

www.gov.uk/naturalengland

Request for Quotation

##

Request for Quotation

**Seabed Infrastructure on Sandbank MPAs: Assessing the impact on feature extent**

You are invited to submit a quotation for the requirement described in the specification below.

Please confirm, by email, receipt of these documents and whether you intend to submit a quote.

Your response should be returned to the following email address by:

Email: Mark.Johnston@naturalengland.org.uk

Date: 03 January 2023

Time: 12:00

Ensure you state the reference number and ‘Final Submission’ in the subject field to make it clear that it is your response.

**Contact Details and Timeline**

Mark Johnston will be your contact for any questions linked to the content of the quote pack or the process. Please submit any questions by email and note that, unless commercially sensitive, both the question and the response will be circulated to all tenderers.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Action | Date |
| Date of issue of RFQ | 29/11/2022 |
| Deadline for clarifications questions | 16/12/2022 |
| Deadline for receipt of Quotation | 03/01/2023 |
| Intended date of Contract Award | 09/01/2023 |
| Intended Contract Start Date | 16-01-2023 |
| Intended Delivery Date / Contract Duration  | 31/03/2023 |

### Glossary

Unless the context otherwise requires the following words and expressions used within this Request for Quotation shall have the following meanings (to be interpreted in the singular or plural as the context requires):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “Authority” | Means the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs acting as part of Natural England |
| “RFQ” | Means this Request for Quotation and all related documents published by the Authority and made available to suppliers |
| “Contract” | Means the contract to be entered into by the Authority and the successful supplier. |

### Conditions applying to the RFQ

You should examine your response to the RFQ and related documents ensuring it is complete prior to submitting your completed quotation.

Your quotation must contain sufficient information to enable the Authority to evaluate it fairly and effectively. You should ensure that you have prepared your quotation fully and accurately and that prices quoted are arithmetically correct for the units stated.

The supplier by submitting a quotation is deemed to accept the terms and conditions in the RFQ. Failure to comply with the instructions set out in the RTQ may result in the supplier’s exclusion from this procurement.

**Acceptance of Quotations**

By issuing this RFQ the Authority does not bind itself to accept any quotation and reserves the right not to award a contract to any supplier who submits a quotation.

#### Costs

The Authority will not reimburse you for any costs and expenses which you incur preparing and submitting your quotation, even if the Authority amends or terminates the procurement process.

#### Mandatory Requirements

The RFQ includes mandatory requirements and, if you do not comply with them, your quotation will not be evaluated. All mandatory requirements are set out in Bravo.

#### Clarifications

The Authority reserves the right to discuss, confidentially, any aspect of your quotation with you prior to any award of Contract to clarify matters.

#### Amendments

The Authority may amend the RFQ at any time prior to the deadline for receipt. If it amends the RFQ the Authority will notify you in writing and may extend the deadline for receipt in order to give you a reasonable time in which to take the amendment into account.

#### Conditions of Contract

The terms and conditions attached Condensed Terms and Conditions https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england/about/procurement will be included in any contract awarded as a result of this RFQ process. The Authority will not accept any material changes to these terms and conditions proposed by a supplier.

# Specification

The Authority is Natural England. The Authority’s priorities are to secure a healthy natural environment; a sustainable, low-carbon economy; a thriving farming sector and a sustainable, healthy and secure food supply. Further information about the Authority can be found at: [Natural England](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/)

**Project Proposal:**

The project will make recommendations which can be used by Natural England in our MPA site condition assessments. Specifically in relation to how we should best consider impacts from deposited rocky substrate on sandbank extent and distribution. These recommendations will take two forms:

1. They will directly help inform the decision-making process which underpins the condition assessment
2. They will direct what work and future projects need to be undertaken to better understand the impacts of rocky substrate on sandbank integrity.

**Project Need:**

Seabed rock protection deposited by energy infrastructure in sandbank MPAs is a major issue. It is a reason why several SACs are in unfavourable condition, it is a reason why several offshore wind projects have required government derogation and is driving a large strategic habitat compensation programme, it is also an important factor controlling where offshore wind farms are built. Yet there is significant uncertainty regarding how rock protection impacts the ecology of sandbank habitats.

**Requirement in more detail:**

When undertaking the condition assessment Natural England will need to consider the following tests

1. **Does the area of rock placement in the site represent a loss in the extent or distribution of sandbank habitat?**
2. **Is the change in extent and distribution of sandbank habitat (caused by the introduced rocky substrate) significant enough that the integrity of the protected site is adversely affected?**

To help us address these tests we are seeking your views on the following questions. Using various types of literature and research in addition to your expert understanding of marine ecological process we would like you to try and answer these questions as far you feel it is possible. Following this we would like your view on what information we should be planning to obtain and what type of analysis could be undertaken to achieve a more comprehensive answer to these questions.

**Questions**

*Test: Does the area of rock placement in the site represent a loss in the extent of sandbank habitat?*

**Q1** What qualities and functionality of a sandbank habitat are likely to be lost by the covering of soft sediment with rocky substrate? What species, life stages and ecological resources i.e. feeding or shelter could be lost?

**Q2** Would any species or resources associated with the sandbank continue to be found in the area covered by rocky substrate e.g. fish, mobile epifauna such as amphipods, burrowing polychaetes? Are there lessons to be learnt from studies of where rocky substrate has been placed on intertidal or near shore soft sediment (where it is easier to study)?

*Test: Is the change in extent and distribution of sandbank habitat (caused by the introduced rocky substrate) significant enough that the integrity of the protected site is adversely affected?*

**Q3** Could some level deposition of rocky substrate occur on a sandbank habitat **without** causing a significant change in population structure, ecological or physical structure of the sandbank?

*If the answer is Yes please answer the following questions:*

**Q4** Sandbank SACs are very large sites and the sandbank feature cover 100s or 1000s of square kilometres. The introduced rocky substrate whilst being locally extensive e.g. 100000s square meters makes up a very small proportion of this feature due to the sheer size of the site/feature e.g. >0.1%. What could be a logical way of assessing ecological impacts at these scales? Are there lessons that can be learnt from other areas of ecology where proportionally small effects on large habitats have been studied?

**Q5** Could there be parts of a sandbank where a loss or change in seabed habitat would have a greater or lesser effect on the ecology of the sandbank? For example should we consider how much of a particular seabed type is present in the site, whether some communities are spatially limited, whether some parts of the site have particularly high biodiversity or functional value, for example the troughs often have higher biodiversity and the slopes are often important fish feeding areas for fish and demersal species during tidal flows.

**Project Deliverables**

A final report outlining a response to each questions including results from scientific literature, scientific rational and professional opinion. Followed by recommendations for what research project works should be undertaken to each question in the future.

# Background and Context to project:

Marine sandbanks are an important part of the ecology of the UK continental shelf. As such several sandbank systems are protected by SACs. These sites have been and continue to be subject to offshore energy infrastructure development, namely hydrocarbons and offshore wind. Critically these industries have and continue to, deposit large quantities of rock and concrete onto the seabed within these sites e.g. for the purposes of scour protection.

At a workshop run by Natural England and JNCC in 2020 which brought together experts on marine infrastructure and sand bank ecology there was agreement that some level of seabed change through rock and concrete would adversely affect the structure and function of sandbank sites. However, there was also agreement that these sites could accommodate some level of seabed change without having significant adverse effects on the structure and function. There was however no agreement on what magnitude of change could result in such an adverse effect on site condition.

In absence of information outlining the impacts of rock protection on large sandbank sites a relatively precautionary approach was necessarily adopted and the condition of several sandbank MPAs has been determined as unfavourable due to the presence of seabed infrastructure. In addition, several habitats regulations assessments for national infrastructure developments have concluded that the levels of seabed change in some sites, due to rock deposited by infrastructure, are large enough to cause adverse effects on their ecological integrity.

**The issue:**

Uncertainty stems from the fact that sandbank sites and their features are extremely large and the structure and function of these sandbank sites is dependent upon physical and biological process occurring over large areas. The area of seabed change from infrastructure when considered as a proportion of the site/feature is extremely small e.g. often affecting less than 0.1% of the feature. Locally however the scale of seabed change can be significant with 10s or 100s of thousands of square meters of rock and concrete being deposited. For example in the Race bank, Inner Dowsing and North Ridge SAC the proportion of sandbank feature covered by rock/concrete is approximately 0.03% which appears tiny but this equates to approximately 76000 square meters, which is a large area.

The level of offshore energy development proposed by the British Energy Security Strategy will result in significant amounts of rock and concrete being placed on the seabed for many years to come. The risks of making the wrong decisions are significant, if we underestimate the impact of seabed change there could lasting damage to our sandbank ecosystems and their associated marine life. Conversely, if we overestimate the effects there could be unnecessary impediments on offshore infrastructure and energy security.

It is anticipated that this contract once awarded will end no later than 31/03/2023 Prices will remain fixed for the duration of the contract award period. We may at our sole discretion extend this contract to include related or further work. Any extension shall be agreed in advance of any work commencing and may be subject to further competition.

**Prices**

Prices must be submitted in £ sterling, inclusive of VAT.

**Quotation Submission**

In order to evaluate proposals we will need to see:

* Evidence that you have strong experience and acknowledged expertise in the study of UK benthic habitats and their interactions with other elements of the marine ecosystem and foodwebs
* Evidence of your expertise in assessing and studying the effects of human induced changes on the physical attributes of marine habitats
* Evidence you understand the offshore energy sector and UK marine protected areas
* An initial review of the questions showing you understand the issues and have a plan of how you will approach the answers.

We will need to see who will be working on the project, evidence of past work, papers etc which displays this expertise.

We will as need to see a brief synopsis of your views to the topics/questions, approach to answering the questions and likely resources that you will call upon

We will award this contract in line with the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) as set out in the following award criteria:

Price – 50%

Quality – 50%

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Quality Criteria | weighting |
| **Staff Expertise** |  50 |
| **Outline understanding of the issues and initial views** |  50 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Justification** |
| For a score of hundred (100):   | Excellent - Response is completely relevant and excellent overall.  The response is comprehensive, unambiguous and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the requirement and provides details of how the requirement will be met in full. |
| For a score of seventy (70):   | Good - Response is relevant and good.  The response demonstrates a good understanding and provides details on how the requirements will be fulfilled.  |
| For a score of fifty (50):   | Acceptable - Response is relevant and acceptable.  The response provides sufficient evidence to fulfil basic requirements. |
| For a score of twenty (20):   | Poor - Response is partially relevant and/or poor.  The response addresses some elements of the requirements but contains insufficient / limited detail or explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled. |
| For a score of zero (0):   | Unacceptable - Nil or inadequate response.  Fails to demonstrate an ability to meet the requirement. |

**Contract Management**

This contract shall be managed on behalf of the Authority by Mark Johnston Principal Advisor: Offshore infrastructure. Mark.johnston@naturalengland.org.uk 02080262171

The project will be managed by a

* start up meeting
* monthly meetings
* a final meeting to discuss the produced report
* adhoc emails and phone calls to address questions or check lines of thought

We will raise purchase orders to cover the cost of the services and will issue to the awarded supplier following contract award.

### Disclosure

All Central Government Departments, their Executive Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies are subject to control and reporting within Government. In particular, they report to the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury for all expenditure. Further the Cabinet Office has a cross-Government role delivering overall Government policy on public procurement, including ensuring value for money and related aspects of good procurement practice.

For these purposes, the Authority may disclose within Government any details contained in your quotation. The information will not be disclosed outside Government during the procurement.

In addition, the Authority is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, which provide a public right of access to information held by public bodies. In accordance with these two statutes, the Authority may be required to disclose information contained in your quotation to any person who submits a request for information pursuant to those statutes.

By submitting a quotation you consent to these terms as part of the procurement.

### Disclaimers

Whilst the information in this RFQ and any supporting information referred to herein or provided to you by the Authority have been prepared in good faith the Authority does not warrant that this information is comprehensive or that it has been independently verified.

The Authority does not:

* make any representation or warranty (express or implied) as to the accuracy, reasonableness or completeness of the RFQ;
* accept any liability for the information contained in the RFQ or for the fairness, accuracy or completeness of that information; or
* accept any liability for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation or any other liability which cannot lawfully be excluded) arising as a result of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication.

Any supplier considering entering into contractual relationships with the Authority following receipt of the RFQ should make its own investigations and independent assessment of the Authority and its requirements for the goods and/or services and should seek its own professional financial and legal advice.

**Protection of Personal Data**

In order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 the contractor must agree to the following:

* You must only process any personal data in strict accordance with instructions from the Authority
* You must ensure that all the personal data that we disclose to you or you collect on our behalf under this agreement are kept confidential.
* You must take reasonable steps to ensure the reliability of employees who have access to personal data.
* Only employees who may be required to assist in meeting the obligations under this agreement may have access to the personal data.
* Any disclosure of personal data must be made in confidence and extend only so far as that which is specifically necessary for the purposes of this agreement.
* You must ensure that there are appropriate security measures in place to safeguard against any unauthorised access or unlawful processing or accidental loss, destruction or damage or disclosure of the personal data.
* On termination of this agreement, for whatever reason, the personal data must be returned to us promptly and safely, together with all copies in your possession or control.

**General Data Protection Regulations 2018**

For the purposes of the Regulations the Authority is the data processor.

The personal information that we have asked you provide on individuals (data subjects) that will be working for you on this contract will be used in compiling the tender list and in assessing your offer. If you are unsuccessful the information will be **held and destroyed within two years** of the award of contracts. If you are awarded a contract it will be retained for the duration of the contract and destroyed within **seven years** of the contract’s expiry.

We may monitor the performance of the individuals during the execution of the contract, and the results of our monitoring, together with the information that you have provided, will be used in determining what work is allocated under the contract, and in any renewal of the contract or in the award of future contracts of a similar nature. The information will not be disclosed to anyone outside the Authority without the consent of the data subject, unless the Authority is required by law to make such disclosures.