

Creag Dhubh to Dalmally 275kV Connection

Environmental Impact Assessment

Volume 4 | Appendix 11.2

Native Woodland Management Strategy

April 2022



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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Technical Appendix (TA) presents information relevant to the Creag Dhubh to Dalmally 275kV Connection. It should be read in conjunction with the **Volume 2 – EIA Report** specifically **Chapter 11: Forestry**, for full details of the Proposed Development.
- 1.1.2 Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (the Applicant) who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission), own, operate and develop the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and remote islands. Due to the growth in renewable electricity generation in the north and north-east of Scotland, upgrade of the transmission network is required in order to provide the necessary increase in transmission capacity.
- 1.1.3 The Applicant is proposing to apply for consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a 13.3 kilometre (km) double circuit 275 kV overhead line (OHL), supported by lattice steel towers between a proposed substation at Creag Dhubh to the existing Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) 275 kV OHL that runs from Dalmally to Inverarnan, near Succoth Glen, connecting via a Tie-In connection (the 'Proposed Development'). The location of the Proposed Development is shown in **Figure 1.1: Location Plan and Overview (EIAR Volume 3a)**.
- 1.1.4 This Native Woodland Management Plan sets out the methodology and process that will be followed to limit the removal of ancient and native woodland.
- 1.1.5 Areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland have been identified along the OHL route **Figure 6.1 and 11.4 (EIAR Volume 3a)** and a commitment has been given to further assess these areas in relation to the OHL design and safety requirements, to identify possible woodland/tree retentions.
- 1.1.6 Prior to felling within the native woodland/tree areas, further mitigation measures will be assessed to identify if further native woodland/tree retention is possible, where safe and practical within the OHL Operational Corridor (OC). During the assessment of further mitigation measures, emphasis will be placed on the native woodland/tree retention objective.
- 1.1.7 The Applicant Forestry Manager will co-ordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the OHL project team and relevant stakeholders.

2 Purpose of Woodland Report

- 2.1.1 As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, it was identified that the overhead line construction and the access tracks required to construct the Proposed Development would cross a number of woodland areas within private or state owned landholdings. The landholding property boundaries are identified in **Figure 11.1 (EIAR Volume 3a)**.
- 2.1.2 During the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, areas of ancient semi-natural woodland of native woodland classification affected by the Operational Corridor (OC) have been identified **Figure 6.1 and 11.4 (EIAR Volume 3a)**. A commitment has been included in the EIA Report to assess the possible mitigation measures that can be established to minimise the felling of these areas. Assessment and prescription of any tree felling mitigation measures such as retention, must ensure the safety during overhead line construction and that the subsequent operation and maintenance of the OHL is not compromised.
- 2.1.3 This report explains the management strategy that will be undertaken by the Applicant prior to and during the OHL construction phase, to assess what can be implemented to minimise the felling/removal of the Native Woodland areas within the new Operational Corridor (OC).

3 Legislation

- 3.1.1 The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 (ESQCR, 2002)¹ specify safety standards to protect the general public and consumers from danger of overhead electricity powerlines. These standards outline minimum safety clearances and the Distribution Network Operator's (DNO's) duty to maintain these safety clearances.
- 3.1.2 The regulations also contain requirements on quality and continuity of electricity supply to ensure an efficient and economic service to customers and consumers.
- 3.1.3 Further legislation arrived in 2006 with the ESQCR, 2006; Amendment², which extended the above duties of the DNO to make their overhead powerlines resilient to the effect of major storms. This includes reducing the risk of falling trees and branch wood of hitting the electricity network.
- 3.1.4 The result of this legislation is that the DNOs in addition to maintaining the vegetation to minimum safety clearances, now must seek to achieve further clearances for trees which may be affected by storm weather conditions.

4 Native Woodland Areas and Mitigation

- 4.1.1 The permanent loss of ancient semi-natural woodland areas as part of the Development has been mitigated by the appropriate assessment of these woodland/tree locations to ascertain the safe OC width required **Figure 11.4 Forestry Project Felling Maps (EIAR Volume 3a)**. An OC width of 60 m has been identified, achieving a reduced OC, in comparison to the required 85 m OC width that has been identified through areas of commercial conifer woodland.
- 4.1.2 Prior to the Development construction phase all areas of ancient semi-natural woodland will be further assessed for selective felling to identify if greater tree retentions can be achieved.
- 4.1.3 The temporary diversion, required as part of the ancillary works to facilitate the SPEN Tie in connection to YW17R (T48), requires a minimum safety clearance distance of 80 m (40 m either side of the temporary diversion centreline). Trees will also need to be cleared between the existing SPEN YW Route between YW17 and YW19 to swing the conductors over to the temporary diversion. However, the open habitats in this location, may allow for micro-siting the temporary diversion infrastructure to avoid or reduce tree loss or disturbance to sensitive ground flora.
- 4.1.4 The Development impacts a current combined total area of 12.62 ha of native woodland, **Figure 6.1 and 11.4 (EIAR Volume 3a)**.
- 4.1.5 The identified woodland categories are:
- Ancient semi-natural native broadleaved woodland - 12.62 ha
 - Native broadleaved plantation woodland - 0.36 ha
- 4.1.6 Considering the native tree species relevant to the Development
- Certain native tree species such as Willow, Hazel and Alder usually coppice well, although success can be limited if large numbers of deer are present due to browsing and this should also be considered.

¹ Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 (ESQCR, 2002) URL: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2665/contents/made.

² Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity (Amendment) Regulations 2006 (ESQCR, 2006) URL: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1521/made.

- The growth heights and structure of the native tree species Oak, Birch, bring an increased risk to overhead powerline safety. Generally, Oak is quite windfirm, dependent on ground conditions and tree health. Crown reduction is often possible, whilst maintaining a healthy tree.
- Rather than a blanket approach to fell all native trees within the OC, surveys will be conducted to identify possible greater tree retention. Tree pruning to reduce crown height will also be considered where appropriate and dependent on tree species, it is generally accepted that tree species such as Birch, Aspen, Scots Pine are not easily reduced aesthetically.

5 Construction Requirements and Native Woodland Survey

5.1.1 The construction phase of the Development requires various work zones of differing area dimensions to be devoid of tree and shrub vegetation to allow the safe access and undertaking of the construction works and provide the necessary land area to install the Development project infrastructure.

5.1.2 The work zone categories are:

- Upgrading of existing access track corridors with passing places.
- New build access track corridors with passing places.
- Tower build worksite compounds.
- Conductor winches worksite compounds.
- Overhead line conductor wiring corridor.
- Sub-station worksite compounds.
- Operational Corridor worksite zone.

5.1.3 Prior to tree felling operations assessments will be conducted and documented of the native woodland/tree areas **Figure 6.1 and 11.4 (EIAR Volume 3a)** in relation to the construction phase works. Tree health, quality and habitat will be visually surveyed and risk assessed in relation to the construction works and OHL dimensions. Where possible further mitigation measures will be identified in the effort to achieve greater native woodland retention.

5.1.4 The assessment of mitigation measures will include:

- The minor re-routing within project parameters of new access track builds, to avoid the felling of mature native tree species where possible.
- Identify the minimal requirements/width of the OHL wiring corridor and review work methods in relation to maximising native woodland retentions.
- The assessment of new build OHL heights across native woodland areas, to identify possible tree/woodland retentions and minimise tree felling through tree pruning and crown reduction where suitable.

6 Conclusion

6.1.1 The implementation of the management items as detailed in this report, will allow a balanced and practical approach to identifying further suitable mitigation measures in relation to native tree/woodland retention and the OHL construction, operation and maintenance.

6.1.2 Following completion of the Development project, a set of plans will be produced and submitted to the Scottish Ministers. These plans will show the areas of ancient semi-natural and native woodland locations of the OC and detail any areas of greater woodland/tree retention that may have been achieved, with those areas that have been retained clearly delineated.