Assessment, Research and Data Unit

Screening for Appropriate Assessment for a Maritime Usage Licence Application

To:	Maritime Authorisations Unit	**From:**	Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor
Date	19th May 2025	**Maritime Usage Licence Application No:**	MUL240042
Applicant:		Port of Cork Company	
Type of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:		*(3) Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.*	
Location of proposed Maritime Usage:		Dognose Bank, Corkbeg, Whitegate in the southeast of Cork Harbour	
Licence application received:		01st October 2024	

1 - Description of Project/Proposal and local site characteristics

Brief description of the project

This maritime usage licence (MUL) application from the Port of Cork Company is for marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigations at Dognose Bank, Corkbeg, Whitegate in the southeast of Cork Harbour. The site investigations are associated with the future port infrastructure identified in the Port of Cork Masterplan 2050[1] including Offshore Renewable Energy infrastructure. This activity falls under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (MAP Act). This application was originally submitted to the Foreshore Division of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) on 19/06/2023 application Ref. FS007098. The application was transferred to MARA on 01/10/2024 in accordance with (5A) of Section 1E of the Foreshore Act 1933 and will be assessed as an application for a MUL within the meaning of the Map Act.

The MUL application area is 98.2ha. The Whitegate oil refinery lies on land to the south and southeast and Corkbeg Island lies to the east. Whitegate village is 1.6 km to the east.

The proposed marine site investigation surveys are shown on Table 1, along with the estimated duration of the activities. The applicant has provided indicative locations for the boreholes and CPT tests (see Figure 1), though the geotechnical and geophysical surveys could take place throughout the MUL application area. The applicant notes the surveys will take approximately 19 weeks in total to complete. The applicant has requested a 5 year licence duration to allow for tendering and completion of activities.

Table 1. The details of the proposed maritime usage activities along with the estimated duration.

Proposed maritime usage activities	Estimated duration
Geophysical surveys – sub bottom profiler single channel seismic reflection, underwater multichannel analysis of surface waves (UMASW) and seismic refraction surveys	3 weeks
Geotechnical surveys – approximately 20 boreholes (cable percussive with rotary follow-on), 0.5m^2 diameter, up to 25 m in depth. A geotechnical drilling rig mobilised on board a jack-up barge will be used (along with a tug vessel). Approximately 20 Cone Penetration Tests (CPTs), up to 10 m in depth, using a dynamically positioned vessel. Surface grab samples - taken using Van Veen Grab or equivalent.	12 weeks

[1] Port of Cork Masterplan 2050. Published May 2023.

Sub-tidal benthic sampling (using Van Veen Grabs) and video surveys for benthic faunal analysis and habitat classification.	During the months of April to September
Intertidal benthic core samples (19 cm diameter) will be taken in soft intertidal sediments	During the months of April to September
Marine mammal surveys will take place via vantage point surveys from the shoreline. Underwater acoustic surveys - a submerged microphone attached to specialised recorder device.	Any time during the licence period. During the geophysical and geotechnical surveys.

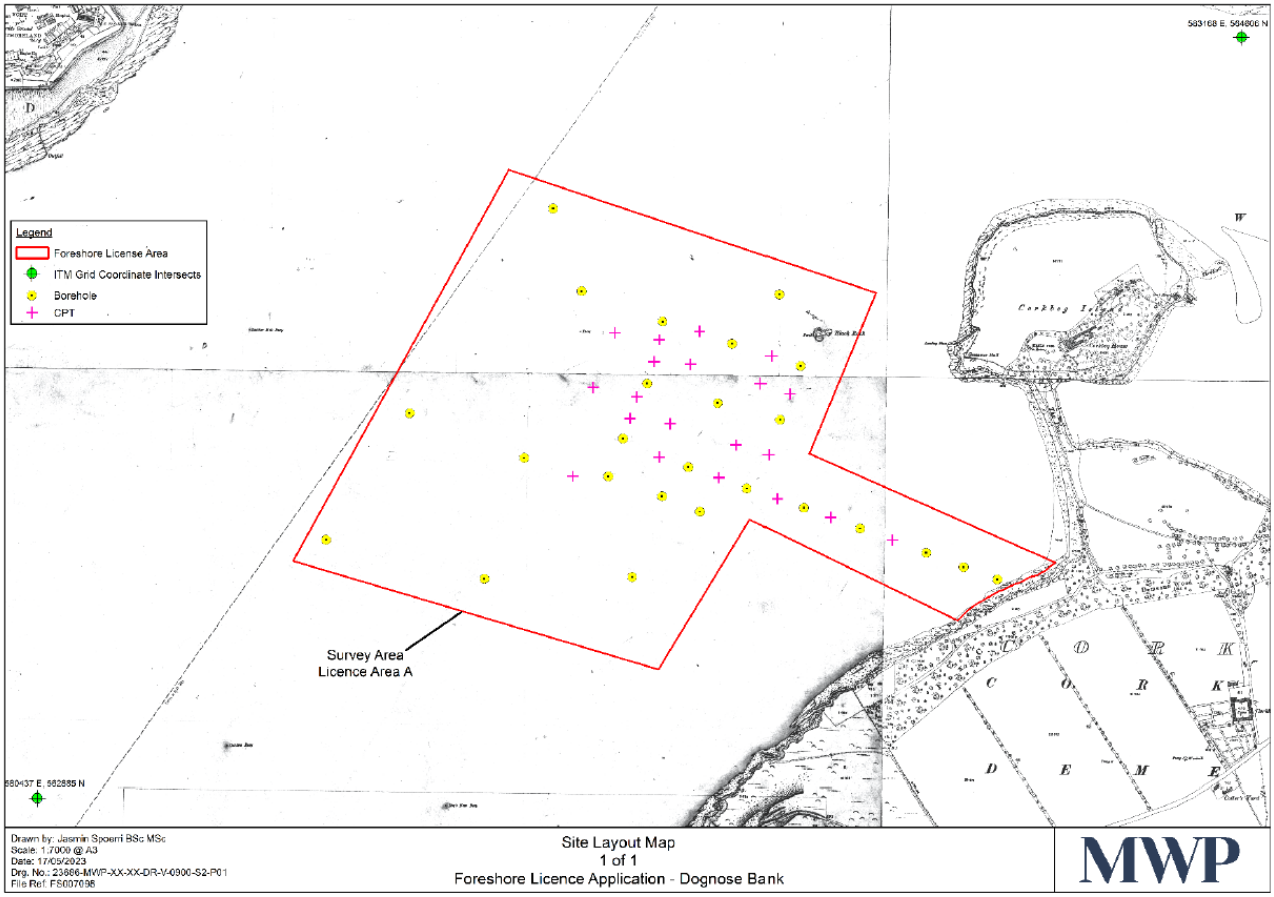

Figure 1: Site layout map and indicative sample locations.

Brief description of the site characteristics

The seabed habitat in the MUL application area is characterised as Atlantic circalittoral coarse sediment and infralittoral seabed[2]. Water depths at the site are up to 18 m. The site is located in the Cork Harbour coastal waterbody (Water Framework Directive (WFD) site code: IE_SW_060_0000), which has been classed as 'at risk' of not achieving good status. The eastern part of the MUL application area is within the main navigation channel in Cork Harbour which is subject to regular maintenance dredging activities. The site is subject to high levels

[2] EMODnet Map Viewer

of shipping activity and is adjacent to the Iriving Oil refinery jetty and close to the Whitegate power station. The surrounding land use is primarily agricultural and industrial.

2 - Identification of relevant European Site(s)

The maritime usage licence application is subject to screening for appropriate assessment to determine if it alone, or in-combination with other plans or projects, is likely to cause significant effects to a European site(s) in view of the conservation objectives of the site(s). The applicant submitted a Supporting Information for Screening of Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report, dated June 2023 and a detailed Project Description report in support of the application, along with other supporting documents which were referred to during this assessment.

The proposed site investigation activities are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s). The MUL application area is not situated within any European site however it is adjacent to the Cork Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA), site code: 004030. The Great Island Channel Special Area of Conservation (SAC), site code: 001058 lies approximately 5.3 km direct distance to the north.

The European sites listed on Table 2 have been identified where the potential impacts from the proposed activities are within the Zone if Influence (ZoI) of the sites, where a Source-Pathway-Receptor (SPR) link exists and given the nature, extent and duration of the activities and the conservation objectives of the European sites.

Table 2. European sites screened in for appropriate assessment, their qualifying interests (QIs) and site specific conservation objectives.

European site & site code	Approx. distance from MUL application area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	QIs screened in	European site screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Cork Harbour SPA [004030]	<0.5	**Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]** **Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) [A005]** **Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]** **Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) [A028]** **Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048]** **Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) [A050]** **Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]** **Pintail (*Anas acuta*) [A054]** **Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056]** **Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) [A069]** **Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130]** **Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]** **Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]** **Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]** **Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149]** **Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156]** **Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]** **Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160]** **Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]** **Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179]**	Yes Above water noise and visual disturbance and displacement to birds. Below water noise disturbance and displacement to birds. Water quality deterioration impacting habitats and species.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA 004030. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182] **Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]** **Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]** **Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]**				
Ballycotton Bay SPA [004022]	15–20 (direct distance)	**Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]** **Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) [A137]** **Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]** **Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]** **Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]** **Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156]** **Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]** **Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160]** **Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) [A169]** **Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]** **Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]**	Yes. Above water noise and visual disturbance and displacement to birds using suitable habitat in vicinity. Below water noise disturbance and displacement to birds using suitable habitat in vicinity.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Ballycotton Bay SPA 004022. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
	25–30 (distance by sea)	Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	No	No		
Sovereign Islands SPA [004124]	20–25	**Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]**	Yes. Above and below water noise and visual disturbance and displacement to foraging birds.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Sovereign Islands SPA 004124. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Ballymacoda Bay SPA [004023]	20–25	**Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]** **Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]**	Yes Above and below water noise and visual disturbance and displacement to foraging birds.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Ballymacoda Bay SPA 004023. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) [A050] Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052] Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) [A137] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141] Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142] Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) [A144] Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149] Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156] Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157] Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160] Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162] Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) [A169] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	No	No		
Old Head of Kinsale SPA [004021]	25–30	**Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188]** **Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]**	Yes Above and below water noise and visual disturbance and displacement to foraging birds.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Old Head of Kinsale SPA 004021. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
	30–35	**Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]**	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Courtmacsherry Bay SPA [004219]			Above and below water noise and visual disturbance and displacement to foraging birds.			NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Courtmacsherry Bay SPA 004219. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*) [A003] Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048] Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) [A050] Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) [A069] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142] Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149] Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156] Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157] Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	No	No		
Hook Head SAC [000764]	<100	***Tursiops truncatus* (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]** ***Phocoena phocoena* (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]**	Yes Underwater noise impacts from survey activities.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Hook Head SAC 000764. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
		Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]	No	No		
Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC [000101]	<100	***Phocoena phocoena* (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]**	Yes Underwater noise impacts from survey activities.	Yes	Yes	NPWS (2011) Conservation Objectives: Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC 000101. Version 1.0.

		Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] European dry heaths [4030] Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330] *Lutra lutra* (Otter) [1355] *Halichoerus grypus* (Grey Seal) [1364]	No	No		National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

3 - Assessment of likely significant effects

Table 3. Identification of all potential direct and indirect impacts that may have an effect on the conservation objectives of the European sites, taking into account the size and scale of the activities.

Potential impacts	Possible significance of potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)
Above water noise and visual disturbance and displacement	Potential for survey activities generating noise from survey vessels, survey equipment and increased human presence to be at an intensity and duration that would cause significant disturbance to birds
Underwater noise disturbance and displacement to birds Underwater noise disturbance impacts on marine mammals	Potential for sound sources from survey activities to be at a level and duration that would cause a significant disturbance to birds Potential for survey activities to be at a level and duration that would significantly impact marine mammals.
Water quality deterioration impacting habitats and species	An increase in suspended sediments from survey activities or water pollution from survey vessels that would cause habitat and associated species degradation

In-combination effects

MARA has developed a stepwise approach for identifying other plans and projects that may impact on European sites in-combination with the proposed activities.

Using professional and scientific judgement, the key steps for assessing cumulative effects are as follows:

1. Defining the Cumulative Effects Spatial Scope (CESS)
2. Defining the Cumulative Effects Temporal Scope (CETS)
3. Impact identification
4. Pathway identification
5. Prediction
6. Identification of Plans or Projects that could act in combination
7. Screening Stage Cumulative Effects Assessment conclusion
8. Managing cumulative impacts - to be carried out as part of Stage 2 AA process.

The CESS has been defined as 10km and the CETS as five years. The CETS is the proposed MUL period. The definition of the CESS is based on acoustic survey equipment effective deterrence ranges as per JNCC Guidance[3].

[3] Guidance for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of harbour porpoise SACs (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). JNCC Report No. 654.

Using the above 8 step approach and following a search of relevant databases (including but not limited to MARA, Foreshore, planning, EPA authorisation databases) undertaken on the 14/05/2025, the projects on Table 4 and plans listed below have been identified, in particular, as having the potential to act in-combination with the proposed site investigation activities.

The following plans, in particular, were identified as having the potential to result in-combination effects. In general these plans support offshore renewable energy development including supporting infrastructure in ports and harbours:

- The Climate Action Plan 2025;
- Port of Cork Masterplan 2050;
- Cork County Development Plan 2022–2028;
- The National Development Plan 2021–2030, and
- South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (SC-DMAP).

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application, the above plans and the projects listed on Table 4, on the conservation objectives of European sites considered in this report cannot be excluded at this stage.

Table 4: List of projects which, in particular, were considered to have potential in-combination impacts (due to their nature and spatial and temporal overlap) on European sites.

Application Ref.	Project description	Approx. distance from MUL application area (km)	Project Status
LIC240006	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	<5	MUL granted
MUL230029	Dredging and deposit of dredged material	2.6	Applied
MUL240036	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	<5	Applied
MUL250008	Deposit of dredged material	>10	Applied
MAC240030	Renewable power generation	1	Applied
S0013-03	EPA Dumping at Sea permit	overlap	Permitted
S0005-03	EPA Dumping at Sea permit	<3	Applied
S0021-03	EPA Dumping at Sea permit	<4	Applied
S0039-01	EPA Dumping at Sea permit	4	Applied
FS007126	Dredging	overlap	Foreshore licence granted
ABP OA04.321875	Planning permission for redevelopment of port facilities	3	Applied

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process? - No

4 - Screening Determination Statement

The assessment of significant effects.

On the basis of the information on file, and having regard to:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development;
- The distance to the nearest European sites;
- The potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects;
- Possible disturbance from above water noise and visual disturbance and displacement;
- Underwater noise disturbance and displacement to birds;
- Underwater noise disturbance impacts on marine mammals, and
- Water quality impacts leading to habitat degradation or reduction in prey species.

Having considered the legal framework applicable to Appropriate Assessment, it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by Port of Cork Company to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation at Dognose Bank, Corkbeg, Whitegate in the southeast of Cork Harbour (MUL240042) will require Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. It cannot be excluded on the basis of objective scientific information, that the proposed project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European Site.

Signature of Recommending Officer	Dr. Alison McCarthy [redacted]	Date: 19th May 2025
Signature of Decision Maker	John Evans [redacted]	Date: 20th May 2025