

Protecting marine mammals at heart of new guidance for marine energy sector

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Sea mammals, such as dolphins and grey seals, will be better protected from new wave and tidal energy developments, thanks to new guidance led by researchers at the University of St Andrews.

The University's Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), SMRU Consulting, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) have published [Monday 10

August] new guidance on marine mammal surveying requirements at energy sites in Wales.

Marine mammals are potentially at risk from being struck by moving parts, or being disturbed from areas where the energy devices are located. The new guidance will help plan in advance what data and information should be gathered to allow robust assessments of possible impact on marine mammals.

Over the next five years, €100 million of EU structural funds have been prioritised for marine energy in Wales which, along with two wave and tidal stream 'Demonstration Zones' and seabed lease agreements for a further four projects, positions the nation in a leading role in marine energy.

However, Welsh waters are home to species including bottlenose dolphins, porpoises and grey seals, all of which are protected under European legislation, which includes the provision of Special Areas of Conservation.

Traditional approaches to assessing risk to marine life, for example those used for large offshore wind projects, may not always deliver the useful information required to underpin environmental assessments.



Dr Carol Sparling from SMRU Consulting, said: "This new guidance will allow developers to take a proportionate and robust approach to the gathering of data required to underpin their environmental assessments to assure the safety of local sea mammal populations.

"This guidance will also allow developers to focus on specific risks presented by individual projects rather than the existing 'one size fits all' approach."

The step-by-step guide for an initial assessment of risk will help provide a 'roadmap' to developers and their consultants to navigate pre-application surveys.

The process is similar in principle to the Scottish Government's draft Survey, Deploy and Monitor policy but is adapted and developed specifically for a more detailed consideration of marine mammals and extends the guidance to provide information on the type of survey used to inform environmental assessment procedures (such as Environmental Impact Assessments and Habitat Regulations Appraisals).

It is anticipated that this guidance will be followed by developers and their consultants at the scoping stage of projects, with input from regulators and nature conservation advisors.

Ceri Morris, Marine Mammal Specialist at NRW, said: "It is our duty to ensure that marine mammals such as dolphins, porpoises and seals in Wales are protected.

"This new [guidance](#) will give us more confidence that we have the best available information on [marine mammal](#) distribution and help us to understand how animals may interact with wave and tidal devices to inform our advice."

Dr Kate Smith, Marine Renewables Advisor at NRW, said: "We will be encouraging developers of wave and tidal stream energy projects to work with us in the future to follow the risk assessment process outlined in this report in order to determine the survey needs for a project.

"This process will identify which impact pathways might result in potentially significant impacts to marine mammals and which impacts and species should be the focus of any pre-application survey.

"This process will ensure that developers are in a much better position to make well-informed decisions about surveys and the need for data to inform environmental assessments and consent decisions."

Provided by University of St Andrews

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