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The Connections Pause

New applications for connections needing a TIA or transmission impact assessment (all plant on all networks over 1MW, shortly to be 5MW) are subject to a pause, ending no later than 31 May 2025.

- NESO, the transmission system operator, has ceased dealing with applications until its new connections regime is in place or, if sooner, 31 May 2025.
- The distribution networks (DNOs) will accept applications but can't proceed with a TIA, so won't be able to make connection offers until the end of the pause.

The reason for the pause is that NESO's new connections regime (called TMO4+) is not yet finalised. Even more changes are being made to it. Once there is agreement about those changes, Ofgem needs to go through the process of approving them and then they have to be put in place.

At the end of the pause, when TMO4+ is launched, the connections landscape will be different. First, there will be new rules and procedures (some yet unknown). Second, networks will only connect 5MW+ projects in scope of NESO's SSEP (its Strategic Spatial Energy Plan). Being ready to build won't be enough to secure a connection. And that is exactly what DESNZ and Ofgem are aiming at: cutting the connection queue to the 'right' size, in the 'right places' for the 'right' kinds of project.

The SSEP is not due to be published until Q3-4 2026. In the interim, the government's Clean Action Plan 2030 has an annex providing "a detailed breakdown of the [CAP30] pathway and capacity ranges... for most generation technologies, and regional breakdowns for onshore wind (ONW), solar, and batteries." In other words, it lists the 'right' sorts of project in the 'right' sort of places.

It does this in tables setting out capacity figures for different technologies "required". For example, in 2030 100MW of solar is "required" in northern Scotland for

transmission connections and 1,100MW of solar is “required” by SSEN and SHEPD for distribution connections.

At the same time, as from 1 January, the DNOs have new rules with much tougher entry requirements. Any developer seeking a connection will need to have sorted out its whole development cycle through to commissioning with dates and plans, together with timelines, milestones, resources, budget and risk management. In short, the information that is currently provided for in a detailed EPC contract will need to be set out at the outset.

These changes, both by NESO and the DNOs, have two main aims:

- to ensure that projects that are ready to go are ready in a way they have never needed to be ready before;
- to reduce the number of projects that have applied or might apply for a connection, whether or not they are ready to go.

As a result of these intended changes, the project development process has changed. What used to happen can no longer happen.

One of the targets to be eliminated by these changes is “speculative re-seller projects”. What are these, exactly? Are they projects whose rights are sold before construction or projects whose rights are sold at the end of construction? There appears to be no answer.

It would be interesting to know if any of the bodies involved in this whole process has estimated how many connection applications could fall in either category. If not, they must all be working on guesses.

One worrisome thing about guesses is that they can be wrong. What if most connection applications are from “speculative re-seller projects” and what if, as a result, the changes are throwing out the baby with the bathwater?

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