Hinkley Point C places 5,000-tonne structure on Bristol Channel seabed

A 5,000-tonne structure has been placed on the seabed of the Bristol Channel as part of work being carried out by Hinkley Point C nuclear plant in Somerset. French energy giant EDF, which is behind the Bridgwater-based power station, said it was Hinkley's "biggest-ever lift at sea".

New footage released by the plant shows the precision placement of the so-called 'intake head', which is the second of four being connected to five miles of tunnels that will supply the plant's nuclear reactors with cooling water. The two 'outfall heads' have already been lowered into position.

The work to install the system is regarded as one of the world's most complex marine engineering projects – as the Bristol Channel has the second-highest tidal range on the planet.

Each intake head, at 44 metres long and eight metres high, is being lifted into position by two floating cranes – named Gulliver and Rambiz – working in tandem. The crane platforms are the size of football pitches and have a combined lifting capacity of 7,300-tonnes.

The heads have been built by Balfour Beatty in Avonmouth and are being transported to Hinkley Point C on barges. The lifting at sea, carried out by marine construction specialists NewWaves Solutions takes several days, due to each step taking place within six-hour tidal windows.

Hinkley Point C has placed a 5,000-tonne intake head on the seabed of the Bristol Channel
(Image: EDF)

EDF said Hinkley Point C is the first power station in the South West to have fish protection measures in place, including the low-velocity heads, a fish-return system and screens. The heads are placed sideways to the tidal flow to help prevent fish entering the cooling system and the size of the intakes heads slows the flow of water on either side, allowing nearby fish to swim away.

The work to install all six heads will continue into the early autumn, bosses at the power station said.

Last month, EDF announced it was proposing changes to the way Hinkley Point C stores radioactive waste. The Environment Agency has launched a consultation, which closes on August 14, following the proposals.

In May, Hinkley confirmed it would begin operating a year later than planned and could cost up to £3bn more to build than originally budgeted. EDF announced the findings following a review of the project.

A previous estimate in January 2021 revised costs up by £500m to between £22bn and £23bn, with bosses at Hinkley Point C saying there had now been a budget increase of £3bn. Full construction of Hinkley Point C began in 2016. It was originally estimated the project would cost £18bn to build.

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