

Marine Licensing Variation Decision

The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009)

Applicant: *Swansea University*
Variation application reference no: *CML1944v1*

Location: Dale, Pembrokeshire

Planting of seagrass seeds at Dale Bay covering an area of up to 2 hectares,

21 April 2023

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OUR DECISION

Based on all the information available, and having regard to all relevant considerations NRW has decided to grant the variation to the Existing Marine Licence sought by the Variation Application.

This decision document:

- explains how the Variation Application has been determined, having regard to the relevant legal framework outlined in section 4;
- explains how relevant considerations have been taken into account and how each of the legal requirements have been considered in determining the Variation Application;
- provides a record of the decision-making process; and
- sets out the reasons for any conditions imposed in connection with any marine licence granted pursuant to the Variation Application.

1 APPLICATION DETAILS

1.1 The Variation Application

Applicant name and address	The Applicant is the Organisation set out below: Organisation name: Swansea University Address: College of Science, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP
Variation Application reference number	CML1944v1
Existing Marine Licence reference number	CML1944
Date Variation Application was duly made	29 March 2023
Description of variation	To adapt methods of hand planting seagrass seeds in Dale, Pembrokeshire using a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) and a hessian bag planting arm.
Proposal[s] covered by the Variation Application	Planting of seagrass seeds at Dale Bay covering an area of up to 2 hectares
Licensable marine activities	Depositing of Seagrass seeds, Rope and Hessian Bags using a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) and an excavator planting arm.
Marine Plan area	Welsh inshore region and Welsh offshore region
Variation Application documents:	CML1944-V01-Variation Form CML1944-V01-Change request form

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2 VARIATION APPLICATION PROCEDURE

2.1 The Variation Application

The Variation Application was accepted by Natural Resources Wales (**NRW**) considered duly made on **29 March 2023**. This means we considered it was in the correct form and contained sufficient information for us to begin our determination, but not that it necessarily contained all the information we needed to complete that determination, and the documents considered may therefore include documents provided after the Variation Application was first made.

2.2 Documents considered

In reaching its decision, NRW has considered the documents listed in section 1 of this decision document along with such other information provided by the Applicant or received during any consultation, that NRW considered relevant.

2.3 Commercial Confidentiality

The Applicant made no claim that any information forming part of the Variation Application was subject to commercial confidentiality and we have not received any information in relation to the Variation Application that appears to be commercially confidential.

2.4 Environmental impact Assessment

Council Directive 2011/92/EU (as amended) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment aims to protect the environment and the quality of life by ensuring that projects which are likely to have significant environmental effects by virtue of their nature, size or location are subject to an environmental impact assessment (EIA) before permission is granted.

The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 ("the Regulations") transpose the EIA Directive in Wales and England for marine licence applications.

Having considered the Variation Application NRW has determined that it does not constitute a development requiring EIA under the Regulations.

3 CONSULTATION

3.1 Consultees

NRW considered it appropriate to reconsult the bodies listed in the table below on *29 March 2023*, due to their particular expertise and the responses received from them during the original consultation. These bodies were consulted for a period of 14 days. For those bodies that responded to the consultation, a 'Y' can be found in the response received column. For those who did not respond to the consultation, an 'N' can be found in the response received column:

Consultee	Response received (Y/N)	Date(s) of receipt
NRW	Y	12/04/2023
Milford Haven Local Port Authority	Y	06/04/2023

NRW has had regard to all consultation responses received in making its decision. Where these have impacted on NRW's decision making, this has been noted in the relevant paragraph in section 4 of this decision document.

4 BASIS FOR OUR DECISION

In determining this variation application, including the terms on which it was granted, NRW has had regard to the factors set out in section 4 below in accordance with the 2009 Act.

Under the 2009 Act NRW is required to have regard to the following:

- the need to protect the environment (see sub-section 4.1);
- the need to protect human health (see sub-section 4.2);
- the need to prevent interference with legitimate uses of the sea (see sub-section 4.3);
- in the case of an application for a licence to authorise construction, alteration or improvement of works within the UK marine licensing area, the effects of any use intended to be made of the works in question when constructed, altered or improved (considered, if relevant in sub-sections 4.1 to 4.5 below);
- any representations which it has received from any person having an interest in the outcome of the Variation Application (summarised in section 3 and where relevant considered in sub-sections 4.1 to 4.5 below); and
- such other matters as it thinks relevant (see sub-section 4.5 below).

4.1 The need to protect the environment:

The reference to the “environment” includes the local and global environment; the natural environment; and, by virtue of section 115(2) of the 2009 Act, any site of historic or archaeological interest. The natural environment may include the physical, chemical and biological state of the sea, the sea-bed and the sea-shore, and the ecosystems within it, or those that are directly or indirectly affected by an activity, whether within the marine licensing area or otherwise.

In considering the need to protect the environment we have considered the relevant environmental legislation set out below.

4.1.1 Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Directive and Water Environment Regulations

(a) The legal framework

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 (**Water Environment Regulations**) implement the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (**WFD**) (Directive 2000/60/EC) which requires consideration as to whether that proposals for development may cause deterioration or prevent a water body from achieving ‘good status’. Proposals likely to cause deterioration or prevent a waterbody from achieving good status should be rejected, unless derogation procedures have been applied.

Under the Water Environment Regulations, NRW must exercise its relevant functions to ensure compliance with the requirements of the WFD, the Environmental Quality Standards Directive (Directive 2008/105/EC) and the Groundwater Directive (Directive 2006/118/EEC).

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

NRW PS considers that the variation has no implication on the WFD compliance assessment, but has updated the assessment to include the deposition of hessian bags using a planting arm and seagrass injection resulting in a possible temporary disturbance through suspended sediment. This was

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subsequently screened out due to the small scale and temporary nature of the disturbance. Please refer to 'CML1944 Decision Document' for conclusions on Water Framework Directive. These conclusions have not been affected by this variation application and therefore are still considered valid.

Based on this assessment it is considered that the Proposed Activities when considered alone and in combination, will not pose a risk to deterioration in the status of any of the above listed waterbodies or jeopardise their attainment of good surface water status.

Further details are described within the Water Framework Directive Compliance Assessment.

4.1.2 Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

(a) The legal framework

Section 6 of the Environment Wales Act 2016 requires that we seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of our functions, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, in a manner that is consistent with the proper exercise of our functions.

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

NRW is satisfied that in this case, we have taken into account and had due regard to this duty in so far as it is consistent with the function of determining an application for a Marine Licence under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

4.1.3 European Protected Sites and Ramsar Sites

(a) The legal framework

European sites are those designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (**Habitats Regulations 2017**) and the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (**Offshore Habitats Regulations 2017**) as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

The Habitats Regulations 2017 and the Offshore Habitats Regulations 2017 require that any project that is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) must be subject to an appropriate assessment. NRW undertakes a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) to establish whether an appropriate assessment is required.

In addition NRW must exercise its functions under the 2009 Act so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the relevant European Directives. NRW also has a duty under the Habitats Regulations 2017 to support wild birds by protecting habitats and avoiding pollution.

A Ramsar site is a wetland which has been designated under the Ramsar Convention. The Ramsar Convention does not place specific legal requirements on its parties (though Ramsar sites are often SSSIs or SPAs, considered below), however Ramsar status is considered by NRW as matter of policy in its decision making.

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

The Project is located in the following European Protected Sites

- Pembrokeshire Marine SAC
- West Wales Marine SAC

A Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Proposed Activities has been updated, and NRW (as Statutory Nature Conservation Body) consulted on the HRA. The update included changing the

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methodology from hand planting seagrass seeds, to using a Remotely Operated Vehicle and a planting arm to deposit hessian bags. The assessment concludes that the project has been screened for likelihood of significant effects and, taking account of the advice received from protected sites advisors, is considered not likely to have a significant effect on any Natura 2000/Ramsar site. Further details are described within CML1944v1 Habitats Regulations Assessment.

NRW is therefore satisfied that the Proposed Activities, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of European Sites when undertaken in accordance with the licence conditions.

4.1.4 European Protected Species

(a) The legal framework

The Habitats Regulations 2017 and the Offshore Habitats Regulations 2017 also confer protection on certain designated species (European Protected Species). A licence (EPS licence) must be obtained in order, whether deliberately or accidentally, to capture, kill, disturb or injure such a species, damage or destroy their breeding or resting places or obstruct access to their resting or sheltering places.

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

NRW considers that no protected species are likely to be impacted by the Project. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on European Protected Species. These conclusions have not been affected by this variation application and therefore are still considered valid.

Any determination made as part of this decision are without prejudice to the consideration NRW is required to give an EPS licence application as the body with a statutory responsibility for its determination and do not constrain or bind NRW in exercising this function. Should an application for an EPS licence in relation to the Project be made it will be determined by NRW based on all the relevant information available to NRW at that time.

4.1.5 Marine Conservation Zones

(a) The legal framework

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) were established under the 2009 Act to protect nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. The only currently designated MCZ in Wales is Skomer.

Under the 2009 Act, NRW must exercise its functions in the manner which it considers best furthers the conservation objectives stated for any MCZ or, where that is not possible, in the manner which it considers least hinders the achievement of those objectives.

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

NRW is satisfied that there is no significant risk of the Proposed Activities on the Skomer Marine Conservation Zone. This is due to the nature of the proposed works and the distance between the MCZ and the location of the works. Please see CML1944 Decision document for more information. These conclusions have not been affected by this variation application and therefore are still considered valid.

4.1.6 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

(a) The legal framework

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Sites of Special Scientific Interest are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (**1981 Act**) and protected by law to conserve their wildlife or geology. NRW must take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features by reason of which an SSSI is of special scientific interest.

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

NRW has considered the impact of the Project on the following SSSI sites:

- Milford Haven Waterways SSSI

NRW is satisfied that the Proposed Activities are not likely to damage the SSSI. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on SSSI. These conclusions have not been affected by this variation application and therefore are still considered valid.

4.1.7 The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011**(a) The legal framework**

The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 (as amended) establish a legal framework for treating waste. This is designed to protect the environment and human health by emphasising the importance of proper waste management, recovery and recycling techniques to reduce pressure on resources and improve their use. Waste generated by a project or activity must in general terms be dealt with in an environmentally friendly way. To achieve this the regulations describe a waste hierarchy which gives an order of preference for how waste is dealt with (prevention, re-use, recovery for other purposes such as energy, and finally disposal).

(b) Factors relevant to our determination

NRW is satisfied that the Proposed Activities meet the requirements of The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011. NRW PS considers that the variation has no implication on compliance with the Waste Regulations and as such this has not been revised. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions. These conclusions have not been affected by this variation application and therefore are still considered valid.

4.1.8 Other matters in considered relevant to the need to protect the environment

NRW PS considers that the variation will have no further implications. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence. These conclusions have not been affected by this variation application and therefore are still considered valid.

4.1.9 Conclusion of our considerations under the need to protect the Environment

Having considered the need to protect the environment, NRW does not consider that any impacts of the Project on the environment (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) are sufficient on their own to justify refusal of the Variation Application.

4.2 The need to protect human health

NRW PS considers that the variation will have no further implications on human health. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence.

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4.3 The need to prevent interference with legitimate uses of the sea

Legitimate uses of the sea include (but are not limited to): navigation (including taking any steps for the purpose of navigational safety); fishing; mineral extraction; and amenity use. NRW consulted with Milford Haven Port Authority on the variation. No comments were made. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence.

4.4 Marine Policy Documents

(a) The Legal framework

NRW is required to take its decision in accordance with the appropriate marine policy documents unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise.

UK Marine Policy Statement 2011 (MPS)

The MPS is the framework for preparing Marine Plans and taking decisions affecting the marine environment.

Welsh National Marine Plan (WNMP)

The WMNP is the Marine Plan for the Welsh inshore region and the Welsh offshore region and sets out the Welsh Government's policies for and in connection with the sustainable development of this area.

(b) Our determination

UK Marine Policy Statement 2011

This decision has been taken in accordance with marine policy as set out in the UK Marine Policy Statement 2011. NRW PS considers that the variation will have not result in any changes to this assessment. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence.

Welsh National Marine Plan

This decision has been taken in accordance with marine policy as set out in the Welsh National Marine Plan. NRW PS considers that the variation will have not result in any changes to this assessment. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence.

4.5 Other matters NRW thinks relevant

4.5.1 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

(a) The legal framework

In making its decision, NRW is required to take all reasonable steps to meet its published well-being objectives, which are designed to maximise NRW's contribution to achieving each of the well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. NRW must also act in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

(b) Our determination

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NRW has taken into account its well-being objectives and is satisfied that its decision is consistent with meeting those objectives.

NRW is also satisfied that its decision is consistent with the sustainable development principle i.e. seeking to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

NRW PS considers that the variation will have not result in any changes to this assessment. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence..

4.5.2 Sustainable management of natural resources**(a) The legal framework**

NRW's general purpose is to pursue the sustainable management of natural resources in relation to Wales and applying the principles of sustainable management of natural resources as set out in section 4 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 so far as consistent with the proper exercise of its functions.

(b) Our determination

NRW is satisfied that this decision, when implemented in accordance with the attached conditions, is consistent with its general purpose of pursuing the sustainable management of natural resources in relation to Wales, and applying the principles of sustainable management of natural resources.

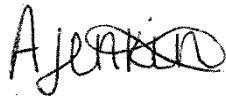
NRW PS considers that the variation will have not result in any changes to this assessment. Please refer to CML1944 Decision Document for conclusions on any other matters relevant to the determination of this licence..

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on all the information available, and having regard to all relevant considerations including consultation responses, NRW's decision is to grant the variation to the Existing Marine Licence sought by the Variation Application. We have reached this decision having had regard to the relevant legal framework outlined in section 4 and have also explained in section 4 how each of the legal requirements have been considered. NRW has determined that a Marine Licence for the Proposed Activities should be granted.

Conditions have been attached to the Marine Licence as set out in Annex 1. The reason for the inclusion of each condition is set out with the conditions.

AUTHORISATION

Report by: Abbie Jenkins Position: Permitting Officer	Date: 18 April 2023	Signed: 
Authorised by: Emmer Litt Position: Permitting Team Leader	Date: 20 April 2023	Signed: 

ANNEX 1

Additional conditions imposed or modified to be in line with current marine licence and reasons for those conditions Section 1 includes updates to the change in methodology and the addition to new variation documents. Condition 8.3 changed due to updated contact details.

1. Particulars of the works

- 1.2 Details of the works requiring the deposit of the substances or articles as specified at paragraph 1.1 of this Schedule are:-

The deposit of 20,000 seagrass seeds using a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) and deposit of 800 hessian bags containing sand consisting of the use of a planting plate using an excavator arm on a barge.

The deposit and subsequent removal of marker buoys

200 hessian fibre rope

- 1.3. Such works are as detailed in the drawing(s) and sectional plan(s) detailed below which were submitted in support of the Licence Holder's application to NRW acting on behalf of the Licensing Authority dated **28 March 2023**

Drawing reference:

CML1944-V01 Variation Form

CML1944V01-Change request form

- 1.4. The substances or articles authorised for deposit and removal at sea are:

Deposit:

20,000 seagrass seeds

Seagrass seeds

Maximum of 800 Hessian bags

Sand

Clay

Maximum of 200 Biodegradable ropes

Marker Buoys

Removal:

Marker Buoys

- 1.6. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the works schedule and method statement as detailed in the application form dated **14 October 2019 and 28 March 2023**, and as detailed in the following:

6 (a) Project Description (cont) (Dated: 14 October 2019)

UPDATED 7 (a) Method Statement (cont) (Dated: 14 January 2020)

Biosecurity assessment (Dated: 14 October 2019)

CML1944-V01-Change request form (Dated: 23 March 2023)

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8. Project Specific Conditions

- 8.3 The Licence Holder must ensure that HM Coastguard is made aware of the works prior to commencement by contacting The National Maritime Operations Centre: zone28@hmcg.gov.uk.