MEETING DOCUMENT

**Task Group Management (TG-M 22-3)**

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Online

**Agenda Item: 7. Renewable Energy**

**Subject: DRAFT Progress report to TG-M**

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**Submitted by: CWSS/ad hoc Working Group Cables and Pipelines**

This document contains a draft progress report of the Ad hoc working group ‘Cables and Pipelines’ to update the TG-M members about the deviation from the deliverables and presents a draft proposal for a new approach.

**Proposal:**

The meeting is invited to approve the new approach and the next steps forwards as outlined.

DRAFT Progress report to TG-M

1. Outcome of the tender process

The ad-hoc group that was established under TG-M met several times to prepare a tender “Ecosystem approach on grid connection for offshore wind farms “with the aim to tackle two deliverables as indicated in the ToR of the group: 1) overview report on best knowledge available with regard to the Wadden Sea and 2) organization of a trilateral stakeholder workshop. First results were intended to be presented at WSB 37. As the CWSS received no offers within the timeline given, the group met and discussed an alternate way forward, especially in view of the recent developments such as the outcome of the meeting of the prime ministers of DK, DE, NL, BE on 18th of May in Esbjerg and their ambitions for renewable energies in the North Sea.

1. Proposal for new approach

The group proposes to deviate from the deliverables in such a way as to broaden the topic and apply for a project under the roof of Interreg North Sea.

Due to its geographical location in the southern North Sea between the areas of offshore renewable energy production offshore and the main consumption centres in the inland, the trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation Area is a crossing and landing area for high-voltage subsea cable systems and gas pipelines intended to transport energy, with an accelerating growing trend towards 2030 and beyond.

The Wadden Sea, as well as other soft coasts e.g. in Belgium or the UK, will face a challenge where supporting the decarbonization of the energy sector is needed in order to resolve climate change and protect the nature and enhance its resilience while intensive industrialization of the area due to development of grid connections can threaten the same nature values.

At this point decisions and actions in the different countries are aligned to a limited extend. An INTERREG Project should lead to an integrative approach safeguarding and strengthening the nature values of soft coasts while supporting the grid development at the North Sea. This should also contribute to involving the people living and working in the coastal regions who depend on these natural values as ecosystem services.

Project Objectives under the aimed call 5.3 INTERREG North Sea Region:

Following objectives are foreseen:

1. Effects: A comprehensive view on actual effects of grid connections on soft coasts, including studying effects from pre-laying monitoring, effect monitoring and additional studies.

2. Mitigation: Overview and implementation of standards, best practices and potential measures in avoiding and reducing effects of cable laying, operation, maintenance and removal, including small innovative demonstration projects (e.g. disturbance of seagrass beds, heat emission, etc.).

3. Compensation: Development of functional compensation projects and their pooling based on lessons learned in compensation projects at soft coasts and future proof with spatial and functional relation (e.g. compensation project can serve as building block for compensating the cumulative effects of additional grid connections).

4. Stakeholder participation: Stakeholders will be involved for lessons learned on effects/mitigation. Compensation project development will be executed with participation of stakeholders (such as fisheries, energy companies, farmers, inhabitants, etc.).

5. Governance and planning: Tools to accelerate spatial planning and approval procedures that ensure adequate implementation of EU environmental directives and recognition of protected status. The role of the TWSC in this process in this context is further elaborated, while taking into account an integrated approach and dialogue processes.

Target Groups/partners to be approached/included:

* Industry, such as TenneT as TSO, who will be supervising the project development of grid connections.
* Governments, due to their role in both spatial planning and permitting procedures.
* Stakeholders, such as fisheries, tourism, green NGOs and farmers who can play a role in studying effects and contribute to developing compensation projects and compensation pools which can also be of a greater spatial extent.
* Universities, due to applying the latest knowledge in studying effects of cable laying and mitigation possibilities.

In addition to the members of the TWSC, other countries with similar geographical and natural conditions in the North Sea region as Belgium and the UK should also be included.

Consequences of “Expression of Interest”

The CWSS has a budget in order to ask for support for further development of an “Expression of Interest”.

When approved: preparation costs – €40,000 funded at a 50% rate paid to the Lead Beneficiary – cover the full preparation period from the time before approval, including time spent on preparing the EOI, and include costs such as the travel and staff costs involved in planning, meetings and writing the application. Preparation costs are granted only to those projects approved for implementation. Costs will be reimbursed as part of the first regular project payment. It is expected that this can be covered by the supplementary budget for CWSS.

When implemented, efforts of all partners will be expected. But this will be worked out in the next phase.

1. Next steps

The ad hoc group needs the agreement of TG-M to proceed further, which means that the funds available from the supplementary budget can be used to prepare an Expression of Interest until November 2022. After consent of TG-M, the WSB needs to be approached to give their approval in a written procedure.

The ad hoc group will then convene to approach qualified consultants to form a project partner consortium with knowledge about the application process as well as the content of the project.