



Government of the Netherlands

Partial Revision of the North Sea Programme 2022-2027 Summary of the Draft Memorandum on Scope and Level of Detail and Participation Plan

This is a summary of the Draft Memorandum on Scope and Level of Detail (NRD) on the Partial Revision of the North Sea Programme and of the public participation plan for this process. The North Sea Programme is part of the National Water Programme of the Netherlands, containing the North Sea policy and the Marine Spatial Plan. This summary aims to facilitate the public inspection of said documents, particularly by parties outside the Netherlands that may have an interest in the Partial Revision.

Introduction

On 18 March 2022 the Dutch government approved the North Sea Programme 2022-2027 as an independent annexe to the National Water Programme and subsequently presented it to the House of Representatives.¹ Among other things the North Sea Programme designates offshore wind farm zones that provide space for the development of wind farms up to and including 2030/31. To ensure the continuity of offshore wind energy, the North Sea Programme stated that a Partial Revision would be necessary, designating offshore wind farm zones to be developed after 2031.

The process of policy preparation for the Partial Revision has now begun. It is envisaged that the government will arrive at a draft decision on the Partial Revision in the first quarter of 2025, with a final decision being made in September 2025. The first formal step in this process is the laying down of a draft Memorandum on Scope and Level of Detail (NRD) and a participation plan. The NRD describes the notification of intent to draft a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and how it is envisaged to be carried out. The participation plan describes how stakeholders and interested parties will be able to participate in the process. This document summarises both the NRD and the participation plan.

Below, we first set out which topics we intend to include in the Partial Revision, and which of those topics will be considered in the SEA. Next, the spatial planning decision-making process, the methodology of the environmental assessment and its level of detail are described for the two subjects that are included in the SEA. The public participation process for the Partial Revision, in particular with regard to parties and stakeholders outside the Netherlands, is then outlined. Lastly, a timeframe of the overall process is given.

Notification of intent

The Partial Revision deals with policy adjustments on issues that cannot wait until a new North Sea Programme for the 2028-2033 period is drafted. These are:

- a) Offshore wind energy areas and shipping routes in their vicinity
- b) Sand extraction
- c) Co-use within offshore wind farms
- d) Text update Sustainable Blue Economy program Borkum Reef Grounds boundary adjustment
- e) MSF designation for the southern part of the Dogger Bank
- f) Protection of North Sea infrastructure
- g) Possible adjustments in the process to optimally align mining activities and offshore wind farms
- h) Cables and pipelines in safety buffer zone for shipping
- i) Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI)
- j) Description of the spatial importance for fisheries in the North Sea Programme

In the Partial Revision, decisions are foreseen on the designation of offshore wind farm zones, the location of shipping routes in their vicinity and on expanding spatial reservations for sand extraction. The type of decisions to be made is explained below, as well as the areas to be considered. For cables and pipelines in safety buffer zones for shipping, generic spatial conditions will be included in the Partial Revision. The other adjustments in the Partial Revision concern textual corrections and updates or process-related agreements, such as what specific interests need to be considered in licensing procedures, and the way that needs to be done. Only policy adjustments with possible environmental or spatial effects will be considered in the SEA. The table below briefly summarizes per topic the intended policy adjustments and also presents conclusions about the need to consider the topic in the SEA.

¹ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 2021/22, 35325, no. 5, annexe blg-1022234.

Table 1 Overview of topics in the Partial Revision and whether they will be included in the SEA

Topic in Partial Revision	Included in SEA?	Summary of intended policy adjustment
Offshore wind farm zones and shipping routes in the vicinity and clearways	Yes	Designation of offshore wind farm zones and indicating the location of shipping routes in the vicinity and clearways (no formal decision). Based on the SEA recommendations can be given on aspects that should be considered in more detail in an area-based plan for area 6/7.
Sand extraction	Yes	Extend spatial reservation for sand extraction (this will be considered in the SEA). Furthermore, in the PH the Assessment framework on using reserved sand extraction areas will be corrected, and recommendations will be given on action points ahead for a revised sand extraction strategy.
Co-use within offshore wind farms	No	Make process-related agreements aimed at optimising possibilities for co-use within offshore wind farms
Borkum Reef Grounds boundary adjustment	No	In the North Sea Programme the total area of the Borkum Reef Grounds is set at 683km ² . Its boundaries are given correctly in Part III of the Marine Strategy (MS3, an appendix to the North Sea Programme), but the stated size of 653km ² is incorrect. The Partial Revision will correct this to 683km ² .
MSF designation for the southern part of the Dogger Bank	No	It concerns the protection of the southern part of the Dogger Bank within the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The conservation measures stay the same, as described earlier in the North Sea Programme 2022 - 2027.
Possible adjustments in the process to optimally align mining activities and offshore wind farms	No	Possible change in process steps and policy instruments in order to optimally align mining activities and offshore wind farms
Agreements on cables and pipelines in safety buffer zones for shipping in the vicinity of offshore wind farm zones	No	These are generic agreements on the permitted uses in safety buffer zones for shipping; the specific location of cables and pipelines for bringing offshore wind energy ashore are determined in the PVAWOZ and PAWOZ-Eemshaven. ²

Topic in Partial Revision	Included in SEA?	Summary of intended policy adjustment
Sustainable blue economy	No	Update of the text of the Programme aiming at a sustainable blue economy
Protection of North Sea infrastructure	No	Possible textual changes based on the letter to parliament on this subject ³ , no implications for spatial planning or the environment
Greater North Sea Basin Initiative	No	Textual changes giving insight into progress with the initiative and associated action points
Description of the spatial importance of fisheries	No	Describe and specify considerations for sustainable fisheries (as is identified as a national interest in the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI)) for of future spatial planning

² Programme for new shore landings connections for offshore wind energy (PVAWOZ) and the Programme for shore landing of offshore wind power (PAWOZ) at Eemshaven.

³ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 2022/23, 33450, no. 118

Offshore wind power and shipping routes in the vicinity and clearways

Scope: objective, areas, time horizon

The objective of the Partial Revision as regards offshore wind energy is to designate areas that will together contain space for a capacity of at least 23-26GW. The SEA will examine the ecological effects of this objective and its consequences for other uses in the North Sea, which will be presented in text and maps after summer 2024.

Figure 1 shows the areas to be considered, namely, search area 6/7, part of the Doordewind and Doordewind (west) areas, and Lagelander. Lagelander will be considered as a fallback option as it is a valuable fishing ground. These areas are slightly different from what was previously agreed⁴: in the Partial Revision, part of Doordewind will be considered instead of Nederwiek (north, parcel III). This is due to the speed at which the shore landing from Doordewind can be built, and because of the importance of an energy connection between Nederwiek (north, parcel III) and the United Kingdom. This means Nederwiek (north, parcel III) will be developed sooner and will be included in the implementation of the Supplementary Roadmap Offshore Wind Energy 2030 (ARK 2030). As a result, part of Doordewind will be considered in the Partial Revision while Nederwiek (north, parcel III) will be developed under the ARK 2030.

The largest share of the required space for wind energy will have to be found in search area 6/7. In view of the area's size, the need to keep parts of it open and the lingering uncertainties about this, an area-based plan will be drafted for area 6/7, partly in parallel with the Partial Revision. Detailed information needed to make zoning decisions is not expected to be available until after a decision has been made on the Partial Revision. However, the decision made in the Partial Revision should offer a sufficient basis for energy infrastructure investment decisions and for the first series of wind farm site decisions after 2031. The Partial Revision will therefore propose a decision designating the entire area for a specific energy generation capacity, with a concrete delineation of the sub-area where the first series of wind farm site decisions will be made, thus providing clarity about the infrastructure required for bringing the energy to shore. A decision on the spatial plan for the rest of area 6/7 can then be laid down in the area-based plan. The Partial Revision should identify which spatial tensions and opportunities in the remaining sub-area need to be elaborated and assessed further.

Spatial planning decisions on shipping routes

Ships cannot pass through offshore wind farm zones, thus limiting their navigable space. Ships therefore need to use routes that were previously unnecessary or did not exist. The delineation of offshore wind farm zones can thus have major implications for shipping – requiring existing routes to be shifted or new ones to be planned. Conversely, current or projected shipping routes can influence the delineation of offshore wind farm zones. This means a cohesive planning approach is required. Clearways are obstacle-free, recognised sea lanes essential for navigation for which international routeing measures are not required. They are laid down in national law, in an order under the Environment and Planning Act, and not in the Partial Revision. Should supplementary international routeing measures be required, then these will be laid down by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The map in Figure 1 shows the current and future shipping routes and clearways concerned. This ties in with previous agreements made within central government and referred to in the aforementioned letter to parliament³. The locations of routes and clearways should tie in with German and Danish spatial plans. This issue therefore needs to be coordinated closely with our neighbours.

⁴ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 2021/2022, 33561, no. 54

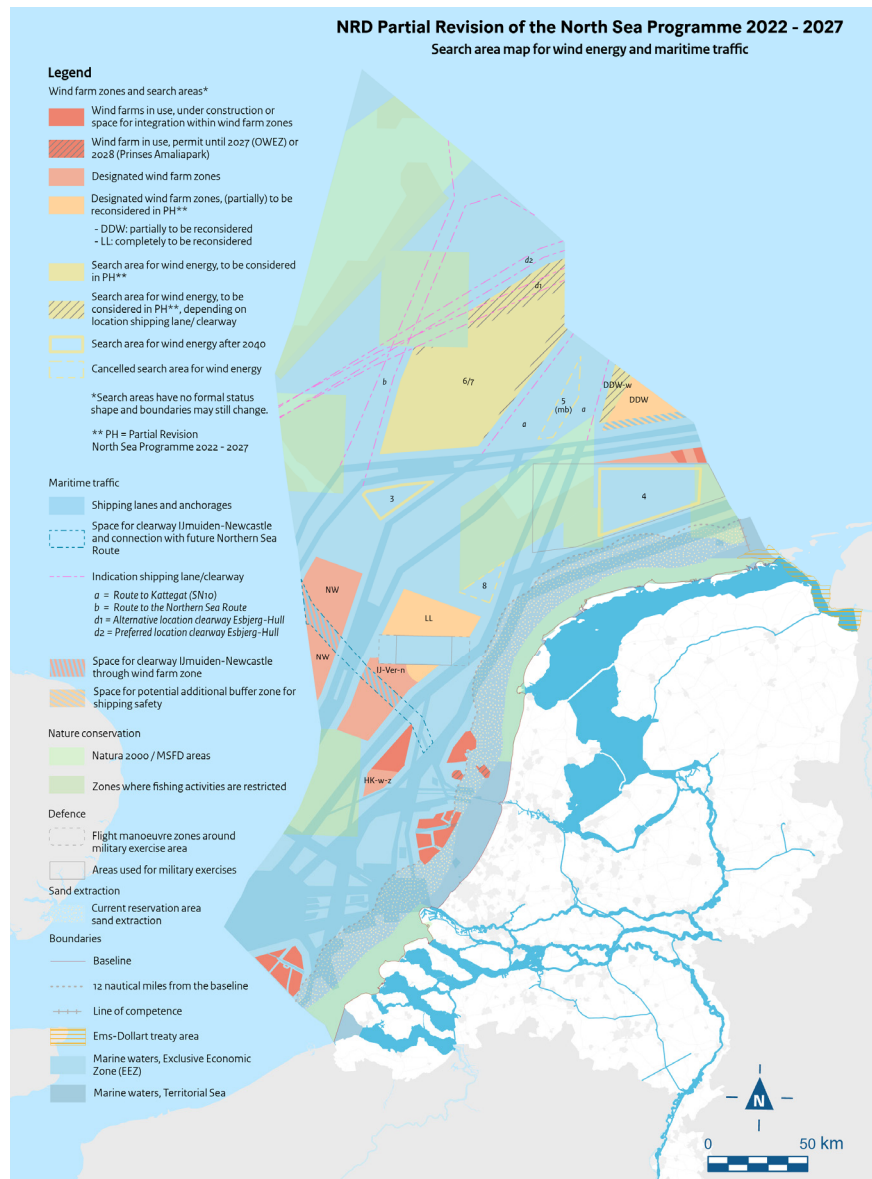


Figure 1 Map of search areas for wind energy and maritime traffic

Level of detail of the SEA

The SEA will aim to determine a minimum and maximum capacity for each area to be considered. This range will be compared with the scenario in which only the ARK 2030 would be implemented.

Search area 6/7 is so big that the effects will be determined by its zoning arrangements (which sub-areas will be suitable for offshore wind farms and which will remain open). The SEA will therefore not only look at the effects for the area as a whole, but also for a wide range of zoning variants, each of them leaving other parts of the area open. Table 2 provides an overview of factors for which possible effects will be determined. Besides environmental and ecological effects, effects on other uses, such as mining activities and fisheries will be assessed as well. Also shipping safety will be considered. The SEA will determine the effects separately for each wind farm zone and where possible also cumulatively. For most factors, the possible effects will be described qualitatively or in the form of a bandwidth. Possible transboundary effects will also be examined, where relevant. The appropriate assessment, which is part of the SEA, will give an estimate of possible transboundary ecological effects on nature in neighbouring countries.

Ecological effects are determined using the VECI approach (cumulative ecological impact study). This qualitative assessment also considers the expected effects of neighbouring countries' offshore wind farms.

Table 2 Factors to be assessed in the SEA

Category	Factors	Qualitative or quantitative	Explanatory note
Energy yield and avoided emissions	Number of GW Energy yield LCoE (Levelised Costs of Energy) CO ₂ emissions reduction	Quantitative	The number of GW gives information about the capacity to be installed, energy yield from generated energy, LCoE
Ecological effects	Ecosystem	Qualitative (VECI)	Destratification Change in turbidity Change in primary production
	Benthic organisms	Qualitative (VECI)	Effects of habitat changes and on diversity
	Fish: protected species and other species with a certain conservation status (sharks, rays)	Qualitative (VECI)	Underwater noise Electromagnetic fields Hard structures
	Bats (migration)	Qualitative (VECI)	Collision risk (barotrauma)
	Birds	Qualitative (VECI)	Collision risk Habitat loss
	Marine mammals	Qualitative (VECI)	Underwater noise Electromagnetic fields
	Protection status of area		Natura 2000 areas (appropriate assessment) MSF areas
Shipping	Shipping safety	Partly quantitative, partly qualitative	Quantitative assessment based on FSAs of shipping routes, effects of wind farms
	Accessibility	Qualitative	
	Scope for passage	Qualitative	
	External safety	Qualitative	

Category	Factors	Qualitative or quantitative	Explanatory note
Extractive activities	Number of actual or potential platforms with reduced space for helicopter access	Indicative Quantitative in relation to available space	Concerns oil and gas extraction and, if relevant and possible, carbon storage and hydrogen storage
Fisheries	The (relative) contribution to total food production and to the type of fisheries, significance for the sector, (supply) chain and fishing communities	Qualitative and quantitative if possible	
Possible effects of energy infrastructure	In addition to the abovementioned factors: environmental impact of hydrogen electrolysis (warmth, brain)	Qualitative	

Sand extraction

Scope: objective, areas, time horizon

Sand extraction is a national interest. Sand nourishments contribute to coastal protection and thus climate resilience, and sand is a raw material for the construction and infrastructure industries. The last sand extraction strategy (North Sea Policy Document 2016-2021) assumed that there would be sufficient sand for the decades ahead. Under the current policy, the coastline is maintained by means of sand nourishments. The short-term sand extraction strategy is adaptive, aligned with the nourishment requirements of the coastal maintenance programme (Kustlijnzorg). The interim results of the Knowledge Programme on Sea Level Rise indicate that sea-level rise will likely increase the volume of coastal sand nourishments to keep the coastline in place. At the same time, growing spatial pressure in the reserved area for sand extraction reduces the availability of sand for extraction along the coast. Enlarging the spatial reservation for sand extraction to ensure sand availability in a larger area is being considered as part of this Partial Revision. The map below shows the envisioned spatial extension between 12 and 14 nautical miles from the coast. In addition to this envisaged extension, the Partial Revision will describe actions to ensure the availability of sand for coastal protection (e.g. increasing the extraction depth), leading up to the revision of the sand extraction strategy as part of the North Sea Programme 2028-2033.

Level of detail of the SEA

The table below gives an overview of the factors for which possible qualitative effects will be determined. If relevant, transboundary effects will be indicated.

⁵ Parliamentary Paper, House of Representatives, 36 200, no. J-7.

Figure 2 Map of the spatial reservation for sand extraction. The current area, which serves as reference, is blank. In the proposed seaward expansion, the green areas are currently available for extraction and red areas are areas with existing spatial claims. The SEA for the Partial Revision will consider the entire area between 12 and 14 nautical miles from the coast.



Table 3 Factors to be studied in relation to proposed sand extraction policy changes

Hydromorphology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currents • Stratification • Waves • Morphology of the seabed after extraction • Depth of abandoned extraction pits 	Qualitative	Effects on water dynamics and on transport of sand and sediment
Ecological effects	Ecosystem	Qualitative (VECI)	Disturbed seabed Primary production Direct additional effects on abiotic factors
	Benthic organisms	Qualitative	Expected direct disturbance
	Fish: protected species and other species with a certain conservation status (sharks, rays)	Qualitative	
	Birds	Qualitative	Risk of collision Habitat loss
	Marine mammals	Qualitative	Underwater noise Electromagnetic fields
	Protection status of area		Natura 2000 areas MSF areas
Emissions	CO ₂ , NO _x	Qualitative	Additional emissions
Fisheries and fish farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected effects at higher trophic levels, e.g. fish • Spatial overlap 	Qualitative	Expected effects of ecosystem effects and additional spatial overlap
Shipping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial overlap • Shipping safety 	Qualitative	Additional spatial overlap and expected impact on shipping safety

Participation

The participation plan describes both the statutory and non-statutory provisions for public participation. Statutory participation concerns formal public participation procedures, in which all interested parties and stakeholders – from the Netherlands and elsewhere – can give their views. This document is intended for the international public inspection process. Interested parties from outside the Netherlands can give their views on the Draft Memorandum on Scope and Level of Detail and the participation plan using the summary provided in this document. Non-statutory participation concerns the gathering of input from interested parties prior to the draft decision on the Partial Revision. The North Sea Consultation, a consensus-based platform, is one of the bodies that can play a role here.

The Dutch Government aims at coordinating plans with neighbouring countries. For example, the Netherlands is in close contact with the German and Danish national authorities as regards the delineation of offshore wind farm zones along national boundaries and the locations of future shipping routes and clearways. Furthermore, existing international consultative bodies can be used for coordinating plans. Agreements in the framework of the Espoo Convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context will be complied with. This concerns the obligations to document effects and consult affected countries. Information meetings will be held for the authorities of neighbouring countries during the period that the NRD and the draft decision on the Partial Revision are available for public inspection.

Timeframe

The government is planning a draft decision in the first quarter of 2025. A final decision on the Partial Revision is scheduled for September 2025. Neighbouring countries' public bodies are invited to attend an international meeting prior to or during the period that the draft NRD is made available for public inspection (January 2024) and during the period that the draft decision on the Partial Revision and the SEA is made available for public inspection (first quarter 2025).

Colophon:

Date: December 2023

Coordination: Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, The Hague