

Project Profile

Carrownaweelaun to Kilkee overhead electricity line: Ecological Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screening

Background

BSG Ecology was commissioned by Carrownaweelaun Energy Limited to prepare an Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) and an Appropriate Assessment Screening Report for 8.7 km of 10 kV overhead electricity line between Carrownaweelaun 20 kV sub-station and Kilkee sub-station, Co. Clare.

The reports were submitted in support of an application for declaration of the electricity line as exempted development (from planning permission) under Section 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

BSG Ecology's Role in the Project

A desk study was undertaken to collate available relevant ecological information. In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) was consulted for their views on the potential impacts of the proposed electricity line on ecology. The key concerns outlined by NPWS were in relation to the potential collision of commuting and migrating birds, alone and in combination with Carrownaweelaun Wind Farm, and other wind farms.

A walkover survey of the electricity line route was carried out to map the habitats present and assess their potential to support protected species. Vantage Point (VP) watches were also undertaken as part of the assessment of the proposed electricity line in order to identify bird flight lines and heights. The EIA identified any impacts resulting from the electricity line construction and operation and recommended appropriate mitigation measures as necessary.

The main ecological receptors considered in the EIA were bird species including cormorant, barnacle goose, whooper swan and Greenland white-fronted goose, which form part of the assemblage of nearby Special Protection Areas. Barnacle goose and cormorant are known to be susceptible to collision with electricity lines, but of these the vantage point surveys recorded only cormorant, flying across the route of the electricity line.

The detailed line design included tailoring the electricity line to lower than the recorded height of the great majority of cormorant flights and the inclusion of flight diverters on the wires in the areas of highest avian activity. With the implementation of these design measures, it was considered that the electricity line would therefore result in an overall neutral and imperceptible residual impact on cormorants.

The AA Screening Report considered the potential effects of the proposed electricity line on Natura 2000 sites and concluded that there was potential for an impact on cormorant, which is a qualifying species of the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA. However it was not considered likely that a significant impact would occur as the detailed design of the electricity line. It was therefore concluded that although there remained the possibility of occasional collision by cormorant there was no likelihood of significant impacts either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, on the SPA population..

Outcome

Clare County Council's AA screening assessment concluded that a significant effect could not be ruled out and that the proposal did not constitute exempted development.¹ Carrownaweelaun Energy Limited subsequently referred the question of exemption to An Bord Pleanála on the 16 July 2014

An Bord Pleanála appointed an inspector who reviewed the details supplied by the referrer (Carrownaweelaun Energy Ltd.) and Clare County Council's decision. The inspector's report² stated that *"Based on scientific information, the BSG screening report correctly concluded that any significant effect can be excluded" and that "The conclusion drawn by the Council in its screening statement is not based on scientific information, is not factually sustainable and is not a reasoned decision on the material before it. Accordingly, the statement to the effect that appropriate assessment is required is unsupported. More fundamentally, it adopts the wrong test of 'likely' effect, instead of 'likely significant effect'."*

The 10 kV overhead electricity line was formally declared exempted development by An Bord Pleanála on 22 January 2015. The electricity line was subsequently constructed and the two turbine wind farm at Carrownaweelaun is now operational.

¹ The planners report can be accessed at <http://www.eplanning.ie/ClareCC/AppFileRefDetails/14449/0>

² The inspectors report can be accessed at <http://www.pleanala.ie/casenum/RL3234.htm>

