

Tender for Attitudes and Perceptions to Decommissioning Marine Artificial Structures

Introduction to requirement

The INSITE Programme is an innovative European-wide research programme that has so far attracted nearly £10 Million total funding and delivered 18 projects, with 17 research institutions from the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Norway. Since 2015, INSITE has established a model of collaboration between the scientific community and the oil and gas industry.

INSITE Phase 2 is due to end in August 2025 and has produced research on scientific attitudes towards decommissioning strategies for oil and gas platforms (Synthesis Project¹), worldwide decommissioning effects science (Decommissioning – Relative Effects of Alternative Management Strategies; DREAMS²) and Functionality and Ecological Connectivity of Man-Made Structures (FuECoMMS³). This call is to continue Phase 3 of this critical work. INSITE Phase 3 is also partnered with the Natural Environment Research Council-funded Value of the Marine Artificial Structures (ValMAS⁴) programme, which is looking to develop an enhanced understanding of the environmental effects and ecological consequences of MAS in the North Sea basin.

INSITE Phase 3 research is looking to align with this by focusing on the effects of decommissioning Marine Artificial Structures (MAS) structures to provide evidence to inform decommissioning strategies, individual asset decommissioning, environmental risk associated with topics of interest (e.g. fates of contaminants), and engagement with regulators and advisory bodies.

INSITE Phase 3 has two operational stages: the **project phase** (19 months) and the **impact phase** (6 months). During the project phase, successful projects are expected to commence research activity in September 2025 and to deliver their research outputs by March 2027. During the impact phase, commencing April 2027, project and wider-programme activity will focus on dissemination of research findings, stakeholder and policy engagement until the end of the programme in September 2027.

Background of the project

This project aims to explore attitudes and perceptions towards the decommissioning of oil and gas platforms and offshore wind farms, as well as their associated infrastructure, and the presence of shipwrecks. Collectively these may be referred to as Marine Artificial Structures (MAS). The goal of this project is to determine if perceptions change when participants are provided with the latest information about the environmental effects, such as shifts in marine biodiversity, and social and economic considerations, including costs, related to decommissioning or whether structures are left in place. The project seeks to explore perceptions in relation to MAS and to understand whether the

¹ <https://insitenorthsea.org/project/insite-overall-synthesis-project-2021-2023/>

² <https://insitenorthsea.org/project/decommissioning-relative-effects-of-alternative-management-strategies-dreams/>

³ <https://insitenorthsea.org/project/functionality-and-ecological-connectivity-of-man-made-structures-fuecomms/>

⁴ <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/value-of-marine-artificial-structures-valmas/>

decommissioning of offshore structures, located beyond the visible horizon, holds significance for people—and if so, in what way. Previous work by Ounanian et al. (2020⁵) examined attitudes toward the decommissioning of oil and gas structures in the North Sea using a small sample size (n=6). By harnessing the four competing claims presented in the Ounanian paper (1. cost savings; 2. structures as habitats for species and biodiversity; 3. ‘oasis in the desert’ and 4. structures serving as *de-facto* marine protected areas (MPAs)) as research areas considered, as well as the latest environmental, social and economic information, this study can build on this previous research by:

- Engaging with a larger and more diverse sample size (n=300), to include stakeholders such as policy leads, conservation groups, industry representatives, NGOs and the public from across a broad geographical area to provide a comprehensive range of perspectives;
- Assessing attitudes toward the decommissioning of not only oil and gas structures but also offshore wind installations and future management of shipwrecks, enabling comparisons across different types of MAS;
- Evaluating whether awareness of:
 - the full costs of decommissioning;
 - the further development of offshore renewables, and;
 - the increased prioritisation of biodiversity and natural capital issues since 2020; reframes the debate regarding options for offshore decommissioning.

The project will involve the development, testing, distribution and analysis of a short survey, with follow-up interviews, to investigate the environmental, social and economic perceptions of decommissioning and management of these three types of structure. Categorical questions and specific subjectivity methods, such as Q methodology, will be considered, which can later be followed up with interviews to quantify any change in perception and in which categories. An engagement plan will determine the most effective survey distribution pathways, anticipating wide use of online routes such as via social media and targeted channels, and also consider in-person routes such as at events and ‘in the street’, for flexibility of delivery. The project team will be responsible for ensuring and evidencing that the survey and interviews maintain neutrality, with no advocacy or political bias, and provide transparent information.

Results will be presented according to each stakeholder group using methodologies and question types structured to allow for initial awareness levels of decommissioning to be determined. Findings will be communicated via a report, policy brief, INSITE website, in conferences and a webinar for added impact and potential data collation.

Scope of project requirements

All objectives and their stated requirements must be addressed in your proposal.

1. Objective 1: Develop comprehensive information package

A concise and accessible summary of the latest environmental, social and economic information relating to the decommissioning of oil and gas platforms, and offshore wind farms, including their associated infrastructure, and the management of shipwrecks, is to be created to support the development of survey and interview questions. The information pack must contain details needed to support questions such as these below:

Theme	Key questions to consider
Environmental	Whether awareness of potential marine implications from MAS (e.g. contaminants, bird collisions and displacements, underwater noise, electromagnetic fields, unexploded ordnance), or ecological implications (e.g. increased biomass, biodiversity changes, networks/aggregation, non-native species spread) contributes to attitudes towards MAS and their decommissioning.
Social	What perceptions are related to the social benefits and threats associated with decommissioning MAS, such as jobs maintained by each industry, coastal heritage, culture, considering also the implications if they are left in place, i.e. creation of new jobs.
Economic	Whether perceptions are influenced by views on the economic contribution, positively or negatively, industries make to UK economy (i.e. revenue from industries, alongside the costs to the taxpayer for relevant industries (i.e. contracts for difference, decommissioning costs) and profits made by relevant industries, considering also the economic implications if MAS are left in place.

The information will need to be gathered from a wide range of reliable, published, publicly-available sources, including but not limited to the following recommendations:

Environmental information

- INSITE Phase 1 and 2 published outputs⁶, e.g. DREAMS⁷, Synthesis⁸, as well as an early published work from Phase 3;
- National Decommissioning Centre⁹;
- National Decommissioning Research Initiative (NDRI¹⁰);

⁶ <https://insitenorthsea.org/publications/>

⁷ <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/marine-eco-engineering-research-unit/dreams>

⁸ <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/marine-eco-engineering-research-unit/insite-synthesis>

⁹ <https://www.ukndc.com/publications/>

¹⁰ <https://ndriaustralia.org/research>

- Offshore Energy Strategic Environmental Assessment research (OESEA¹¹);
- Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme (OWEC¹²);
- Ecological Consequences of Offshore Wind programme (ECOWind¹³);
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee¹⁴, Nature Scot¹⁵, Natural England¹⁶;
- Historic England¹⁷, Historic Environment Scotland¹⁸;

Social information

- Ounanian at al. (2020);
- Office for National Statistics¹⁹;
- Industry - collaboration with industry experts will be essential, e.g. International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP) socio-economic review of decommissioning options (focused on UK jackets): as a repository for historical data on steel jacket decommissioning cases (facilitated by INSITE Programme team);
- Historic England²⁰; Historic Environment Scotland²¹;

Economic information

- North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA²²) and Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning authority (OPRED²³);
- Historic England²⁴; Historic Environment Scotland²⁵;
- Industry - collaboration with industry experts will be essential (facilitated by INSITE Programme team).

2. Objective 2: Stakeholder and public engagement plan

The project will develop a robust stakeholder engagement plan to identify stakeholders from all groups (i.e. through known industry contacts, policy leads, conservation groups, Non-Government Organisations and using government public lists, public events, local community groups and others for wider engagement) and evaluate their influence and interest in issues. Prioritising groups and individuals from this list will inform and direct the survey outreach so that views are captured from a diverse range of stakeholders and wide public arena. Suggested groups include:

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/offshore-energy-strategic-environmental-assessment-sea-an-overview-of-the-sea-process#sea-recommendations>

¹² <https://www.marinedataexchange.co.uk/content/info/offshore-wind-evidence-and-change-programme>

¹³ <https://ecowind.uk/news-and-resources/>

¹⁴ <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/offshore-industry-advice/>

¹⁵ <https://www.nature.scot/>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

¹⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

¹⁸ <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/>

¹⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/>

²⁰ <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

²¹ <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/>

²² <https://www.nstauthority.co.uk/>

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/offshore-petroleum-regulator-for-environment-and-decommissioning>

²⁴ <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

²⁵ <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/>

Public	Industries	Government and NGOs
Decommissioning operation areas	Waste industry	Councils and local government
Urban centres	Fishing	Govt regulators, e.g. OPRED, Defra, NSTA
Countryside and rural	Offshore wind	Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs)
Scuba divers	Oil and Gas	Environmental protection agencies, e.g. Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Agency, Waste management
Sailing community	Tourism	Wildlife trusts
Tourism boat operators	Merchant Marine	
	Royal Navy	

3. Objective 3: Develop and test online questionnaire

The project team will develop an online questionnaire ensuring objectivity and no bias in approaches. To uphold neutrality and guarantee an objective design, it is recommended that an objectivity review of the questionnaire and information shared be sought from key stakeholders.

A trial of the online survey must be carried out at the Structures In the Marine Environment (SIME) conference in 2026. Refining of the survey and analytical approaches is expected using findings from the analysis of the SIME 2026 trial results.

4. Objective 4: Conduct survey and interviews to assess current attitudes and perceptions towards the decommissioning of marine artificial structures.

The project team will conduct and manage a wider online survey campaign, alongside in-person surveys if needed, to collect sufficient responses for a detailed analysis of survey data to investigate patterns, trends and factors relating to stakeholder groups. The possibility of aligning the survey with national surveys on public attitudes toward environmental issues, such as the DESNZ public attitudes survey²⁶, and Defra channels, should be explored to extend reach, value and impact.

Building on the outcomes of the trial survey in Objective 3, a rigorous and objective approach must ensure unbiased survey design and implementation.

Following on from the survey, the project team must carry out a limited number of focused interviews with representatives from each public group or key stakeholders' group to clarify initial results and allow for a 'deeper dive' into the implications of MAS and their decommissioning. All stakeholders must be informed about the intended outcomes of the data collected.

5. Objective 5: Survey and interview analysis

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-spring-2024/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-net-zero-and-climate-change-spring-2024-uk>

Conduct a comprehensive review of survey and interview results to deepen and clarify understanding of attitudes and perceptions towards the decommissioning of marine artificial structures. The analysis must investigate patterns, trends and factors relating to stakeholder groups, drilling down to uncover key findings for dissemination. The project team should also investigate where changes in perceptions have occurred and discover reasons why.

6. Objective 6: Work in collaboration with the other INSITE projects

The project will work collaboratively with the INSITE programme team and INSITE project teams, including the “Value of Marine Artificial Structures” programme (ValMAS²⁷), to co-deliver the objectives of the INSITE programme and projects (as stated in INSITE website²⁸).

The project team will need to attend programme co-ordination meetings (approx. twice a year) to share updates and actively contribute to programme discussions. There is an expectation that findings from all INSITE projects, including this one, will be communicated with the other INSITE projects, where appropriate, to create greater cohesion across the programme. Note that academic credit and acknowledgement of any shared findings will be ensured where this happens.

During the impact phase of INSITE, March 2027-September 2027, the project will work with the INSITE programme team to co-deliver a range of activities that best communicate findings, engage with stakeholders and policy makers using effective impact pathways.

Deliverables and expected outcomes of the project

All expected deliverables and outcomes must be addressed in your proposal.

Expected deliverables

- **Summary information package** (Objective 1)
- **Online survey – questions and link** (Objective 4)
- **Main project report** to contain background context for project, objectives, methods, results, discussion and recommendations.
- **Policy brief** – a summary (2-4 pages) of the key findings from this project intended for communication with regulator and policy-focused audiences (for examples see INSITE policy briefs²⁹).
- **Conference presentations** at the INSITE Structures in the Marine Environment conference (SIME), held in May/June 2026 and 2027. Note the 2026 conference will include the pre-survey trial.
- **Project webinar** to communicate key findings, with a panel question session for discussion. Webinar will be recorded and posted on YouTube for added viewing afterwards.

²⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/value-of-marine-artificial-structures-valmas/>

²⁸ <https://insitenorthsea.org/>

²⁹ <https://insitenorthsea.org/webinars/>

- **Content updates for INSITE webpage** to present key findings as project progresses and to keep stakeholders up-to-date.
- **Key stakeholder briefings** to communicate key findings to selected stakeholders, e.g. regulators, policy makers, SNCBs, targeting areas of policy need.

Although not a stated deliverable for this project the publication of articles in scientific journals is strongly encouraged for all INSITE projects.

Expected impact outcomes

1. Increased understanding of public and stakeholder perceptions of MAS decommissioning against a backdrop of the changing dynamics of North Sea activities, capturing environmental, social and economic concerns.
2. Stakeholders will be better informed of societal viewpoints on MAS and their decommissioning. New viewpoints may emerge that may encourage greater consideration and inclusion of environmental, social and economic concerns in decision-making around MAS and their decommissioning.
3. Project findings may have high relevance to other sea users and offshore industries, e.g. fishing and offshore wind, potentially influencing future approaches taken in those industries.

Commissioning process

The INSITE Programme currently has 3 live invitations for tender. Interested parties are invited to tender for any or all of these opportunities. The cost of any submission should be in the range of £50,000 to £500,000. Bids at the upper end of this range should address more than one of the invitations to tender. You must declare any third-party funding being used to supplement this research.

You as the Research Provider will be asked to sign a Research Contract upon submission of the detailed proposal should you be successful at the outline stage. By submitting an application to INSITE Phase 3 you agree to the terms within that contract without variation. If there are any variations you as Research Provider would require to enable participation in INSITE Phase 3, these must be stated within your application.

This commissioning process will be carried out in two stages:

1. An open call for **outline proposals** goes live on 17 April 2025 and will close on 25 May 2025 (5 weeks). Any documents submitted after this will not be considered. The assessment for outline proposals will be within 5 weeks of this date, any clarifications and/or notification of invitation to the next stage will be provided by 26 June 2025. Failure to respond to clarifications within this period may result in your proposal being removed from consideration.
2. The second stage of commissioning will be closed to only selected proposals, who will be invited on or before 27 June 2025 to submit a full, **detailed proposal** by 3 August 2025 (5 weeks). Any documents submitted after 3 August 2025 will not be considered. Assessment of the detailed proposals will be from 4 August to 11

September 2025. Any clarifications and/or notification of award will be within 6 weeks of final submission. Failure to respond to clarifications within this period may result in your proposal being removed from consideration.

Dates for these two commissioning stages are summarised here:

Commissioning stage	Dates
Open call for outline proposals	17 April – 25 May 2025
Assessment and feedback for outline proposals	26 May – 26 June 2025
Closed call for detailed proposals (to successful outline proposals only)	27 June – 3 August 2025
Assessment and feedback for outline proposals	4 August – 11 September 2025
Project awards	From 12 September 2025

Preparation of project tenders

1. Outline call proposals

The requirements for outline call proposals are to submit the following by 25 May 2025:

- 500-word summary of the proposed project and how it answers the ‘challenges’,
- The core team with assigned roles,
- 500 words on their capability to deliver,
- 1000 words on the outline vision and how it aligns with the ‘Expected Outcomes & Impact’
- 1000 words on the approach,
- A timeline for proposed delivery and a table of outline costs.

2. Detailed call proposals

The requirements for detailed call proposals are to submit the following by 3 August 2025:

- A maximum of 5000-word project proposal which summarises the project, shows the vision of the project, details the approach they will take.
- A maximum of 1000 words as to how the outputs for this project proposal will achieve impact.
- Up to 500-word mini-CVs for the core applicant delivery team, showing they have relevant experience, and balance of skills.
- List of any project partners and their contributions, with letters of support to be uploaded alongside the application as a separate PDF.

- A full project delivery plan, with clearly defined milestones for payment.
- A full cost breakdown of the proposed project including any subcontractors, facility, additional funding, partner contributions and equipment needs.
- A project risk assessment including if there are any ethical or responsible research and innovation concerns relating to the proposed project.
- Quality standards of the lead organisation
- Data Management and sharing approach

Tender evaluation process

Project proposals will be assessed in a two-step process. First, they will be assessed against **scientific excellence and engagement criteria**. This will be carried out by the INSITEs independent Science Advisory Group. All proposals must pass this first assessment to be considered for the second assessment.

The second step assesses against **industry relevance criteria**. This assessment will be carried out by INSITEs Industry Executive Committee. The final decision to award a project will be made in this second assessment step, after a project has demonstrated scientific excellence and engagement, as well as industry relevance.

The following describe the INSITE assessment criteria against which project proposals will be assessed.

Project assessment criteria:

Step 1 - Science excellence & engagement (Pass 55/80)

Category	Description	Score
Approach	<p>The proposal must demonstrate how the proposed work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the project design appropriate, valid, and reliable for addressing the research question? - Is the proposed budget and timeline realistic? - Are the proposed data collection methods accurate and reliable? - Is there strong Quality Management Processes built into the proposal? - Are the proposed methods for data analysis appropriate and statistically sound? - Is the research is designed in a way that allows for replication and verification by other researchers? - Is the proposal clearly written and easy to understand? - Is the proposed project logically structured? Do you think it will successfully address the requirement? - Does the proposal summarise any relevant previous work by the Research Team and describes how this will be built upon and progressed? - Will the research outputs be effectively communicated to deliver project impact? 	<p>40 (Pass 30/40)</p>
Vision	<p>The proposal must demonstrate how the proposed work:</p>	<p>20 (Pass 15/20)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the proposed research address the questions in the project tender document? - Is the proposed solution novel, does it have the potential to advance current understanding, or generate new knowledge, thinking or discovery within or beyond the field? - Does the proposed research contribute to the outcomes in the project tender document? - Does the proposed research have the potential to influence future research, practice, society, the economy or the environment? - Does the proposed research demonstrate it is of excellent quality and importance within or beyond the field of decommissioning science? 	
Capacity to deliver	<p>The proposal must provide evidence of how the delivery team have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do the proposed Research Team have the right skill sets to deliver this work? - Do the proposed Research Team have the right background, experience and expertise to address the research question? - Do the proposed Research Team have the appropriate leadership and management skills to deliver the work and their approach to develop others? 	<p>20 (Pass 10/20)</p>

Step 2 - Industry relevance (Pass 15/20)

Category	Description	Score
Industry Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the proposal address the Research Question? - Do the proposed project deliverables provide something of value to you? - Does the proposal approach clearly demonstrate what the impact of the project will be once complete? - As a member of the IEC do you feel this proposal delivers to the tender requirements the IEC approved? 	<p>20 (Pass 15/20)</p>
Total		<p>100 (Pass 70/100)</p>