Supporting Information for Screening for Appropriate Assessment (SISAA)

1. Introduction

Purpose of the SISAA

This SISAA is prepared to assess the potential impacts of the salvage operation of the cargo of the SS Ohio on Natura 2000 sites and to determine whether an Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required. The assessment follows the guidelines provided by the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) to ensure compliance with the Habitats Directive.

Project Overview

The project involves the salvage of non-ferrous metals from the SS Ohio, a World War I-era steamship wreck located 142 NM from Irish territorial waters at a depth of 330 meters. The operation aims to recover valuable materials while minimizing environmental impacts.

2. Description of the Project

Project Location

- Wreck Location: 51ºN 52.720; 014ºW 16.880
- Depth: 330 meters
- Distance from Irish Territorial Waters: 142 nautical miles

Project Activities

- Preparation: Equipping the salvage vessel (N35) with necessary tools and provisions for a three-month operation at sea.
- Operation: Utilizing a 100-ton crane and mechanical grabs for cargo retrieval, supported by ROVs and USBL sonar systems to ensure precise operations.
- Maintenance: Regular maintenance of salvage equipment and vessel.
- Decommissioning: Post-salvage report of the wreck site and disposal of retrieved waste materials.

Duration and Timing

The salvage operations are scheduled for the summer season of 2024, with potential operations extending up to two years, depending on weather conditions and operational challenges.

3. Description of the Environment

Baseline Conditions
- Seabed Composition: Predominantly clay, supporting marine life.
- Marine Ecosystems: Initial assessments did not indicate the presence of diverse marine species in the vicinity of the wreck.

Natura 2000 Sites
- Proximity to Protected Areas: The wreck site is located outside any designated Natura 2000 sites, reducing the immediate risk to sensitive habitats.

4. Assessment of Potential Impacts

Identification of Potential Impacts
- Direct Impacts: Physical disturbance to the seabed and potential dispersion of non-ferrous metals.
- Indirect Impacts: Potential contamination of surrounding waters from accidental spills.

Impact Assessment
- Low to Magnitude: Moderate, given the remote location and nature of activities.
- Extent: Localized to the wreck site and immediate surroundings.
- Duration: Temporary, confined to the operational period.
- Reversibility: Largely reversible with effective mitigation measures.

5. Mitigation Measures

Proposed Mitigation Measures
- Precise Equipment Usage: Use of DP2 system, mechanical grab and ROVs to minimize seabed impact.
- Environmental Monitoring: Continuous monitoring of water quality and marine life during operations.
- Spill Response Plan: Implementation of SOLAS-compliant procedures to address any accidental spills, and an Oil Spill Response Tier 2 capability approved by the IRCG.

Effectiveness of Mitigation
The proposed measures are expected to effectively minimize the environmental impacts, ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and protection of marine ecosystems.

6. Conclusions

Screening Decision
Based on the assessment, the project is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, a full Appropriate Assessment (AA) is not deemed necessary at this stage.

Next Steps
- Continued Monitoring: Ongoing environmental monitoring and reporting to MARA.

- Stakeholder Engagement: Continued communication with relevant authorities and stakeholders.

7. Supporting Documentation
- Maps and Figures: Detailed maps of the project location and surrounding marine areas.
- Technical Appendices: Environmental impact assessments, mitigation plans, Oil Spill Plan, Salvage Plan and stakeholder consultation records.

By adhering to this structured approach, the SISAA provides a comprehensive assessment of potential impacts, ensuring regulatory compliance and environmental protection.