

# **Marine licencing supporting research, energy infrastructure, new maritime facility and seabed protection**

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**Recent marine licencing decisions are supporting acoustic research, unexploded ordnance investigations ahead of Sizewell C construction, a new quay wall for a maritime innovation centre, and a pioneering nature-inclusive seabed protection trial.**

## **University of Southampton to map underwater soundscape off East Wittering**

A marine licence has been granted to the University of Southampton for Project AIDA, an acoustic monitoring initiative designed to build a detailed picture of the underwater soundscape in the Solent, four kilometres from East Wittering.

The project involves the deployment of a small-scale hydrophone array mounted to the seafloor, accompanied by a surface marker buoy. The equipment will remain in place for up to 8 months, continuously recording ship traffic noise, biological noise and ambient noise, with regular pauses to allow for battery replacement and data collection.

The project follows growing scientific and regulatory concern about the impact of noise pollution on marine habitats. Recording noise levels and identifying their sources is essential for managing coastal regions and predicting how marine life responds to increasing human activity at sea.

A key ambition of Project AIDA is to use the data to train AI systems to automatically identify and distinguish between different ocean noise sources. Automating this process would significantly reduce the time spent on manual recording, freeing researchers to focus on how noise levels can be better managed.

If successful, the project could provide a valuable foundation for future noise management policy and marine planning decisions across England's coastline.

Portsmouth

## **UXO Investigations clear the way for Sizewell C nearshore infrastructure**

A marine licence has been granted to conduct potential unexploded ordnance (pUXO) investigations in the intertidal and nearshore off Sizewell Beach, Leiston, in preparation for construction of the new nuclear power station.

Metallic targets were identified through earlier surveys using a combination of remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), a submersible, and dive teams. Confirmed non-UXO debris was removed, while suspected UXO was left in place for removal under a separate marine licence application.

The investigations were required to support the construction of Sizewell C, including beach landing

jetties and several outfalls and intakes. Given that nearshore works were visible from the beach and works had the potential to interact with members of the public, safety was a central consideration throughout the licencing process.

The MMO engaged closely with the applicant, reviewing its own approaches to UXO clearance advice and considering the respective roles of Statutory Harbour Authorities and Local Planning Authorities.

Suspected UXO targets have now been identified for future removal, reducing risks to public and navigational safety. Once operational, Sizewell C will provide a significant and sustainable source of low-carbon energy for the UK.

## **Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre takes shape on the River Torridge**

Torridge District Council has been granted a marine licence for the construction of a new quay wall to support the Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre, a new facility being developed on a brownfield site on the banks of the River Torridge in Devon, due to open in 2026.

The centre will support innovation across a range of maritime disciplines including clean propulsion, maritime cyber security, aquaculture, autonomous vessels and environmental intelligence. The marine licence covered the construction of a 99-metre wall, built using 40 large-diameter steel tubes driven into the ground using a vibrating hammer (vibropiled). The wall has been designed to provide improved protection against flooding and rising sea levels over the coming decades.

MMO supported the applicant through a complex licencing process. When the applicant withdrew an earlier application in February 2024 to refine their design, the MMO ensured the case was reassigned to the same team when resubmitted in December 2024, reducing duplication and providing continuity for the applicant. The case team also undertook a rigorous evidence review to address potential environmental impacts on the Taw-Torridge Estuary SSSI, against the overriding public interest in flood protection.

The new quay wall incorporates additional ecological niches to encourage biodiversity along the wall's surface. The centre will engage with local schools, universities and researchers, and the improved quay wall will also help protect a nearby public slipway and national trail from the increasing risk of flooding.

## **Rampion Offshore Wind Farm trials nature-inclusive scour protection**

A marine licence has been granted to E.ON Climate & Renewables UK Limited to trial an innovative form of nature-inclusive scour protection at the Rampion Offshore Wind Farm off the Sussex coast.

Several turbines at the wind farm have experienced higher than predicted levels of seabed scouring. This is the erosion caused by tidal currents around turbine foundations. One turbine which saw approximately 2.5 metres of scour and has been selected as the site for a pioneering pilot project using Reef Enhanced Scour Protection (RESP), involving the installation of specially designed reef cubes around the turbine base.

Reef cubes will be used support biodiversity and ecosystem health. Their textured surface is designed to encourage settlement by marine organisms, and research has shown they can enhance

marine life and boost biodiversity in the surrounding area.

This is the first project of its kind to test whether reef cubes can provide sufficient scour protection at an offshore wind turbine. If successful, the approach could inform scour protection strategies across future offshore wind developments and provide new options for habitat compensation and mitigation in nationally significant infrastructure projects.

Fishing industries may also stand to benefit if the reef cubes increase populations of fish and crab species in the area.

The MMO case team worked proactively throughout the licencing process, anticipating likely concerns from consultees and seeking additional information on methodology and monitoring plans at an early stage to ensure all advisors were fully informed.

ARC Wind Farm Cubes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/marine-licencing-supporting-research-energy-infrastructure-new-maritime-facility-and-seabed-protection>