

European Subsea Cable Association: providing technical advice to manage the life cycle of subsea cables

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ABSTRACT

Technical guidelines are a helpful tool to manage subsea cable projects over the life time of a cable. They help establish good practice and cost effectiveness. Nevertheless, they are challenged by differently by national legislation's. This paper gives an overview of the existing technical guidelines and topics addressed by the European Subsea Cables Association (ESCA). It is supported by an example for using a guideline on proximities between the assets of transmission system operators, telecoms, and wind farms.

KEYWORDS

ESCA, guidelines, lifecycle subsea cable, offshore, cable protection

INTRODUCTION TO THE ESCA ORGANISATION

The European Subsea Cables Association (ESCA) is an organisation of submarine cable owners, operators and suppliers primarily aiming at promoting marine safety and protecting subsea cable installation, maintenance and operation in European and surrounding waters. The scope covers telecommunication cables as well as power cables.

Coming historically from a telecoms perspective ESCA has developed over recent years to an association covering also the power sector giving guidance to transmission system and wind farm operators on developing and maintaining reliability and availability of submarine links. Dedicated working groups develop comprehensive guidelines providing technical advice to manage the life cycle of subsea cables where knowledge from different industries and European countries is shared to inform:

- Planning, handling and installing, repairing and decommissioning cables
- Interfaces with regulatory authorities, fisheries, and other sea bed users

ESCA's [1] is steered by an Executive Committee, which is also responsible for keeping abreast of new developments (technological, regulatory and legal) which may enhance or benefit the use of submarine cables. The Executive Committee is also responsible for forming sub-groups with experts to deal with a particular field of interest.

The organisation was formed in May 1999 as the UK Cable Protection Committee (UKCPC) and renamed Subsea Cables UK in 2011. In March 2016, reflecting its European membership it was agreed that the organisation should become the European Subsea Cables Association.

THE ESCA WORKING GROUPS

ESCA [1] operates three working groups focusing on different topics associated with managing the life circle of a cable:

The Technical and Regulatory Subgroup to provide technical and operational guidance to the members for all matters pertaining to relationships with regulatory authorities:

- compile technical papers and/or assess technical papers supplied by ESCA members;
- provide an ad-hoc technical and regulatory advisory service;
- attend appropriate technical or regulatory fora on behalf of ESCA and report back;
- maintain relevant ESCA technical or regulatory guidelines;
- liaise and hold periodic meetings with other relevant technical or regulatory groups and organizations;
- monitor and advise on future trends in regard to the joint use of the seabed;
- monitor the general regulatory position in the European Community and advise on any issues that have a direct impact on consents, wayleaves, licenses, easements, permits or other authorizations for future and current international and national submarine cable systems;
- liaise with the relevant government departments and agencies in representing ESCA's interests.

Renewables and Power Cables Subgroup provides technical guidance associated with the installation and operation of submarine power cables:

- raise awareness, guidelines and working practices in the renewables and power cables sectors;
- build on cross-sector working and the integration of relevant organisations;
- provide guidance on aspects of safety concerning the installation and operation of existing and planned submarine power cable systems, relevant to other members, and other stakeholders such as other seabed users, marine operators etc.;
- develop and agree best industry practice and other guidelines which may assist ESCA in meeting its objectives of improving safety and supporting Best Industry Practice as applicable to Submarine Cables and other developments;