P626 Donich Water

Clarification Note – Ecology

The effects of the proposed Donich Water hydroelectric scheme on the natural environment are outlined in the Supporting Environmental Information (SEI), submitted to the Planning Authority as part of the planning application. However, more information has been requested on a number of aspects of the scheme and this information is presented below.

1. Ornithology – Buzzard & Sparrowhawk

LLTNP requested more detail on the location of buzzard/sparrowhawk nests in close proximity to the pipeline. However, no buzzard or sparrowhawk nests were identified within c.200m of the pipeline route therefore the mitigation is based on the assumption that they could potentially be nesting along the pipeline. These two species are acknowledged to have foraging territories that overlap or are likely to overlap with the wider survey zone of a 1km+ buffer of the works.

The only record was of a buzzard in flight with no behavioural context to identify if it was close to a nest (as shown in Figure. 1 of the report). For clarification, Figure 1 is an indicative map of birds holding breeding territories in the summer and should not be interpreted as an absolute indication of single nests.

For sparrowhawk, there could potentially be between 2-6 nests in the wider forest block (as advised on a precautionary basis). Therefore, signs that there was definitely **not** a nest in close proximity to the penstock were looked for in 2012. Advice is subsequently based on mitigation following pre-construction confirmation and supervision if they were to move into close proximity of the pipeline in 2014/2015.

2. Fish

There were a number of concerns raised by the community regarding the impact of the hydro scheme on migratory fish in the Donich Water. On further inspection, it was brought to our attention that there was an error in the Fish Habitat report regarding the grid references of obstacles to fish migration. The Argyll Fisheries Trust has corrected this error and the report has been revised. For clarification, a summary of the existing habitat at Donich Water is provided below:

There is a potential barrier to migration approximately 100m upstream of the tailrace and a more likely impassable barrier a further 60m above this. The electric fishing has been commissioned and the results of this will help to establish whether the potential barrier can be passed by migratory fish under certain flow conditions. However, the proposed development will affect only 0.16km length of accessible habitat in the Donich Water, which equates to just 2.5% of accessible habitat in the River Goil catchment.

Between the impassable fall and the confluence with the River Goil, there are sufficient habitat resources (adult pools, spawning and juvenile habitat) to support salmonid fish in this reach of the river. However, the majority of optimal spawning and adult pool habitat occurs downstream the proposed tailrace position and the confluence with the River Goil, as there is high obstacle frequency above the tailrace. The 1:10,000 map showing the obstacles to fish and the spawning areas is attached (Drawing No. P626 10113 Fish Habitats).

Moreover, an upper powerhouse position was considered that is closer to the suspected limit of migration. However, the option is less preferred due to access difficulties (the location is quite tight) and difficulties getting the pipe down to the powerhouse (negotiating the Scottish Water infrastructure). This position would also result in a greater loss of trees and a loss of head.

3. Bats

Please refer to the document *Bat Survey – Trees at Glenbranter and Lochgoilhead.* The aim of the 2013 survey was to pinpoint specific trees that have been previously identified as 'with bat roost potential' and assess whether any signs of bats were present or if any licences are required.

A single mature Sycamore tree (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) near the proposed powerhouse (NN 20399 02114) was identified in a survey in September 2012 as having bat roost potential. A visual inspection of this tree in September 2013 revealed that the Sycamore did not have any visible features that could be used by bats and was given a BCT Category 3. No further survey is required for this tree, which will be unaffected by construction.

4. Red Squirrels

It is acknowledged that there are more red squirrel dreys on the site than were identified by the protected mammal surveyor at the time of his survey. However, it is perhaps unsurprising that someone familiar with the site and who has an interest in the species might know of certain dreys where the surveyor may have missed them.

Pre-construction surveys will be carried out by a qualified ecologist, prior to any works taking place. The identification of the dreys by the resident in question is useful and this information will be used by the ecologist to check the status of these sites.

Appropriate mitigation measures are described in the report, should any dreys need to be removed.

5. Trees

All areas of FCS conifer removal are identified in the Tree Plan (drawing no. P626 10111), which was submitted as part of the planning application. Please refer to drawing no. P626 10116 for a plan of trees be removed or retained at the powerhouse.

In order to avoid the spruce trees located south of the powerhouse, the tailrace has been routed along the existing access track. Although the tailrace pipe trench would overlap with the Root Protection Areas of these spruce trees in principle, the roots are likely to have a limited range due to probable disturbance from construction of the existing access track and Scottish Water Infrastructure.

As encroachment on these RPAs is unavoidable, it will be necessary to manually excavate the trench to a depth of approximately 0.5m and root-ball the roots to avoid damage. Mechanical excavation can then be used to dig the trench to the appropriate depth, taking care to avoid the Scottish Water infrastructure that also runs along the access track.