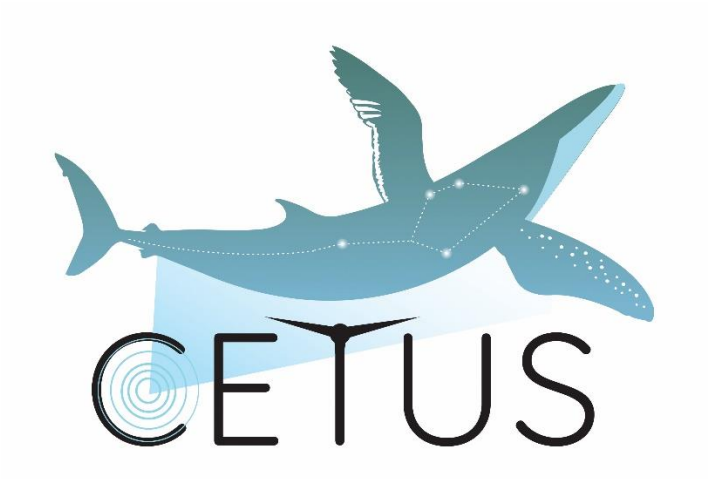

CETUS CIL Co-deployment Project
MUL240028

Assessment of Impacts of the Maritime Usage (AIMU) Report

August 2024

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Introduction

To ensure MARA can fully assess all potential impacts of a proposed maritime usage, all applicants are required to submit the AIMU report in support of their maritime usage license application. The scale and complexity of the AIMU should reflect the scale and complexity of the project. This report contains an analysis of the potential effects of a proposed deployment of approximately 20 passive acoustic receivers on existing Commission of Irish Lights (CIL) managed buoys in the western Irish Sea and two passive acoustic receivers on CIL buoys in the southern Celtic Sea, for the purposes of monitoring two conservation listed elasmobranch species.

The research has a core conservation management objective of understanding these vulnerable species' fundamental ecology and assessing their amenability to spatial protection. The work is being conducted as part of a large multidisciplinary research project called CETUS. The CETUS project: Cetacean, Elasmobranch, Turtle, and Seabird distribution modelling platform supporting the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy and is funded by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

Project Description

The proposed maritime usage aims to assess the seasonal residency, site fidelity and dispersal of tope, *Galeorhinus galeus,* in the western Irish Sea and flapper skate, *Dipturus intermedius,* in the southern Celtic Sea. Recreational angling records indicate that the area off the east coast, between Bray Head and Court Town, is important for tope sharks. North of Wicklow is thought to be especially important due to the presence of large mature females. In addition, Courtmacsherry Bay in Co. Cork is one of the last known global hotspots for the flapper skate.

This project will involve deploying and maintaining passive acoustic receivers on existing Commission of Irish Lights (CIL) managed buoys. The passive receivers are completely inert and listen at a specific frequency for acoustic tags, which sends out coded pulses every 120 – 180 seconds on 69 KHz. Initially, we propose the co-deployment of five receivers on navigational buoys. Once satisfied that the deployments have no material impact on the buoys, data is of sufficient quality and

deployments/retrievals are feasible, a minimum of 20 receivers will be deployed on other buoys along the east coast and two in Courtmacsherry Bay. A study duration of five years is envisaged at this stage. This project has been through strict animal welfare licencing and review, with approval from the University College Cork Ethics Committee and the governing body for animal research in Ireland, The Health Products Regulatory Authority. Licences for animal tagging were granted in 2023. The project results will be disseminated to all interested stakeholders and will support decision-makers in government, industry and broader society in developing sustainable offshore energy.

Programme of Works

The start date for maritime usage would preferably be in Q1 of 2025, running for five years. Maintenance, data retrieval and re-deployment will be carried out from a 7 m RIB annually after an initial pilot phase.

Consideration of the

EIA Directive

Under the EU's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU), major building or development projects in the EU must first be assessed for their environmental impact. This proposal describes the deployment of small passive receivers on large existing infrastructure with negligible impacts on the receiving ecosystem and no impact on the seabed; therefore, there is no need to consider an EIA for our proposed project.

WFD Directive

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) focuses on ensuring good qualitative and quantitative health, i.e., reducing and removing pollution and ensuring sufficient water to support wildlife and human needs. The WFD is the primary law for water protection in Europe. It applies to inland, transitional and coastal surface waters and groundwater. Our study site overlaps with WFD coastal water bodies, with seven buoys located within coastal water bodies. One buoy is in a transitional water body in Argideen Estuary (IE_SW_090_0200) connected to Courtmacsherry Bay, Co. Cork. As the proposed deployments on existing CIL buoys will not emit energy or leech a substance into the receiving environment, there is no need to consider the WFD for our proposed project.

MSFD Directive

The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) was implemented to protect the marine ecosystem and biodiversity upon which our health and marine-related economic and social activities depend. The directive states: "The marine environment is a precious heritage that must be protected, preserved and, where practicable, restored with the ultimate aim of maintaining biodiversity and providing diverse and dynamic oceans and seas, which are clean, healthy and productive".

Our primary research objective is to gain knowledge on the distribution and movement ecology of two conservation-listed elasmobranch species. These species are high up the food chain and potentially a key indicator of ocean health, but they may be affected by offshore renewable energy. Therefore, our objectives align with those stated in the MSFD directive.

Negative impacts stated in the MSFD include pollution, biodiversity loss, seabed damage, overexploitation, spread of non-indigenous species, marine litter, underwater noise, ocean warming, and acidification. In this context, the proposed deployments on existing CIL infrastructure are trivial in scale and will not contribute to any of the pollutants/stressors listed in the MSFD. The receivers

will not emit energy or leech a substance into the receiving environment. The tether will be kept at a minimum length to minimise entanglement risk. Therefore, we do not assess any negative impacts on the objectives of the MSFD from our research project.

Planning & Development (including Statement of consistency with the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

We assess that there will be no impact on planning and development in the area due to the trivial scale of our deployments on existing CIL infrastructure.

Land & Soils

The proposed application is in the coastal marine environment. We assess that there will be no impact on the land and soils in the area caused by the proposed co-deployed devices on existing CIL infrastructure.

Water

We assess that there will be no impact on the water quality in the area.

Biodiversity

We assess that there will be no significant impact on the biodiversity in the area.

Fisheries and Aquaculture

We assess the proposed deployments as having no impact on fisheries or aquaculture in the study area.

Air Quality

We assess the proposed deployments as having no impact on air quality in the study area.

Noise & Vibration

Due to our technical equipment being silent, we assess that there will be no impact on the noise and vibrations in the area.

Landscape/Seascape

The proposed deployment on existing CIL infrastructure will not affect the swing radius of the swept area of the existing buoy or mooring system.

Traffic & Transport (including navigation)

A pilot phase of deployment monitoring and assessment in collaboration with CIL will ensure the deployments will not negatively impact navigation buoys.

Cultural Heritage (including underwater archaeology)

We assess that there will be no impact on the area's cultural heritage, including archaeology.

Population & Human Health

We assess that there will be no impact on population and human health.

Major Accidents & Disasters

We assess that there will be no risk of major accidents and disasters.

Climate

We assess that there will be no significant impact on the climate.

Waste

We assess that there will be no risk for waste.

Material Assets

We assess that there will be no risk for material assets.

Interactions

We see no potential interactions to consider.

Summary of Mitigations

Our proposed deployments will be sub-surface, silent, and non-invasive. They will not significantly impact the environment, people or animals in the area itself or more broadly. Therefore, no mitigation measures are required.