in national strategic planning and licensing procedures, as well as in transboundary collaboration.

WHAT KIND OF TOOL WILL CEAF BE?

CEAF will provide a common tool and language to discuss the potential impacts of wind farm development plans. If there are any undesirable ecological effects, CEAF will help to highlight them at an early stage. Additionally, it will assist in identifying and prioritising the needs of evidence, as well as in providing direction for future monitoring and research. Most importantly, this tool will be adaptable and flexible across species, timescales, and areas, enabling future changes to be incorporated easily.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TRANSBOUNDARY COLLABORATION?

Many species of conservation concern are highly mobile and are therefore not restricted by national borders. This means that populations could be affected by multiple offshore energy projects in more than one national marine area. This requires cooperation among national authorities in order to manage these cumulative pressures. CEAF provides opportunities for more effective cooperation in three ways: firstly, by facilitating the identification and use of commonly accepted, best practice methods and models, with which to estimate potential effects; secondly, by facilitating collaborative research (including tool development and monitoring); and thirdly, by providing common ambitions for mitigation goals and innovative measures.

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT?

A prototype CEAF will reach its completion at the end of 2019. Ongoing development of this instrument, using an adaptive management approach, will facilitate decision makers, advisors, commercial stakeholders and nature conservation NGOs with achieving sustainable use of the North Sea by considering possible future scenarios of maritime spatial planning and licensing. The long-term goal of this project is a common tool that will facilitate the large-scale deployment of offshore wind in European seas without causing environmental damage.

HOW DOES CEAF WORK?

State of the environment

- Species abundance, distribution and (transboundary) movements
- Population (status, demography, et cetera)
- Relevant environmental factors

Development of windfarms throughout the North Sea

- Wind farm characteristics (number and size of turbines)
- Spatial layout and location of wind farms
- Methods of construction of wind farm (pile driving, timing of the construction)

The adaptive management cycle

Future development of the instrument

- Identification of knowledge gaps, prioritisation of the needs of evidence
- Advancement of our understanding and knowledge building

Setting

- Common/shared methods, models, approaches and standards
- Impact assessment regulations
- The Precautionary principle
- Different ways of dealing with environmental impacts and thresholds

Estimated effects

- Mortality
- Sub-lethal effects (for example displacement from preferred habitats causing demographic changes)
- Evaluation of population response to wind farm effects

Movement towards a common understanding of potential cumulative impacts

