1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF EIA

This Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA Report) is submitted in support of a planning application made by Ackron Wind Farm Ltd (the Applicant) to the Highland Council (the Council), to install and operate a wind farm comprising up to 12 turbines, with a generation capacity of less than 50 megawatts (MW), and associated infrastructure (the Development), on land located in north-eastern Sutherland (the Site) for a period of 30 years.

Given that the Development is not expected to exceed 50 MW, the Applicant is seeking consent pursuant to the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997[1] (as amended). This EIA Report sets out the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken for the Development as carried out in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017[2] (hereafter referred to as the EIA Regulations).

In line with the EIA Regulations, the Applicant recognises that the Development constitutes EIA Development following consideration of the characteristics of the Development, the location of the Development, and the characteristics of the potential impacts as outlined within Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations.

This EIA Report presents information on the likely significant environmental effects of the Development. The EIA Report also informs the reader of the nature of the Development and the measures proposed to protect the environment during site preparation, construction, operation and decommissioning.

This Chapter of the EIA Report is supported by the following figures provided in Volume 2a EIA Report Figures:

- Figure 1.1: Site Location; and
- Figure 1.2: Site Boundary Plan.

1.2 SITE CONTEXT

The Site which contains the Development covers an area of approximately 662 hectares (ha). The Site is located approximately 18 kilometres (km) west of Thurso and approximately 2 km south-east of Melvich in Sutherland, and is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 291200, 96215 as shown on Figure 1.1. The Site lies wholly within the administrative boundary of the Highland Council (the Council).

The topography of the Site and immediate vicinity generally slopes westward, as shown on Figure 1.2 The elevation of the Site varies from approximately 163 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the north-east near Caol-Loch, sloping westward to 30 m AOD along the A897. There are two named knolls: Golval Hill (127 m AOD) and Cnoc an Achadh (123 m AOD).

The Site predominately comprises of open moorland used for rough grazing; there is a small area of improved pasture in the north-west and a woodland grant scheme (WGS3) consisting of conifer plantation along the lower elevations in the west of the Site with RDC-Woodland planted in 2013 in the central portions of the Site.

[1] Scottish Government (1997) Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 [Online] Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/8/contents (Accessed 15/10/19)
[2] Scottish Government (2017) Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 [Online] Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/102/contents/made (Accessed 15/10/2019)

The Site lies within the Halladale River catchment with Giligill Burn, Akran Burn, and an unnamed watercourse flowing from south-east to north-west through Site. No public roads are located within the Site. The A836 lies to the north of the Site with the A897 to the west.

No public roads are located within the Site. The A836, part of the North Coast 500 route, lies to the north of the Site with the A897 to the west. An overhead transmission line transects the south-east corner of the Site connecting Connagill Substation in the south-west, to Dounreay in the north-east.

There are no residential properties within the Site with the closest residential properties being Ackron Farm and Golval (both financially involved with the Development), located 0.9 km to the west of the nearest turbine and 1 km to the south-west of the nearest turbine, respectively.

The Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands covers large portions of Caithness and Sutherland with an area located adjacent to the east of the Site, designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)[3], Ramsar site[4] and Special Protection Area (SPA)[5] for its ecological and ornithological interest. It is recognised as being of international importance for its wetland/peatland habitats, breeding bird populations, and other species these habitats support. The site also includes 39 nationally important peatland Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the closest of which is East Halladale[6].

1.3 APPLICATION DETAILS

The Development comprises of up to 12, three-bladed, horizontal axis turbines of up to 149.9 m tip height with a total generating capacity of up to, but not exceeding 50 MW. The main components of the Development are as follows:

- Up to 12 three-bladed turbines with a maximum tip height of 149.9 m including external transformers (if required);
- Associated foundations, blade laydown areas and crane hardstandings at each wind turbine location;
- Access tracks linking the turbine locations;
- Substation compound incorporating electrical switchgear and wind farm control elements;
- Temporary construction compound;
- Network of underground cabling, running adjacent to the access tracks where possible;
- A permanent anemometry mast (up to 92 m);
- Up to two onsite borrow pits; and
- New site access off the A897.

The Development will require the felling of approximately 1.1 ha of woodland land grant crop which will be replanted within the same landowner's holdings or offset by habitat restoration. Further details on the Development are provided in **Chapter 4: Development Description.**

The purpose of the Development is to generate electricity from a renewable source of energy, offsetting the need for power generation from the combustion of fossil fuels.

[3] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2016). Natura 2000 – Standard Data Form: Site UK0013602, Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC. Available online at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8218 (Accessed 15/10/2020)
[4] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2005). Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS): Site UK13003, Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands. Available online at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8412 (Accessed 15/10/2020)
[5] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2018). Natura 2000 – Standard Data Form: Site UK9001151, Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA. Available online at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8476 (Accessed 15/10/2020)
[6] SNH (n.d.) Citation: East Halladale SSSI. Available online at: https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/585 (Accessed 15/10/2022)

Consequently, the electricity that will be produced results in a reduction in emissions of Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) with associated environmental benefits, which is discussed in **Chapter 15: Climate Change and Carbon Balance**.

1.4 THE APPLICANT

Ackron Wind Farm Ltd (the Applicant) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Statkraft UK Ltd. Statkraft is a leading company in hydropower internationally and Europe's largest generator of renewable energy, producing hydropower, wind power, solar power, gas-fired power, and supplies district heating. Statkraft owns and operates 11 wind farms in the UK and the Nordics with a combined installed capacity of almost 1,000 MW. In 2018, Statkraft acquired 100 per cent of the shares of Ackron from WPD Europe GmbH.

1.5 PROJECT TEAM

This EIA Report has been compiled by Arcus on behalf of the Applicant, supported by sub-consultants in the production of certain specialist assessment chapters. For each topic, the detailed assessment of likely significant effects has been undertaken by organisations with relevant specialist skills, drawing on their qualifications, experience of working on other development projects, good practice in EIA and on relevant published information. Table 1.1 lists the organisations that have been involved in each topic in this EIA Report.

The EIA Report has been reviewed in full by a Registered EIA Practitioner, as certified by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. Qualifications and experience of the individual who undertook each assessment is included at the start of each technical chapter.

Table 1.1: Project Team

Chapter Number	Title	Organisation Responsible, Specialist Assessor and Experience
1	Introduction	Arcus
2	Energy and Planning Policy	David Bell Planning Ltd
3	Site Selection and Design	Arcus
4	Development Description	Arcus
5	EIA Methodology	Arcus
6	Landscape and Visual	MVGLA
7	Ecology	Arcus
8	Ornithology	Arcus
9	Archaeology and Cultural Heritage	Arcus
10	Noise	Arcus

Chapter Number	Title	Organisation Responsible, Specialist Assessor and Experience
11	Access, Transport and Traffic	Arcus
12	Hydrology and Hydrogeology	Arcus
13	Geology and Peat	Arcus
14	Land Use, Socio-economics and Tourism	Arcus
15	Climate Change and Carbon Balance	Arcus
16	Other Issues, (includes Human Health and Safety, Waste, Shadow Flicker, Telecommunications and Utilities, and Aviation)	Arcus
17	Summary of Mitigation	Arcus

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE EIA REPORT

This EIA Report contains the findings of the assessment of likely environmental effects of the Development and comprises of the following volumes:

- **Volume 1** – EIA Report Text;
- **Volume 2** – EIA Report Figures;
  - **Volume 2a** – Figures excluding Landscape and Visual;
  - **Volume 2b** – Landscape and Visual Plan Figures;
  - **Volume 2c** – NatureScot[7] Visualisations;
  - **Volume 2d** – THC Visualisations;
- **Volume 3** – EIA Report Technical Appendices; and
- **Volume 4** – EIA Report Non-Technical Summary.

An outline of Volume 1 of the EIA Report which is split into 17 separate chapters is presented below:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – Provides background information about the Applicant and an overview of the Development;
- **Chapter 2: Energy and Planning Policy** – Identifies the energy and land use policy, outlines the need for the Development and its benefits within the context of international climate change agreements and European, UK and Scottish renewable energy policy;
- **Chapter 3: Site Selection and Design** – Provides details of the site selection exercise and alternative layouts that were considered within the design evolution process;
- **Chapter 4: Development Description** – Provides a detailed description of the Development including details of the construction, operational and decommissioning arrangements;
- **Chapter 5: EIA Methodology** – Provides an overview of the EIA process, its regulatory context and an outline of the methodology used to assess environmental effects and ensure a consistent and transparent approach to assessment. It

[7] Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) rebranded in August 2020 as NatureScot. Where relevant reference is still made to SNH within this EIA Report in respect of guidance which remains valid and is yet to be republished etc.

describes the scoping and consultation process that assisted in the identification of likely significant environmental effects to be given further consideration;

- **Chapters 6 – 16: Technical EIA Chapters** – Each technical chapter as shown in Table 1.1 will provide a description of the baseline environmental conditions specific to the relevant topic and will assess the potential environmental impacts (positive or negative) due to the Development in line with the EIA methodology. This will include a description of any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures and a statement of predicted residual impacts.
- **Chapter 17: Summary of Mitigation** – Provides a summary of the findings of the EIA, including a tabular summary of all residual effects and proposed mitigation.

1.7 ADDITONAL DOCUMENTS

A Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany the application. The Planning Statement sets out an assessment of the Development in the context of the development plan and national planning and energy policy and emerging planning policies. It also considers the potential benefits and harm which may arise and concludes as to the overall acceptability of the proposal in relation to the planning context. This does not form part of the EIA Report.

In addition, a Design and Access Statement (DAS) and Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) Report will accompany the planning application which will be submitted online via e-Planning.

1.8 OBTAINING FURTHER INFORMATION

The EIA Report will be publicised in accordance with Part 5 of the EIA Regulations and the Town and Country Planning (Miscellaneous Temporary Modifications) (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Regulations 2020[8] (the Coronavirus Regulations).

Part 5 of the EIA Regulations requires the EIA Report to be available for public viewing; however, as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this would not be in line with current public health guidance from the Scottish Government. Consequently, the Coronavirus Regulations introduces a temporary relaxation of Part 5 of the EIA Regulations during the emergency period; the amended regulations therefore require that the Applicant must:

"state that the EIA report is available for inspection free of charge and the means by which, the EIA report is available for inspection".

The EIA Report and supporting documentation can be accessed on the Ackron Wind Farm project website at www.ackron-windfarm.co.uk or at www.highland.gov.uk/.

Hard copies of The Non-Technical Summary (NTS) can be made available free of charge from the Applicant. Hard copies of the application submission may be obtained for £1,643 or on USB for £20 to cover production cost, plus postage and packaging.

Requests for copy of the application submission can be made:

By email: ukprojects@statkraft.com
By post: Freepost Statkraft
By phone: 0800 772 0668

8 The Town and Country Planning (Miscellaneous Temporary Modifications) (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/124/contents/made

Any representations to the application should be made by completing the online representation form on the Council Planning Portal or by:

- email to: eplanning@highland.gov.uk
- post to:

eProcessing Centre
Highland Council Headquarters,
Glenurquhart Road,
Inverness
IV3 5NX

Representations should be dated and should clearly state the name (in block capitals) and full return email or postal address of those making representation. All representations to the Council will be published online along with the name of those making representation.

As noted above, no physical copies are available for public viewing at the point of submission due to the EIA Regulations and the Coronavirus Regulations. However, should this change during the consultation period, then public copies will be made available at locations that will be published on the project website www.ackron-windfarm.co.uk.