



## Appropriate Assessment Report and Determination for Maritime Usage Licence Application

<b>To:</b>	Maritime Authorisations Unit	<b>From:</b>	Dr Ciar O'Toole, Senior Marine Advisor
<b>Date</b>	17 June 2025	<b>Maritime Usage Licence Application No:</b>	MUL240008
<b>Applicant:</b>		<b>Mares Connect Ltd.</b>	
<b>Type of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021</b>		<i>3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigations or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.</i>	
<b>Purpose and location of proposed Maritime Usage:</b>		For marine survey and site investigations in the Irish Sea, off the Dublin coast between the 12 nautical mile limit and the boundary of the EEZ.	
<b>Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment required:</b>		Yes, AA screening and determination issued by MARA on 6 January 2025, updated Natura Impact Statement (NIS) submitted by applicant dated 11 February 2025	
<b>Request(s) for further information:</b>		Yes, request for updated NIS 10 January 2025. Response received 11 February 2025	
<b>Public consultation:</b>		Yes, from 7 May to 6 June 2025, five submissions received from public bodies, no submissions received from members of the public	

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## **Statement of Authority**

This Appropriate Assessment Report has been undertaken by the Assessment, Research and Data Unit within MARA, a specialist unit with appropriate expertise in ecological and environmental assessment.

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

On the 4 July 2024, Mares Connect Limited was granted a foreshore licence (FS007635) by the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications under the Foreshore Act 1933 as amended, to carry out site investigation works within the foreshore out to the 12 nautical mile limit, in order to determine the suitability of the area for cable routing and other electrical infrastructure associated with the development of a proposed 750-megawatt electricity interconnector between Ireland and Britain. Subsequent to the submission of this Foreshore Licence application, Part 5 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, as amended (the “MAP Act”) was commenced, requiring Mares Connect Limited to obtain a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to carry out works in the area beyond the seaward limit of the foreshore (i.e. beyond the 12nm limit of the foreshore seaward to the EEZ boundary). Mares Connect Ltd. has now applied to MARA for a MUL to carry out site investigation survey works off the coast of county Dublin between the 12 nautical mile limit to the EEZ boundary in the Irish Sea (Figure 1).

### **1.2 Legislative Context**

This appropriate assessment report relates to a MUL application for an activity in the maritime area in accordance with Part 5 of the Maritime Area Planning Act (2021). Section 117 of the MAP Act sets out the requirements for MARA to undertake appropriate assessment in respect of proposed maritime usage. The EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EC) and Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 outline requirements for screening for appropriate assessment and for undertaking appropriate assessment. In addition, a 30-day public consultation is required on the Natura Impact Statement under Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 and Section 117 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021.

### **1.3 Screening for Appropriate Assessment**

MARA completed a screening for appropriate assessment and made an appropriate assessment screening determination on 6 January 2025. The determination stated that the proposal by Mares Connect to carry out site investigation works requires an Appropriate Assessment, as it cannot be excluded on the basis of objective scientific information,

following screening, that the proposed activities, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European Site.

An updated NIS was requested from the applicant and received by MARA, dated 11 February 2025.

## **2 Description of proposed works**

### **2.1 Project and Site Description**

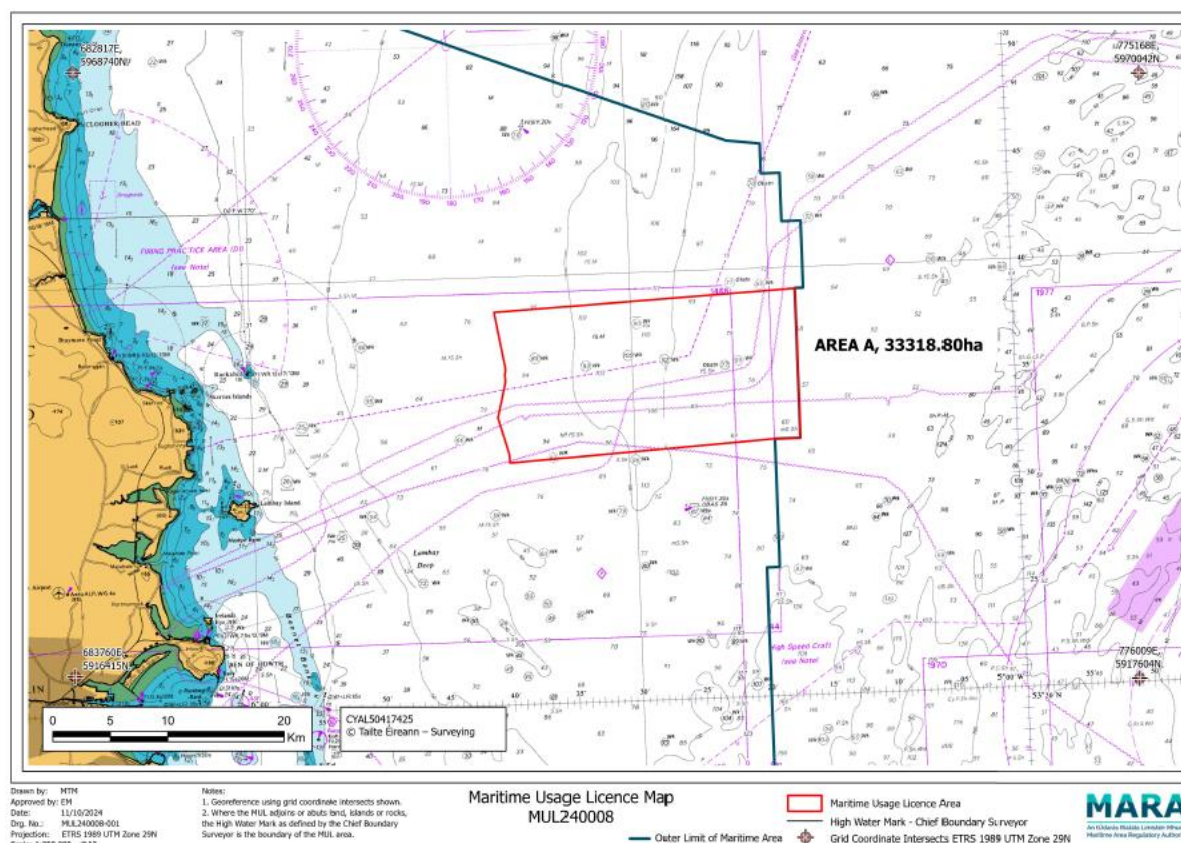
Mares Connect Ltd. has applied to MARA for a MUL to carry out site investigation survey works off the coast of county Dublin between the 12 nautical mile limit to the EEZ boundary in the Irish Sea (Figure 1). These site investigation works are to be carried out in order to determine the suitability of the area for cable routing and other electrical infrastructure associated with the development of a proposed 750-megawatt electricity interconnector between Ireland and Britain.

### **2.2 Location**

The proposed MUL application area lies between the 12nm limit and the boundary of the EEZ off the coast of north County Dublin, an area 33318.80 ha in size (Figure 1). The water depths in the MUL application area range from 70 to 100 metres and the substrate ranges between sandy mud to sand (EMODNet, 2024<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://emodnet.ec.europa.eu/geoviewer/>



**Figure 1:** Map showing proposed Maritime Usage Licence area outlined in red.

### 2.3 Description of the Proposed Survey Works

A description of the proposed project and its associated works is given in Section 1.4 of the updated NIS submitted by the applicant and dated 11 February 2025.

The proposed site investigations works include geophysical, geotechnical, environmental sampling, over a total licence period of five years. The activities have been assessed as potentially occurring at any time of year. The proposed activities summarised in Table 1 below. Table 2 shows the predicted noise levels for the survey activities.

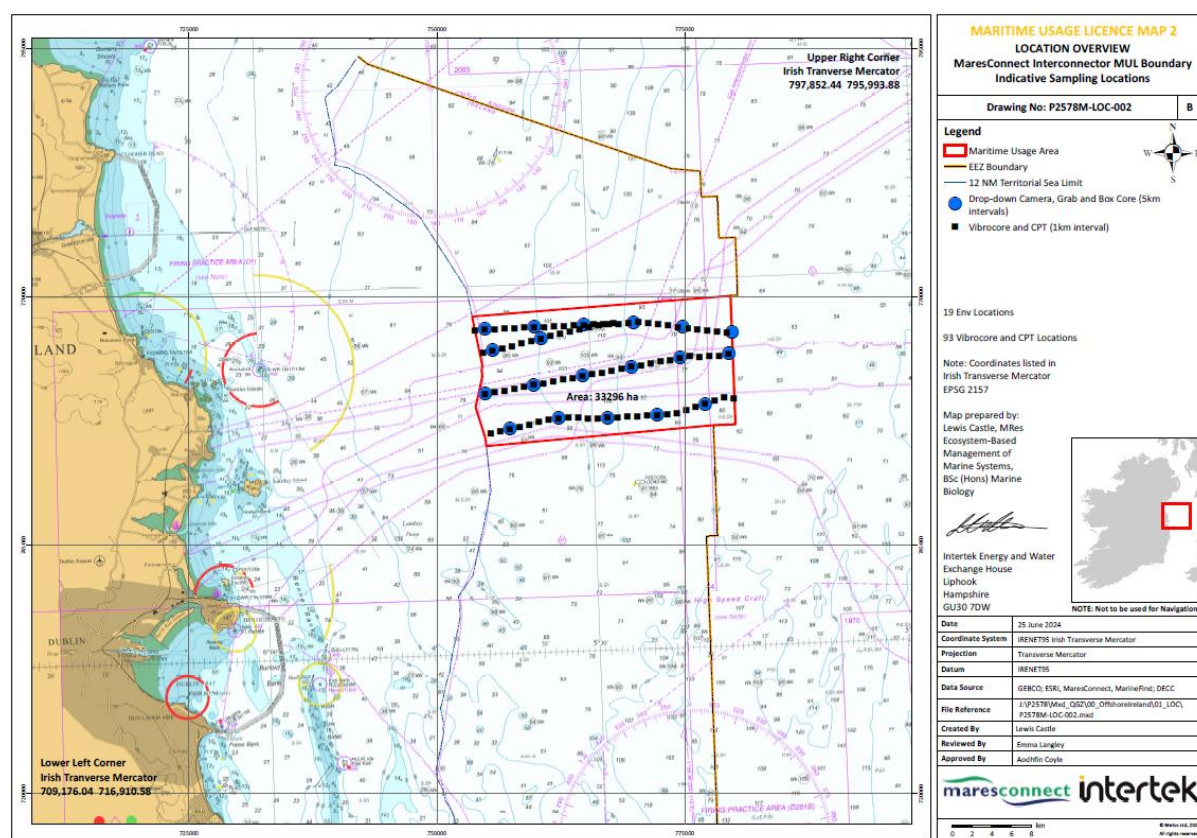
**Table 1:** Proposed marine environmental surveys and the estimated duration.

Proposed activity	Estimated duration
Geotechnical surveys – boreholes, up to 93 cone penetration tests, up to 93 vibrocores, up to 19 box cores or Van Veen grabs	2 – 4 months (multiple times)
Geophysical– side scan sonar, multibeam echo-sounder, magnetometers and sub-bottom profiler	3 months (multiple times)
Benthic surveys – 3 grab samples at 19 stations (57 total)	2-3 day period
Marine Mammal surveys- using MMO observer	Over duration of works

**Table 2** Summary of the noise sources from geophysical and geotechnical surveys.

Noise Source	Frequency	Sound Pressure Level (dB re 1 $\mu$ Pa @ 1m)
Multi beam Echo sounder	200 - 700 kHz	200-228 dB
Side scan Sonar	300 - 900 kHz	228 dB
Geotechnical drilling (Rotary)	2Hz -50kHz	160dB
Shipping Noise	50 - 300 kHz	160-175 dB

Figure 2 shows proposed locations of benthic, geophysical and geotechnical sampling activities, as indicated by the applicant's submissions.



**Figure 2** showing proposed locations of benthic, geophysical and geotechnical activities, as indicated by the applicants' submissions.

### 3 European Sites and Qualifying Interests

#### 3.1 Identification of European sites likely to be affected

As part of MARA's appropriate assessment screening determination, twenty-one Irish Special Area of Conservation (SAC) sites, nine British and twenty French SAC sites, were identified which were considered to be within the Zone of Influence of the proposed maritime usage activity. Seventeen Special Protected Area (SPA) sites were identified that were considered to be within the Zone of Influence of the proposed maritime usage activity. These European



sites, their Qualifying Interests, Special Conservation Interests and possible impact as a result of the proposed maritime usage are given in Table 5 below.

### **3.2 Description of the Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests affected.**

The appropriate assessment screening identified Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*), Grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*), Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) as Qualifying Interests that may be impacted as a result of the proposed maritime usage. This appropriate assessment has been undertaken in light of the descriptions of the qualifying interests and special conservation interests in the latest Article 17 report from the NPWS in 2019<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, 21 bird species were identified as needing further assessment due to the possibility for those species to be significantly negatively affected by disturbance from above water noise or underwater noise in the case of diving species (Screening for AA Report, 10 December 2024, Table 5). Seabird species profiles, population trends and species-specific threats used in this assessment were taken from the most recent Article 12 assessment produced by the NPWS in 2019<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.3 Conservation Objectives, Overall Status and Trends of Species and Habitats with potential to be affected**

Conservation objectives are intended to define as precisely as possible the desired state or degree of conservation to be reached in a particular site. The measures taken under the Habitats Directive are to ensure that the species and habitats listed in the Annexes achieve Favourable Conservation Status. The objective of the Birds Directive is formulated slightly differently but the ambition is the same.

Site-specific conservation objectives for sites, habitats and species listed in Table 5 were used when considering potential impacts of the proposed maritime usage activity. Details of these sites are available on the NPWS website (<https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>). Conservation objectives are not available for French sites, therefore the Conservation objectives used in the assessment of impact on these species comes from a suitable Irish SAC. For Bottlenose Dolphin, this is the Lower River Shannon SAC. For Harbour Porpoise, this is Blasket Islands SAC.

The conservation status of a habitat or species relates to the nationwide status, while conservation objectives relate to a specific SAC or SPA. The Favourable Conservation Status of a species is achieved when:

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS\\_2019\\_Vol3\\_Species\\_Article17.pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS_2019_Vol3_Species_Article17.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/IWM114.pdf>

- The population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats.
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- There is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Harbour Seal, Grey Seal, Harbour Porpoise and Bottlenose dolphin have a favourable status for the British sites. The Harbour Porpoise and Bottlenose dolphin have a Bad/Unfavourable conservation status for the French sites.

Under the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland Assessment<sup>4</sup>, of the birds that screened in for further assessment fifteen are classified as Amber (medium concern) and three species classified as Red (high concern).

The most recent Birds Directive [Article 12 report](#)<sup>5</sup> identified trends in seabird species relating to Breeding Population numbers and Breeding Distribution. For the relevant species under consideration in this assessment, declining long-term Breeding distribution trends were seen for the Black-headed gull, common gull, herring gull and kittiwake.

### 3.4 Pressures and threats to Habitats, Annex II species and Annex I species

Table 3 outlines the various pressures and threats experienced in Ireland by the Annex II species screened in for this assessment. It should be noted that under the European Environment Agency guidance on Article 17, noise pollution from marine seismic surveys was to be reported under C09 Geotechnical Surveying.

**Table 3** Pressures and Threats for relevant Habitats and Annex II species as assessed for the NPWS 2019 Article 17 report.

	Pressure	Threat
Grey seal [1364], Harbour seal [1365] Harbour porpoise [1351] and Bottlenose dolphin [1349]	<b>C09</b> Geotechnical surveying (M) <b>G01</b> Marine fish and shellfish harvesting (professional, recreational) causing reduction of species/prey populations and disturbance of species (M)	<b>C09</b> Geotechnical surveying (M) <b>G01</b> Marine fish and shellfish harvesting (professional, recreational) causing reduction of species/prey populations and disturbance of species (M)

The most recent Birds Directive [Article 12 report](#) identified the main pressures and threats to Annex I breeding seabirds. Table 4 shows these main threats and their percentage relevance to seabirds.

<sup>4</sup> [https://birdwatchireland.ie/birds-of-conservation-concern-in-ireland/#:~:text=The%20conservation%20status%20of%20species,%25\)%20on%20the%20Green%20list.](https://birdwatchireland.ie/birds-of-conservation-concern-in-ireland/#:~:text=The%20conservation%20status%20of%20species,%25)%20on%20the%20Green%20list.)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/IWM114.pdf>



**Table 4** Pressures and Threats on Annex I bird species as assessed for the NPWS 2019 Article 12 report.

Code	Description	Percentage relevance
D01	Wind, wave and tidal power, including infrastructure	92
G12	Bycatch and incidental killing (due to fishing and hunting activities)	79
N06	Desynchronisation of biological/ecological processes due to climate change	75
N07	Decline or extinction of related species (e.g. food source / prey, predator / parasite, symbiote, etc.) due to climate change	75
I02	Other invasive alien species (other than species of Union concern)	71
F22	Residential or recreational activities and structures generating marine macro- and micro- particulate pollution (e.g. plastic bags, Styrofoam)	54
F23	Industrial or commercial activities and structures generating marine macro- and micro- particulate pollution (e.g. plastic bags, Styrofoam)	54
F07	Sports, tourism and leisure activities	46
G01	Marine fish and shellfish harvesting (professional, recreational) causing reduction of species/prey populations and disturbance of species	46
J02	Mixed source marine water pollution (marine and coastal)	29

Table 5 below outlines the SAC and SPA sites that were screened in, the Qualifying Interests and Special Conservation Interests related to each site, the reason why, and provides links to the relevant Conservation Objectives document produced by the NPWS in each Irish site.

**Table5:** Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protected Areas, qualifying interests and conservation objectives identified as requiring further assessment.

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Rockabill to Dalkey SAC (Site Code IE003000 )	Approx. 15 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2013)</a> Conservation Objectives: Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC 003000. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Codling Fault Zone SAC (Site code IE003015)	Approx. 20 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2025)</a> Conservation Objectives: Codling Fault Zone SAC 003015. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Lambay Island SAC (Site Code IE000204)	Approx. 15 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364] <i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour Seal) [1365]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Lambay Island SAC 000204. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Blackwater Bank SAC [Site code IE002953]	>100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Blackwater Bank SAC 002953. Version 3. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Carnsore Point SAC [Site code IE002269]	Approx 150km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Carnsore Point SAC 002269. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service,

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
				Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Slaney River Valley SAC [Site code IE000781]	> 100 km	<i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour Seal) [1365]	Yes – potential disturbance from above and underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2011)</a> Conservation Objectives: Slaney River Valley SAC 000781. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
Saltee Islands SAC [Site code IE0007071]	> 100 km	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	Yes – potential disturbance from above and underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2011)</a> Conservation Objectives: Saltee Islands SAC 000707 and Saltee Islands SPA 004002. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC [Site code IE000101]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2011)</a> Conservation Objectives: Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC 000101. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2014)</a> Conservation Objectives: Blasket Islands SAC 002172. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Hook Head SAC [Site code IE000764]	> 100 km	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2025)</a> Conservation Objectives: Hook Head SAC 000764. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Kenmare River SAC [Site code IE002158]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2013)</a> Conservation Objectives: Kenmare River SAC 002158. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Belgica Mound Province SAC [Site code IE002327]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2025)</a> Conservation Objectives: Belgica Mound Province SAC 002327. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Inishmore Island SAC [Site code IE000213]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Inishmore Island SAC 000213. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Kilkieran Bay and Islands SAC [Site code IE002111]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2014)</a> Conservation Objectives: Kilkieran Bay and Islands SAC 002111. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
West Connacht Coast SAC [Site code IE002998]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2025)</a> Conservation Objectives: West Connacht Coast SAC 002998. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Bunduff Lough and Machair/Trawalua/Mullaghmore SAC [000625]	> 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2015)</a> Conservation Objectives: Bunduff Lough and Machair/Trawalua/Mullaghmore SAC 000625. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
Lleyn Peninsula and the Sarnau SAC [Site code UK0013117 ]	>100km	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters
The Maidens [Site code UK0030384]	>100km	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) the species in UK waters
The Murlough SAC [Site code UK0016612]	>100km	<i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour seal) [1365]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Strangford Lough SAC [Site code UK0016608]	>100km	<i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour seal) [1365]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) the species in UK waters
The North Channel SAC [Site code UK0030399]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters
Cardigan Bay SAC [Site code UK0012712]	>100km	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters
North Anglesey Marine SAC [Site code UK0030398]	75 – 100 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters



European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
West Wales Marine SAC [Site code UK0030397 ]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters
Bristol Channel Approaches SAC [Site code UK003039]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained and that it makes the best possible contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the species in UK waters
Récifs et landes de la Hague SAC [Site code FR2500084]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Anse de Vauville SAC [Site code FR2502019]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Banc et récifs de Surtainville SAC [Site code FR2502018]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Chausey [Site code FR2500079]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Baie du Mont Saint-Michel [Site code FR2500077]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Estuaire de la Rance SAC [Site code FR5300061]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Baie de Lancieux, Baie de l'Arguenon, Archipel de Saint Malo et Dinard [Site code FR5300012]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -.
Cap d'Erquy-Cap Fréhel [Site code FR5300011]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Baie de Saint-Brieuc [Site code FR5300066]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Tregor Goëlo [Site code FR5310070]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Côte de Granit rose-Sept-Iles [Site code FR5300009]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Nord Bretagne DH [Site code FR2502022]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Baie de Morlaix SAC [Site code FR5300015]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Abers - Côte des legends [Site code FR5300017]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Ouessant-Molène [Site code FR5300018]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Côtes de Crozon [Site code FR5302006]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Mers Celtiques – Talus du golfe de Gascogne [Site code FR5302015]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Rivière Leguer, forêts de Beffou, Coat an Noz et Coat an Hay [Site code FR5300008]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Estuaire de la Rance [Site code FR53000061]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Chaussée de Sein [Site code FR5302007]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
Récifs du talus du golfe de Gascogne [Site code FR5302016]	>100km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes – possible disturbance from underwater noise	There are no specific conservation objectives relating to these species in this SAC, so the conservation objectives from Lower Shannon River SAC (Site code: IE002165) and Blasket Islands SAC [Site code IE002172] were used -
North West Irish Sea SPA (Site Code IE004236)	Overlaps with MUL site	Red-throated Diver ( <i>Gavia stellata</i> ) [A001] Great Northern Diver ( <i>Gavia immer</i> ) [A003] Fulmar ( <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> ) [A009] Manx Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> ) [A013] Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> ) [A017]	Yes – possible above and under water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2023)</a> Conservation Objectives: North-west Irish Sea SPA 004236. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage



European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
		Shag ( <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> ) [A018] Common Scoter ( <i>Melanitta nigra</i> ) [A065] Little Gull ( <i>Larus minutus</i> ) [A177] Black-headed Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> ) [A179] Common Gull ( <i>Larus canus</i> ) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> ) [A183] Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184] Great Black-backed Gull ( <i>Larus marinus</i> ) [A187] Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188] Roseate Tern ( <i>Sterna dougallii</i> ) [A192] Common Tern ( <i>Sterna hirundo</i> ) [A193] Arctic Tern ( <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> ) [A194] Little Tern ( <i>Sterna albifrons</i> ) [A195] Guillemot ( <i>Uria aalge</i> ) [A199] Razorbill ( <i>Alca torda</i> ) [A200] Puffin ( <i>Fratercula arctica</i> ) [A204]		
Howth Head Coast SPA (Site Code IE004113)	Approx 15 km	Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188]	Yes – possible above and under water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Howth Head Coast SPA 004113. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Ireland's Eye SPA (Site Code IE004117)	Approx 15 km	Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184] Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188] Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> ) [A017] Guillemot ( <i>Uria aalge</i> ) [A199] Razorbill ( <i>Alca torda</i> ) [A200]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and under water noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Ireland's Eye SPA 004117. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Dalkey Islands SPA (Site Code IE004172)	Approx 25 km	Roseate Tern ( <i>Sterna dougallii</i> ) [A192] Common Tern ( <i>Sterna hirundo</i> ) [A193] Arctic Tern ( <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> ) [A194]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and under water noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Dalkey Islands SPA 004172. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Lambay Island SPA (Site Code IE004069)	Approx 15 km	Fulmar ( <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> ) [A009] Greylag Goose ( <i>Anser anser</i> ) [A043] Lesser Black-backed Gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> ) [A183] Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184] Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188] Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> ) [A017] Shag ( <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> ) [A018] Guillemot ( <i>Uria aalge</i> ) [A199] Razorbill ( <i>Alca torda</i> ) [A200] Puffin ( <i>Fratercula arctica</i> ) [A204]	Yes – possible disturbance from above and under water noise	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Lambay Island SPA 004069. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
Rockabill SPA (Site code:004014)	Approx 15 km	Roseate Tern ( <i>Sterna dougallii</i> ) [A192] Common Tern ( <i>Sterna hirundo</i> ) [A193] Arctic Tern ( <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> ) [A194]	Yes – possible above and below water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2013)</a> Conservation Objectives: Rockabill SPA 004014. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Skerries Islands SPA (Site code: 004122)	Approx 25 km	Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184]	Yes – possible above and below water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Skerries Islands SPA 004122. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA (Site code: 004158)	Approx 25 km	Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184]	Yes – possible above and below water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2012)</a> Conservation Objectives: River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA 004158. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
South Dublin Bay and River Tolka SPA (Site IE004024)	Approx 35 km	Arctic Tern ( <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> ) [A194]	Yes – possible above and under water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2015)</a> Conservation Objectives: South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA 004024. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
The Murrough SPA (Site code: 004186)	Approx 55 km	Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184]	Yes – possible above and under water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: The Murrough SPA 004186. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service,

European Site Code	Distance from the Proposed Development (km) or other unit used	Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Conservation Objective
				Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Wicklow Head SPA (Site code: 004127)	Approx 70 km	Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188]	Yes – possible above and below water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Head SPA 004127. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Seas off Wexford SPA (site code IE0004237)	Approx 120 km	Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188] Guillemot ( <i>Uria aalge</i> ) [A199] Razorbill ( <i>Alca torda</i> ) [A200] Puffin ( <i>Fratercula arctica</i> ) [A204] Lesser Black-backed Gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> ) [A183] Gannet ( <i>Morus bassanus</i> ) [A016] Fulmar ( <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> ) [A009] Black-headed Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> ) [A179] Common Gull ( <i>Larus canus</i> ) [A182] Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184]	Yes – possible above and under water noise disturbance	<a href="#">NPWS (2024)</a> Conservation Objectives: Seas off Wexford SPA 004237. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

## 4 Assessment and Mitigation

### 4.1 Assessment of Likely/Possible Significant Impacts on European Sites and their conservation interests

The impacts that have been identified that have the potential to cause significant impacts on European sites and their Qualifying Interests are potential above water noise and visual disturbance, underwater noise disturbance and vibration for a number of qualifying interests and Special Conservation Interests at various SAC and SPA sites (Table 5).

These disturbances may cause the displacement of individuals, changes in species behaviour, or the risk of morbidity or mortality. Any mitigation measures recommended on foot of the assessment in this section are included in Section 4.5 Mitigation Measures.

#### 4.1.1 Disturbance due to underwater noise and vibration (marine mammals)

Underwater noise resulting from the proposed survey has the potential to impact grey seal, harbour seal, bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise should they be within the Zone of Influence (Zoi) of the survey during operations. Marine mammals depend on sound for a wide range of functions including navigation, perception of their environment, communication, prey identification and capture, and the detection of predators. The hearing system of marine mammals, being highly sensitive and adapted to respond to changes in pressure in an aquatic environment, is particularly susceptible to damage. Auditory injury in marine mammals can be defined as a permanent threshold shift leading to non-reversible auditory injury or as a temporary threshold shift in hearing sensitivity, which can have negative effects on the ability to communicate, navigate, or locate prey for a period of minutes, hours or days. These threshold levels as they relate to varying impact levels on marine mammals have been the focus of a number of research papers and resulted in guidelines being issued by the NPWS<sup>6</sup>.

MARA finds that the possibility of impact on these marine mammals as a result of equipment proposed as per Table 1 of this report cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt.

In-combination impacts resulting in a higher risk of negative impact are also considered possible in relation to underwater noise due to the potential for similar surveys and activities occurring at the same time in the same area, as outlined in Section 4.2. Therefore, it is recommended that suitable mitigation measures be included in any Maritime Usage Licence relating to this proposed maritime usage activity to rule out possible negative impacts on marine mammals due to underwater noise.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://sea-inc.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Southall-et-al\\_2019\\_MM-Noise-criteria-update-with-errata\\_Aq-Mammals.pdf](https://sea-inc.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Southall-et-al_2019_MM-Noise-criteria-update-with-errata_Aq-Mammals.pdf)  
[https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/Underwater%20sound%20guidance\\_Jan%202014.pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/Underwater%20sound%20guidance_Jan%202014.pdf)  
<https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/e2a46de5-43d4-43f0-b296-c62134397ce4/jncc-guidelines-seismicsurvey-aug2017-web.pdf>

#### 4.1.2 Disturbance due to underwater noise and vibration (birds)

Diving birds can be sensitive to disturbance from underwater noise and fatalities can occur at close distance. Flushing disturbance can be expected to displace these diving seabirds from close proximity to the survey vessel and any towed equipment, thereby limiting their exposure to the highest sound pressures generated. The likelihood of these birds being in the vicinity of a noise generating operation is low due to the surface activity associated with such operations disturbing the birds prior to commencement of the underwater noise. There is a low likelihood of interaction between the sound source and diving birds due to the relatively short exposure time when they dive, the temporary nature of the survey work, the mobile nature of the birds and the displacement of most diving species due to flushing disturbance. Therefore, it can be determined that underwater noise would be very unlikely to have a significant effect on diving seabirds in the vicinity of the survey area and no further mitigation is required.

#### 4.1.3 Disturbance due to above water noise(birds)

Temporary displacement from boat activity and above water noise can be expected for bird species also.

While it is acknowledged that the species that use the offshore survey area for feeding may be disturbed by the activities of the survey vessel, visual or above water noise disturbance from an additional vessel is unlikely to be significant given the temporary nature of the activities and the slow speed of the survey vessels. In-combination impacts in relation to disturbance are possible in relation to above water noise and bird activity due to the potential for other surveys and activities to occur at the same time in the same area, as outlined in Section 4.2.

Given the short duration of the proposed site investigations, the significance of effects on birds in the environment from the proposed site investigations will be temporary. However, as some bird species are thought to be more sensitive to this type of disturbance while foraging, particularly during their breeding period, it is recommended that suitable mitigation measures be included in any Maritime Usage Licence relating to this proposed maritime usage activity to rule out possible negative impacts on protected bird species due to above-water noise.

#### 4.2 Assessment of In-combination effects

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that an Appropriate Assessment be carried out in respect of any plan or project which is likely to have a significant effect on one or more European sites, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects. Therefore, regardless of whether or not the likely or possible effects of a plan or project are significant when considered in isolation, the potential for the plan or project to significantly affect European sites in combination with other past, present or foreseeable future plans or projects



must also be assessed. All types of plans or projects that could, in-combination with the project under consideration, have a significant effect, should be taken into account. This in-combination assessment has been undertaken using professional and scientific judgement.

#### 4.2.1 Defining the Cumulative Effects Spatial Scope (CESS)

Impacts of underwater noise associated with the proposed maritime usage are considered to have the widest spatial reach, with Harbour porpoise being most sensitive to noise disturbance. The definition of the CESS is based on acoustic survey equipment effective deterrence ranges as per JNCC Guidance on Assessing the Significance of Noise Disturbance against Harbour Porpoise<sup>7</sup>. The CESS was defined at Appropriate Assessment screening stage as 10km, based on acoustic survey equipment effective deterrence ranges for Harbour porpoise, as they were identified as the species most sensitive to disturbance in this assessment<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4.2.2 Defining the Cumulative Effects Temporal Scope (CETS)

The temporal scope for examination of cumulative effects has been defined considering the period over which the proposed maritime usage would take place. For this project, this is five years, the requested Marine Usage period and the time period assessed in the AA screening report and determination. Therefore, the Cumulative Effects Temporal Scope (CETS) is five years.

#### 4.2.3 Impact identification

The impacts identified are:

- Disturbance from underwater noise and vibration
- Visual and above water noise disturbance

#### 4.2.4 Pathway Identification

Impact	Potential Cumulative Pathway
Disturbance from underwater noise and vibration	Pathway possible via sound travelling through water with impacts possible within CESS where there is temporal overlap with other underwater noise producing projects.
Visual and above water noise disturbance	Pathway possible via light and sound travelling through air with impacts possible within CESS where there is temporal overlap with other visual and above water noise producing projects.

#### 4.2.5 Prediction:

<sup>7</sup> JNCC Guidance on Assessing the Significance of Noise Disturbance against Harbour Porpoise SACs Conservation Objectives (<https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/2e60a9a0-4366-4971-9327-2bc409e09784/JNCC-Report-654-FINAL-WEB.pdf>)

<sup>8</sup> Effective Deterrence Range – the radius of a circular area assumed to be disturbed.

The magnitude and extent of identified likely cumulative effects have been predicted below.

*Disturbance from underwater noise and vibration*

There is the potential for increased underwater noise disturbance effects if geophysical activities with other projects were to take place at the same time.

*Visual and above water noise disturbance*

There is the potential for increased visual and above water noise disturbance if geotechnical activities with other projects were to take place at the same time.

**4.2.6 Identification of Plans or Projects that could act in combination:**

A search was carried out of relevant databases (e.g. EPA, Foreshore, MARA, aquaculture, planning authorities, etc.) for other plans/projects with characteristics that may cause in-combination or cumulative effects with the project being assessed, on Natura 2000 sites. All plans and projects within the CESS and CETS have been identified. All projects within the CESS and CETS have been considered for their potential to cause cumulative effects in combination with the site investigation activities proposed under this Maritime Usage Licence Application, on the qualifying interests of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

Following a search of relevant databases undertaken on the 28 February and 16 June 2025, the projects in Table 6 were identified as having potential in-combination impacts with the proposed maritime usage activity. No other projects were identified as having the potential for causing in-combination impacts.

**Table 6:** Projects identified with the potential to cause in-combination effects with the project being assessed.

Company Name	Reference code		Approximate distance from MUL area	Project Status	Potential cumulative effects
Mares Connect	FS007635	Geophysical survey and site investigations for a proposed subsea cable	Adjoins	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Microsoft Ireland Operations Ltd	LIC230016	Geophysical survey and site investigations for a proposed cable	Within 5 km	MUL granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Microsoft Ireland Operations Ltd	LIC230018	Geophysical survey and site investigations for a proposed subsea cable	Overlaps	MUL granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap

Eircom Limited	FS004523	Submarine communications cable	Within 5 km	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Gas Networks Ireland	FS003993	Lay, use and maintain of gas pipeline	Within 5 km	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Virgin Media	FS005358	Submarine Communication Cable	Within 5 km	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Emerald Bridge Fibres Limited	FS006196	Site investigation and installation of submarine cable.	Within 5 km	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Rockabill Cable System Limited	FS006842	Submarine Communication Cable	Within 5 km	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap
Celtix Connect Limited	FS006915	Telecommunication subsea fibre optic cable	Within 5 km	Foreshore licence granted	Potential disturbance to birds, fish and cetaceans via underwater and above-water noise. Potential spatial and temporal overlap

The following plans, related to the development of the maritime environment were also identified:

- The Climate Action Plan 2024
- The National Marine Planning Framework
- The Water Action Plan 2024

These plans promote sustainable development and integrated management planning in the maritime environment. It is unlikely that any of these plans will result in a negative in-combination effect on the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites.

#### 4.2.7 In-Combination Effects Assessment conclusion

Based on insufficient clarity when projects will be carried out and using the precautionary principle the above projects are considered to have potential in-combination effects should there be temporal overlap with the proposed maritime usage activity.

It is not possible to exclude the possibility of likely significant in-combination effects on the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites considered in this assessment as a result of

this proposed maritime usage activity and the projects identified in Table 6. Therefore, it is recommended that suitable mitigation measure be included in a Maritime Usage Licence relating this proposed maritime activity for the possibility of likely significant in-combination effects.

#### **4.3 Assessment of Transboundary effects**

The mitigation measures proposed as part of this appropriate assessment will mitigate against any transboundary effects on the qualifying interests from the British and French protected sites.

#### **4.4 Public consultation**

A 30-day public consultation was undertaken commencing on 7 May 2025, with the public invited to make observations. In addition to the public consultation, observations were invited from relevant public bodies. Five submissions were received, all from public bodies and no submissions were received from members of the public. These submissions are dealt with in detail in Table 1 of the accompanying ARD MUL Assessment Report for this activity and have been considered in the Appropriate Assessment as appropriate. Relevant mitigation measures are included in Section 4 of this report and Appendix 1 of the ARD MUL Assessment Report.

#### **4.5 Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures for those impacts identified in Section 4.1 *Assessment of Likely/Possible Significant Impacts on European Sites and their conservation interests* are detailed below.

##### **4.5.1 Disturbance due to underwater noise and vibration (marine mammals)**

An appropriate mitigation for the effects of underwater noise on marine mammals is the implementation of the most up to date national guidance to manage the introduction of manmade sound sources into the marine environment. When carrying out geotechnical and geophysical surveys particular attention should be paid to the sections of the guidance relating to drilling (in relation to seabed cores) and geophysical acoustic surveys. It is recommended a condition be included in any maritime usage licence that may be granted as follows:

##### ***Marine Mammals***

- i. The Holder shall appoint a marine mammal observer(s) for the purposes of overseeing the Permitted Maritime Usage. The Holder shall ensure the marine mammal observer(s) shall satisfy the requirements of the most up to date national guidance. During the activity, the Holder shall comply with the directions of the marine mammal observer(s).*
- ii. The Holder shall implement risk control and mitigation measures for marine mammals in strict accordance with the most up to date national guidance.*

- iii. *The Holder shall, within 30 days of completion of the Permitted Maritime Usage, forward a report of the marine mammal observer(s) operations and mitigation undertaken, to [offshore@npws.gov.ie](mailto:offshore@npws.gov.ie) and [compliance@mara.gov.ie](mailto:compliance@mara.gov.ie).*
- iv. *The Holder shall publish the report and recording and data forms on their website within 60 days of completion of the Permitted Maritime Usage unless otherwise agreed with the Grantor.*

#### 4.5.2 Disturbance due to underwater noise and vibration (birds)

No mitigation is required for birds relating to survey disturbance due to underwater noise and vibration in the proposed Maritime Usage Area.

#### 4.5.3 Disturbance due to above water noise (birds)

To minimise any disturbance effects on protected bird species as a result of other projects or plans, it is recommended a condition be included in any maritime usage licence that may be granted as follows:

##### *Birds*

*Where the Holder observes significant clusters of birds, actively fishing and/or diving, within 500m of the survey vessel, in carrying out the Permitted Maritime Usage, the survey route shall be altered to maintain a 500m buffer from the birds. Appropriate records must be retained by the Holder.*

#### 4.5.4 In-combination effects

To minimise any in-combination effects as a result of other projects or plans, it is recommended a condition be included in any maritime usage licence that may be granted as follows:

##### *In-combination effects*

- i. *Prior to the commencement of the Permitted Maritime Usage, the Holder shall coordinate with other authorisation holders carrying out geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities within a 10 km radius of the site boundary.*
- ii. *Where a vessel-to-vessel distance of greater than 10 km cannot be maintained with respect to geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities, the Holder shall co-ordinate with other authorisation holders to prevent temporal overlap of the activities. Where the Holder can submit evidence that there is a vessel-to-vessel distance of greater than 10 km, no temporal co-ordination of activities is required.*
- iii. *Where the Holder becomes aware of temporal overlap that cannot be resolved within the prescribed distance, the Holder shall notify the Grantor who shall determine the timing of activities.*

- iv. Records of all engagements held, and agreements reached, if any, shall be maintained by the Holder and made available to the Grantor if requested.*

#### **4.6 Residual effects**

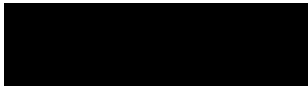
This assessment has identified Likely/Possible Significant Impacts on European Sites and their conservation interests at Section 4.1 and identified mitigation measures for each at Section 4.5. It is considered that the mitigation measures described and their implementation through licence conditions will remove, or reduce to imperceptible levels, all negative impacts and that residual effects will not arise.

### **5 Appropriate Assessment Conclusion**

The Appropriate Assessment process identified likely/possible significant impacts due to disturbance from above and underwater noise and disturbance from geotechnical and geophysical surveys on Annex II marine mammal species and birds. These likely significant impacts could not be ruled out, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, without mitigation.

The same impacts were identified as having the potential to cause in-combination impacts, which could not be ruled out, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, without mitigation.

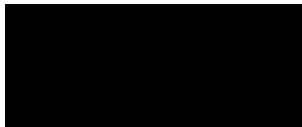
Mitigation measures were identified to ensure that impacts on European sites and their qualifying interests and special conservation interests do not occur. Therefore, with adherence to the mitigation measures specified in section 4.5 Mitigation Measures, and in view of best scientific knowledge, and of the site's conservation objectives, I find that the project, individually, or in-combination with other plans or projects, will not have adverse effects on European sites.

Signature and Date of Recommending Marine Advisor	 <b>Dr Ciar O'Toole</b> Senior Marine Advisor Assessment, Research and Data Unit 17 June 2025
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## 6 Appropriate Assessment Determination

Having considered this report, the documents submitted by Mares Connect Limited, along with my own assessment, it can be concluded, and I determine, for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 42(11) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations, that the proposal for *Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000 in the Irish Sea, off the Dublin coast between the 12 nautical mile limit and the boundary of the EEZ* (either individually or in combination with any other plans or projects), will not adversely affect the integrity of any European sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives, subject to the implementation of the mitigation measures specified in section 4.5 Mitigation Measures adopted and outlined above, which must be included as conditions to any consent that may be granted in respect of the respective maritime usage licence application.

Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director of Assessment, Research and Data 20 June 2025
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