Glen Earrach

Technical Clarification on Flood Risk

Dear SEPA and The Highland Council,

Electricity Act 1989
Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997
The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

Glen Earrach Energy Pumped Storage Hydro (PSH) Project
Technical Clarification SEPA – September 2025
ECU Ref: ECU00005121
SEPA Ref: PCS-20006092

This document has been prepared by the Glen Earrach Energy project team to respond to comments provided by SEPA on 1 September.

SEPA SECTION 1: Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (as amended) (CAR) authorisation for hydro scheme and Dochfour Weir upgrade

SEPA Comment 1.1:

We can confirm that we received a CAR application for the hydro scheme element of the application on 4 July 2025 (application reference CAR/L/5011166). It includes an appendix on the Dochfour Weir Upgrade element of the S36 application, but that part of the project will be subject to a separate CAR application which has not yet been submitted.

We understand the Weir application will be made by a third party and it is proposed to set up a water management board to oversee its operation to ensure it is run in a way that results in the best outcome for local water management, controls flood risk and is equitable to all water users. It is not clear what legal status the management board would have and how it would be controlled; we understand this cannot be achieved as part of the Section 36 consent, but would welcome the ECU's confirmation and advice on this as we do not consider it can be achieved via CAR. Reg8(5)(b) of CAR states when considering whether to grant an authorisation SEPA 'may have regard to any agreement reached between different persons concerning controlled activities carried on in the relevant area of the water environment'. The agreement would therefore need to be in place prior to the issuing of a CAR authorisation.

Applicant Clarification:

SEPA's comments regarding the need for a separate CAR application for the Dochfour Weir Upgrade are noted. The Applicant (we) confirm that this will be brought forward, as indicated earlier, under a separate consent process by Scottish Canals, in coordination and with support from the Applicant. We also acknowledge SEPA's reference to our proposal for a Water Management Board. The intention behind this is to put in place a body of key stakeholders to help co-ordinate the operation of an upgraded weir arrangement in the best interests of the protection of the water environment in the River Ness catchment. We are conscious of the Scottish Ministers' and SEPA's River Basin Management Plan and the intention to work with operators through the review of CAR licences to ensure weirs and impoundments best protect the water environment. The proposal to set up a Water Management Board is intended to support SEPA's exercise of its powers in this regard. SEPA could take the existence of the

Water Management Board and the terms of the agreement amongst its members into account when reviewing existing CAR licences, and considering applications for new CAR licences or applications to vary existing CAR licences. Whilst we could not compel all relevant CAR licence holders and other relevant stakeholders to become members of the Water Management Board, we consider its existence is likely to lead to cooperation amongst stakeholders and better results for the effective management of the water environment. We would welcome a discussion with SEPA about how best we could dovetail a Water Management Board with SEPA's existing powers and duties.

SEPA Comment 1.2:

The Dochfour Weir element of the project is necessary to delivery of the hydro scheme; they are integrally linked. We highlight that SEPA will be unable to grant CAR consent for the hydro scheme until such times as the Dochfour Weir element of the project has also been applied for and determined, and a suitable management group is in place.

In addition, as you will be aware, there are other large scale hydro scheme applications in the same geographical areas currently in progress and the impacts of them will also have to be considered as part of the determination process. In conclusion therefore we cannot provide any advice on whether the proposal is capable of being authorised by SEPA at this stage and we consider it to be completely at the developers own commercial risk to pursue this application ahead of other consents.

Applicant Clarification:

We acknowledge SEPA's confirmation that the proposed Glen Earrach Pumped Storage Hydro (PSH) scheme and Dochfour Weir Upgrade are integrally linked. We will continue to liaise with SEPA's Water Permitting Team in relation to the proposed Glen Earrach PSH scheme application CAR/L/5011166. While we acknowledge SEPA's position, it is our view that the CAR licence for the proposed Glen Earrach PSH scheme could be granted subject to a suitable condition, or alternatively prepared ready for issue but held until the matching CAR licence for the Dochfour Weir Upgrade (as envisaged in our Application) is determined. We remain committed to working with SEPA to ensure the appropriate sequencing of consents and will maintain direct contact with the SEPA Water Permitting Team as advised. We note SEPA's reference to other PSH applications on Loch Ness. As such, we have included cumulative considerations for all other PSH schemes in our EIAR for the application to the ECU and for our CAR application. We note SEPA's point regarding commercial risk and confirm that the Applicant proceeds on this basis.

<u>SEPA SECTION 2: Flood Risk – Stop Generating Level</u>

SEPA Comment 2.1:

We note that the Additional Information provided by the applicant outlines that the stop generating level of 17.6mAOD was an error and should actually be 17.44mAOD. It remains unclear as to how this level has been determined as the 1 in 10 year level and additionally, how it has been determined that at this level, and associated downstream flow, there is no risk to receptors. As we noted in our previous response, the flow recorded at Ness-Side in October 2014 was 542m³/s. From the River Ness study this would have a return period of around 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 years. The level recorded at Foyers at this time was 17.03mAOD.

Applicant Clarification:

We confirm that the correct stop-generating ('hands-off') level is 17.44 mAOD, as noted in the Additional Information and the CAR Application. The length of record at Loch Ness is relatively short, so to provide greater confidence in extreme event levels and flows, data from the River Ness Flood Protection Scheme and flows at the SEPA supplied Ness-side gauge were used. That study identified the 1 in 10 year event as having a flow of 622 m^3/s in the River Ness, which was contained without property flooding in Inverness.

Based on the rating derived for Dochfour Weir and reported in the Section 47 inspection, a flow of 622 m^3/s corresponds to a Loch Ness level of 17.60 mAOD. By comparison, the October 2014 event recorded a level of 17.03 mAOD at Foyers, equivalent to around 480 m^3/s. A flow of 542 m^3/s, as cited by SEPA, would require a level closer to 17.4 mAOD. This demonstrates that the October 2014 event sat within the expected 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 year banding and did not cause flooding to receptors.

A review of the Dochfour Weir rating showed scatter at lower flows and limited data during the most extreme events. Further analysis, including modelling of the existing Dochfour Weir and breach scenarios as part of the MiOS review, showed changes to the S47 rating. The revised rating was therefore used to set the 'hands-off' level for the proposed Glen Earrach PSH. It should be noted that the critical determinant is the flow in the River Ness, as this is what impacts receptors most directly.

Consistent with other consented PSH schemes on Loch Ness, 600 m^3/s in the River Ness has been adopted as the appropriate flow threshold for curtailing generation. It is this flow, and not a specific flood return period, which has been used to set the stop generating level. Using the revised rating, this equates to a Loch Ness level of 17.44 mAOD. This aligns the project with existing PSH schemes. Setting the threshold lower would not confer additional flood protection benefit, since other operators will continue to run to their consented levels. For extreme events (e.g. 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000 year), a precautionary approach was applied using levels from the S47 rating.

SEPA Comment 2.2:

We note that level-discharge curves have been provided from the Loch Dochfour Reservoirs Act Section 10 Inspection Report 1987 and reference is made to the River Ness Flood Prevention Scheme, however, it is unclear whether any updated hydrological assessment has been made to understand the relationship between flows on the River Ness and levels in Loch Ness/Loch Dochfour. This should be undertaken and further updated information provided on receptors at risk both downstream and on Loch Ness itself. The operation of the hydro scheme should result in no increase in frequency or magnitude of flood events that impact on receptors.

Applicant Clarification:

We confirm that the River Ness Flood Protection Scheme study identified channel capacity between the 1 in 10 and 1 in 25 year events, equating to flows of 622–653 m³/s. While the statistical return period of these flows may shift as additional years of data are added, the fundamental channel capacity has not changed and remains the relevant determinant for assessing flood risk.

To mitigate any potential impact from PSH generation, a conservative flow threshold of 600 m³/s in the River Ness has been set as the maximum not to be exceeded while the scheme is generating. This corresponds to a Loch Ness water level of 17.44 mAOD (as explained in response to 2.1). This ensures the scheme does not operate in conditions where receptors are at risk.

Additional data collected in recent years has improved understanding of the relationship between Loch Ness levels and River Ness flows, but these records cover normal system ranges only. The largest event captured, March 2015, was around the 1 in 25 year event and provides only a single point at the upper end of the curve. In the absence of more extensive data for extreme events, the S47 rating has been used for extrapolation at high flows.

As previously noted, we are working to 'hands-off' thresholds based on actual levels and flows rather than statistical return periods. Return periods may shift with new data, but the thresholds at which receptors flood do not. On this basis, the operational regime is designed to curtail generation ahead of any extreme flood event, ensuring no increase in flood frequency or magnitude for receptors either downstream or along the Loch Ness shoreline.

SEPA Comment 2.3:

We are satisfied that the provision of an updated Flood Risk Assessment to assess the stop-generating level could be covered by condition. However, as the status of the hydro scheme is fully dependent on the Dochfour Weir Upgrade and further information is required to assess the impacts of that on flood risk (see below) then it would be preferable that the information was provided for all aspects prior to determination.

Applicant Clarification:

The Dochfour Weir Upgrade is currently envisaged to operate only during the summer months when flood events are less frequent and of smaller magnitude. In the winter, the Dochfour Weir Upgrade variable weir is not modelled to be in operation, with the spill level remaining as existing, and therefore the upgrade will not change the flood risk of the area. The 'hands off' stop-generating level can be secured by condition, as has been the case for other PSH schemes and will be regulated via a CAR licence.

<u>SEPA SECTION 3: Flood Risk – Dochfour Weir Mitigation</u>

SEPA Comment 3.1 & 3.2:

As indicated above whilst the works to the Dochfour Weir Upgrade are not covered by this Section 36 application and will be consented under a separate planning application, the

proposed Glen Earrach PSH scheme is dependent on works to the weir and would not be undertaken without them. As requested, we provide comments below on the weir proposals.

We are aware that Statera Energy, developer for Loch Kemp PSH, is proposing a new weir (known as the NESS Weir II) at Dochfour. Statera Energy has proposed this approach without consulting with all other developments. We agree that a joined-up approach is the only way and as such is why we are working together with the operators of Foyers PSH and the proposed Loch na Cathrach PSH, with an invitation to Statera Energy to join which has been declined to date.

The Dochfour Weir Upgrade proposal, as per the EIAR Appendix 2.1 of our Section 36 Application, would not change the existing Dochfour Weir, but rather it would install a new variable weir along the full length of the existing weir, immediately upstream of it. It is modelled that the new variable weir would be operated in summer months only and be controlled through telemetry on the proposed, and existing, pump storage hydro schemes so that the Dochfour Weir Upgrade is raised when generating and loch levels are rising and lowered when pumping and Loch Ness levels are lowering. The aim of this is to ensure that flows downstream on the River Ness are maintained at 'natural' levels and not influenced by the PSH scheme operation. However, as outlined within EIAR Appendix 2.1, it has been modelled that the Dochfour Weir Upgrade variable weir operation would be restricted in winter months and set at a level that it is possible to lower to the current weir level with notice of possible flooding. It is therefore not clear what the proposals are in winter and how the operation will take account of flood forecasting and warning. Consideration would need to be given to worst case scenarios where operation of the weir is not in line with target operation.

Applicant Clarification:

We acknowledge SEPA's observation that the Glen Earrach PSH scheme is dependent on the Dochfour Weir Upgrade. The Applicant confirms that the Dochfour Weir Upgrade will be subject to a separate planning and CAR application, and that the Glen Earrach PSH scheme cannot proceed until the necessary consents for the weir are in place.

The Dochfour Weir Upgrade does not alter the existing fixed weir structure but introduces a variable crest weir upstream of the current line. The existing SSE sluice gates will be retained and incorporated into the upgraded solution, ensuring that the new arrangement functions as part of the wider, long-established Ness system of water level and flow control. In addition, the design includes improved upstream and downstream fish passage, providing ecological enhancement alongside operational flexibility.

This variable crest arrangement of the Dochfour Weir Upgrade is currently designed to operate in summer months only, when flood events are typically of smaller magnitude and less frequent. Operation will be managed via telemetry integrated across the proposed and existing PSH schemes on Loch Ness. The system will raise the weir crest when generating and loch levels are rising, and lower it when pumping and loch levels are falling, maintaining flows downstream in the River Ness at natural levels. The system will also take into account weather conditions and this will be utilised within the control system.

During winter months the Dochfour Weir Upgrade variable weir is not currently modelled to be in operation and the spill level will remain aligned to the existing Dochfour Weir, meaning that winter flood risk will remain unchanged. The design incorporates multiple panels with

independent actuation, ensuring resilience and minimising the risk of non-compliance with target operation.

It is however recognised, that, subject to further technical work and agreement with SEPA and other stakeholders, there may be opportunities in future to use the Dochfour Weir Upgrade for some level of active winter flow management, potentially delivering wider system benefits. However, this does not form part of the modelling for the Section 36 Application, and the present design and operational proposals ensure that the works will not increase flood risk either on Loch Ness or downstream on the River Ness.

SEPA Comment 3.3 & 3.4:

There is no clear information as to what level the weir can raise loch levels to and how flood risk on Loch Ness itself has been considered within this to ensure flood magnitude and frequency is not increased. We note that stop generating levels are proposed at 17.44mAOD to ensure no increase in flood risk although as noted above it is not clear whether this is an appropriate level and further information should be provided on this. Additionally, it is not clear if levels are raised to this maximum prior to a storm event, what impact this will have on water levels compared to existing conditions.

The Flood Risk Assessment notes that operation would be in summer only which is taken to include September. Whilst most flood events in the Ness catchment are in the winter months, the significant flood of 1829 was in August and demonstrates that flooding can occur in summer months so consideration would need to be given to the impacts of flood events with the weir in operation.

Applicant Clarification:
The 'hands-off' stop-generating level of 17.44 mAOD in Loch Ness relates to winter flood conditions and has been set on the basis that the Dochfour Weir Upgrade will not be operational during this period. This ensures that in winter, when the largest floods occur, the scheme will curtail generation in advance of the threshold at which receptors downstream are at risk.

During summer months, water levels in Loch Ness are considerably lower. The proposed Dochfour Weir Upgrade to introduce a variable weir is designed to operate only in this period, allowing levels to be managed to alleviate drought conditions whilst maintaining flows in the River Ness at natural levels. Flood events in summer are of smaller magnitude than in winter. The highest flows observed in recent records occurred in September 2018 and 2019, at around 300 m^3/s. Both events were included in the water balance modelling, and whilst water levels in Loch Ness increased, they did not reach a level that caused concern, nor were downstream flows adversely impacted.

A review of records at the River Ness gauge confirms that no flood event in excess of Qmed (the median annual maximum flood flow, calculated from the full annual record) has occurred during summer months based on the record period. It is recognised, however, that an exceptional event did occur in the Highlands in 1829, demonstrating that extreme floods can occur outside of the winter period. As you will be aware, such an event is beyond the scope of standard design thresholds. In that highly unlikely scenario, catchment-wide protocols would be required to manage the situation.

To provide clarity, and in coordination with SEPA and THC, the proposed Water Management Strategy and accompanying Board would establish procedures for handling summer flood events. These procedures would include the ability to progressively lower the variable weir in advance of forecast high flows, based on available flood forecasting, thereby removing the structure from operation and ensuring no adverse effect on flood risk.

On this basis, the 17.44 mAOD stop-generating level is secured based on winter conditions, typical summer events are safely accommodated within this range, and a governance framework is in place to manage exceptional scenarios, ensuring that the proposed works will not increase the frequency or magnitude of flood events on Loch Ness or downstream on the River Ness.

The operational regime of the Dochfour Weir Upgrade will depend on the number of pumped storage schemes participating in the coordinated management arrangement.

The variable weir will be raised during generation periods to accommodate the volume of water released into Loch Ness, and lowered during pumping periods when water is being removed from the loch. The Dochfour Weir Upgraded weir adjusts dynamically to maintain natural flows in the River Ness.

The maximum height to which the variable weir may be raised will depend on the cumulative generation volumes from participating schemes:

- **Glen Earrach alone**: up to 0.5 m above the existing Dochfour Weir spill level;
- **Glen Earrach plus consented Loch na Cathrach**: up to 0.59 m above existing spill level;
- **Glen Earrach, Loch na Cathrach, and proposed Loch Kemp**: up to 0.96 m above existing spill level; or
- **All schemes if consented and operational (Glen Earrach, Loch na Cathrach, Loch Kemp, and Foyers)**: up to 1.23 m above existing spill level

However, the actual height of the Dochfour Upgraded weir at any given time will be proportional to the volume of water stored in the upper reservoirs. If the upper reservoirs are, on average, half full, the variable weir would typically be raised to approximately half of the maximum height listed above to accommodate the corresponding generation volume.

Regardless of the Dochfour Upgraded weir height, the stop-generating level will remain at 17.44 mAOD in Loch Ness, corresponding to a flow of 600 m^3/s in the River Ness. This ensures that generation ceases before flows reach levels that could increase flood risk to receptors along the River Ness.

SEPA Comment 3.5:

The applicant outlined that there would be scope for operation of the weir for flood management purposes and reducing flows downstream on the River Ness. We could see that a benefit could be provided through such proposals and would welcome further consideration

of this, although consideration of increased risks would also be required. Any management group controlling the structure will need to take into consideration flood risk.

Applicant Clarification:

The Applicant recognises that there is potential for the Dochfour Weir Upgrade to provide additional benefits in terms of flood management. Some opportunities relate to the incorporation of the existing sluice gates into the same control system as would be established for the Dochfour Weir Upgrade variable weir, such that both the weir and the sluice gates would be available to flood management control by THC, in consultation with SEPA to be operated in a complementary fashion.

The concept of flood mitigation would be that in advance of significant flood risk, steps could be taken to attenuate the peak of any flood by increasing flows in River Ness for a period in advance of the flood event (through use of the sluice gates) to create additional flood storage in Loch Ness and enable a reduction of the peak flood flow at the time of the flood event through then restricting flows using the variable weir at the time of peak Loch Ness inflow, reducing flows downstream on the River Ness. Any such use of the structure would require careful assessment of associated risks and would need to be considered within the remit of the proposed management group, ensuring that flood risk is properly taken into account in any operational decision-making. For the avoidance of doubt, any such operation would not be under the control of the PSH operations, but would be governed by appropriate Water Management Board flood management protocols, via a proposed planning condition in the determination of the Dochfour Weir planning permission, ultimately controlled by THC, in consultation with SEPA where required.

It should also be noted that, while generation from all PSH schemes would be curtailed during flood events through the stop generation level for each PSH scheme, the ability to pump water from Loch Ness into the head pond would remain. Where sufficient storage capacity is available in the head pond, this functionality could be used to support the management of flood risk by lowering levels in Loch Ness independently of generation. Such a protocol could be incorporated into the agreement amongst the members of the Water Management Board, to include THC's flood management protocols. This would establish the new pumped storage capacity as an additional flood mitigation solution available to THC.

SEPA Comment 3.6:

An updated Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) should be provided to demonstrate that the operation of the hydro scheme will not increase flood risk to others, either as a direct result of increased levels on Loch Ness or increased flows downstream on the River Ness. This should include the proposals for the Dochfour Weir upgrade and the impact of the stop-generating level on flood risk. A precautionary approach should be taken to determining the flood risk and any unintended consequences related to operation of the weir fully understood.

Applicant Clarification:

A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has already been provided and demonstrates that the operation of the hydro scheme, including the Dochfour Weir Upgrade, will not increase flood risk either on Loch Ness or downstream on the River Ness.

To clarify:

- The proposed Dochfour Weir Upgrade is based on established variable weir technology with proven fail-safe mechanisms. The structure will consist of multiple independent elements, making the likelihood of the entire arrangement remaining in an upright position under fault conditions intrinsically low, likewise for an uncontrolled lowering of multiple elements.

- The Dochfour Weir Upgrade variable weir is modelled to only operate during summer months. During the winter period, when extreme flood events are typically experienced, the weir will remain fully lowered with the spill level aligned to the existing Dochfour Weir.

- The operational regime of the Dochfour Weir Upgrade ensures that generation is curtailed in advance of threshold flood levels, applying a precautionary approach that safeguards against any increase in flood frequency or magnitude. This is the same principle in respect of flood resilience that has been applied for other PSH schemes that have not included a variable weir at all.

Taken together, these measures confirm that the FRA already submitted addresses SEPA's concerns and demonstrates that no additional flood risk is created.

SEPA Comment 3.7:

We note from section 1.1.2 of Appendix 2.1 the developer's proposal is that the upgrade works are the subject of a condition attached to the planning consent. Once more is known about the potential impacts of the weir works on flooding and it is clear that the design objectives are achievable, we would be content that final details could be agreed via planning condition or other appropriate planning mechanism. This would need to ensure that (1) development cannot commence until planning permission and CAR authorisation has been granted permission for the weir works, and (2) the hydro scheme cannot be commissioned until such times as all the works on the weir have been completed and the management board is functional. We would welcome confirmation from the ECU how this could be controlled via planning.

Applicant Clarification:

We consider that the issue of flood risk has been fully addressed within the submitted assessments, and that the design objectives for the proposed weir works are achievable. We specifically welcome the proposed safeguards that:

1. The construction works cannot proceed until planning permission or the operation of the weir until CAR authorisation have been secured for the Dochfour Upgraded Weir works; and

2. The first commercial operation of the main scheme cannot commence until the weir upgrades have been completed and the management board is in place.

We note that the "no generation" hands-off flow level is properly a matter for CAR authorisation, but we also recognise that, where appropriate, a parallel planning condition can

be used to tie the operation of the scheme to confirmation of CAR compliance. This dual mechanism provides added assurance, and we are content that the necessary controls can be secured by condition or other appropriate planning mechanism. We would welcome confirmation from ECU of the preferred form of control.

SEPA SECTION 4: Peat and Peatland

SEPA Comment 4.1 & 4.2:

We welcome the proposed amended layout for the temporary workers accommodation and other compounds noting that section 4.1 of the Additional Information indicates that it results in a 20% reduction in the total project peat disturbance.

On the basis of this reduction in peat disturbance we now withdraw our objection subject to the condition we requested previously covering the submission of a Peat Management Plan. To ensure consistency with other energy developments we recommend applying your relatively recently agreed windfarm standard Peat and Carbon Rich Soils Management Plan condition, amended slightly to ensure that the mitigation now provided – that at temporary construction sites only the areas where infrastructure is to be constructed are stripped of peat and carbon rich soils – is secured.

Applicant Clarification:

We welcome SEPA's recognition of the 20% reduction in peat disturbance achieved through the amended layout at the workers village. This outcome reflects the project team's commitment to minimising peat impacts by design and evolution to take into account statutory consultee comments. We accept the requirement for a Peat and Carbon Rich Soils Management Plan condition and are content to work to the standard wording applied to recent wind farm consents, with appropriate amendment to secure the agreed mitigation at temporary construction sites.

SEPA SECTION 5: Advice for the Applicant

Regulatory Advice

SEPA Comment 5.1:

The developer should continue to liaise with our Water Permitting Team in relation to application CAR/L/5011166. As indicated above we will not be in a position to grant permission for this hydro scheme until such times as other earlier projects have been determined, the management board is in place, and the application is submitted for the Dochfour Weir element of this proposal. Should you wish to discuss these elements further then please contact Waterpermitting@sepa.org.uk; Clare Wallace is the contact.

Applicant Clarification:

We will continue to liaise with SEPA's Water Permitting Team in relation to application CAR/L/5011166. While we acknowledge SEPA's position, it is our view that the CAR licence

for the hydro scheme could be granted subject to a suitable condition, or alternatively prepared ready for issue but held until the matching CAR licence for the weir is determined. We remain committed to working with SEPA, who have been very helpful in the advice they have given us so far in the process, to ensure the appropriate sequencing of consents and will maintain direct contact with the Water Permitting Team as advised.

Conclusion

This technical clarification addresses the key points raised by SEPA in their consultation response of 1 September 2025.

The operational parameters for the Glen Earrach PSH scheme have been established by reference to the physical capacity of the River Ness rather than statistical flood return periods. The adopted stop-generating level of 17.44 mAOD, equivalent to a flow of 600 m^3/s in the River Ness, is consistent with or below the thresholds consented for other PSH schemes on Loch Ness. This approach ensures consistency across operators and provides robust protection for downstream receptors.

The proposed Dochfour Weir Upgrade is required mitigation for the Glen Earrach PSH scheme and is designed to operate in summer months only. In the winter, when the largest flood events occur, the Dochfour Upgraded weir will remain at the existing fixed spill level, ensuring no change to baseline flood risk. While winter operation of the Dochfour Upgraded weir is not required for mitigation, there may be scope to explore wider system benefits in future. Such opportunities would be a matter for collective consideration through the proposed Water Management Board.

A Flood Risk Assessment has been completed for the modelled case of summer operation and confirms that the works will not increase flood risk either on Loch Ness or downstream on the River Ness. The combination of the Dochfour Upgraded weir infrastructure and pumped storage capacity may also provide additional flood management options for The Highland Council, offering potential benefits beyond the scheme's primary function.

The Applicant acknowledges SEPA's concerns regarding sequencing of consents. A CAR application has already been submitted for the Glen Earrach PSH scheme. A separate CAR application for the Dochfour Weir Upgrade will follow, led by Scottish Canals with the Applicant's support. We are content with the safeguards SEPA proposes, namely that no construction of the main scheme can proceed until consent for the Dochfour Weir Upgrade has been consented, and that no full commercial operation of the main scheme can occur until the Dochfour Weir upgrades are completed and the Water Management Board or similiar is functional.

The proposed Water Management Board will provide the governance mechanism to coordinate the operation of all PSH schemes, support SEPA and THC in exercising oversight and control, and maintain effective communication with affected stakeholders. This arrangement will complement SEPA's duties under the River Basin Management Plan and promote the sustainable management of the River Ness catchment.

The Applicant remains committed to working constructively with SEPA, THC and all stakeholders to ensure the timely sequencing, coordination, and delivery of consents for both the Glen Earrach PSH scheme and the associated Dochfour Weir Upgrade.