

Marine usage licence ref MUL230024 for marine survey and site investigation works at Ballyloughane, county Galway & Atlantic ocean

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Summary

- The application is for a marine survey and site investigation (temporary survey works) for the location of a proposed subsea telecoms cable, from a landfall at Ballyloughane County Galway traversing the Irish Maritime Area to the southwest of Ireland.
- Survey operations include:
 - Geophysical sub bottom profiler, which has potential for high energy input
 - multibeam which should have zero impact.
 - grab and core samples.
- The survey area and route overlaps with spawning and nursery grounds of selected species (Figure 1) and a herring spawning area outside Liscannor bay is close to the survey route (Figure 2).
- **The survey route passes through prawn fishing grounds “The Aran Grounds” Functional Unit 17 (FU17).**
- Geophysical surveys may impact these species, if undertaken during spawning periods.
- Survey area coincides with Irish fishing catch, including international fishing effort (Figures 3 and 4).
- Main survey area of overlap is with bottom trawls, particularly skirting southern end of Aran grounds (FU17) (Figure 5).
- The survey area shows some overlap with gears used by inshore fishing vessels (Figure 6).

Background

FEAS received the following request for information:

DAFM has become aware of the Public Consultation for Marine Usage Licence ref: MUL230024 All documentation for this project can be found on the following link: [MUL230024 - MARA - The Maritime Regulator](#).

We would like to request your comments/observations on the impact this project might have on the whole of the seafood sector.

I would greatly appreciate the return of observations by COB Tuesday, 11th of February, please.

Further details

- **Start Date is stated as September 2024.**
- Duration of operations estimated at 8 weeks.
- Total Survey area estimated at 3,607km².
- Intention to commence survey operations as soon as practically possible following licensing, relative to vessel availability, seasonality and weather.
- Purpose: to investigate feasibility of constructing new subsea telecoms cable system, PISCES, linking Ireland – landfall at Ballyloughane – to France, Spain and Portugal.
- Survey operations are detailed in the offshore, inshore, and landfall zones. With landfall close to Galway harbour and city.
- Galway Bay Complex is classified as an SAC (Special Area of Conservation; Site code 000268) while the Inner Galway Bay is classified as a SPA (Special Protection Area; Site code 004031)

- Operations in the marine zone include multibeam echosounder, sub-bottom profiler, side-scan sonar and magnetometer. Cone penetration test, grab samples and gravity cores / vibrocores will be gathered.
- Acoustic survey operations can put large energy waves into the water column which can disturb marine life and sediment. This is primarily an issue with sub-bottom profilers. Commercial and non-commercial species may be impacted. Responses of animals to underwater noise vary and are generally proportional with the distance from source, length of exposure, the nature of the sound (i.e. sound pressure and particle motion) and the sensitivity of the receptor fish and shellfish species. There is a continuum of possible responses from death, physical and physiological effects, impaired hearing, masking biologically important sounds, to behavioural responses (Hawkins & Popper, 2017). In general, there are substantial knowledge gaps regarding both the bioacoustics and the responses of animals to sounds associated with survey operations, however they may be expected to be short term.
- Survey operations would also include a Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) to ensure no disturbance of seal /cetacean populations.
- There are no licensed aquaculture sites within the survey area, the nearest, a licensed shellfish site for Pacific Oysters, being situated 2.4km east in Mweeloon Bay – the survey may be expected to have no impact or interactions.
- Survey route passes through known demersal and pelagic fish spawning and nursery grounds and the range of wild Atlantic salmon. Most of which cover large spatial expanses, making the survey area relatively small and with limited survey restricted, likely to have little impact.
- The survey route passes through prawn fishing grounds “The Aran Grounds” Functional Unit 17 (FU17).
- Application states “*There is no significant overlap with fishing activities in the region*” while there are overlaps with FU17 and regions of high fishing activity catching anglerfish, boarfish horse mackerel, mackerel, megrim and squid.
- It is not expected that any long-lasting effects on fish or habitats of significance would result from the proposed survey.
- Effect on recreational activities expected to be minor.
- Marine users will be requested to maintain safe distance from survey operations due to restricted manoeuvrability.
- A Notice to Mariners will be published.
- Liaison with fisheries to ensure survey operations will not restrict use of the nearshore.
- Consultation Ports (Galway) and marine stakeholders (ferry operators, OWF developers) along proposed cable route will be undertaken prior to and during survey operations.
- Survey may cross shipping routes – a Notice to Mariners will be issued prior to each survey and standard maritime practice for marine works will be adopted.
- Surveys may traverse traditional fishing grounds – Fisheries liaison and consultation with local stakeholders will be undertaken prior to and throughout the works.
- An Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment (UAIA) has been prepared for the survey application.

Further details, including charts on the fish nursery and spawning areas are included in the ECIA Report Appendix II.

Application includes:

- Supporting Information for Screening for Appropriate Assessment (SISAA)
- Natura Impact Statement (NIS)
- Ecological Impact Assessment Report (ECIA) incl Risk Assessment for Annex IV Species
- Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment (UAIA)
- Assessment of Impacts on the Maritime Usage (AIMU) Report.

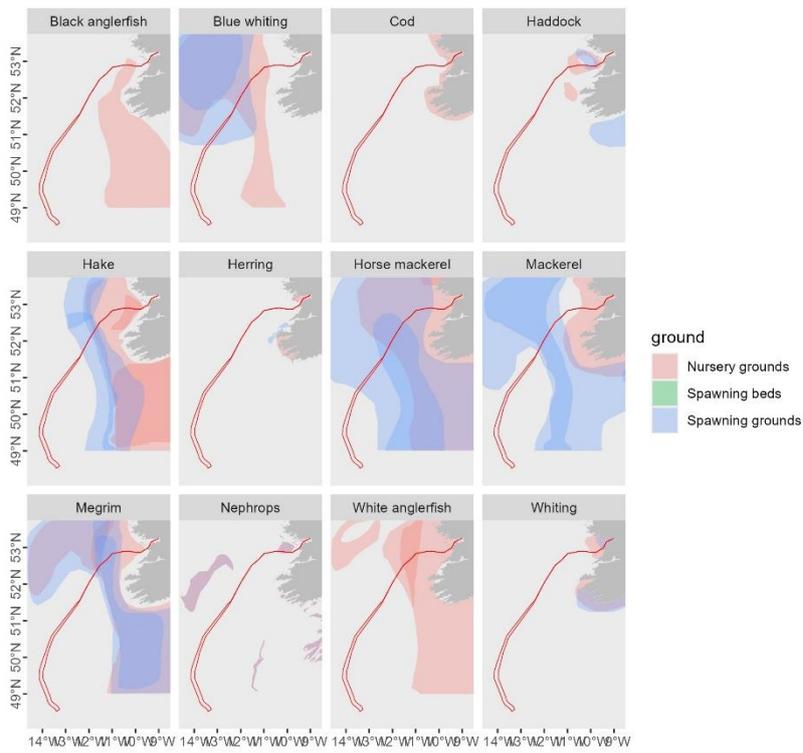


Figure 1. Spawning and nursery grounds of selected commercial fish species.

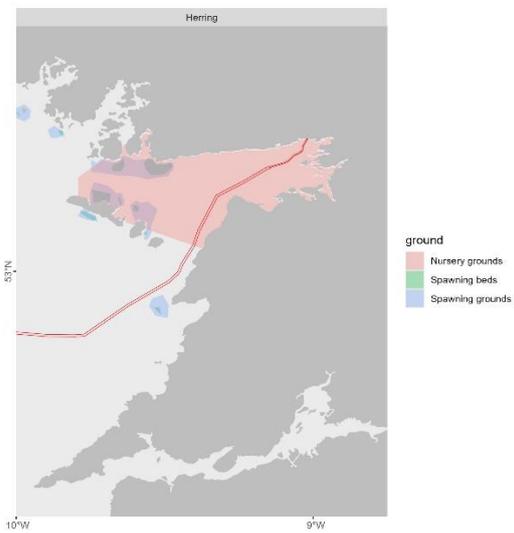


Figure 2. Herring spawning area outside Liscannor bay is close to the survey route

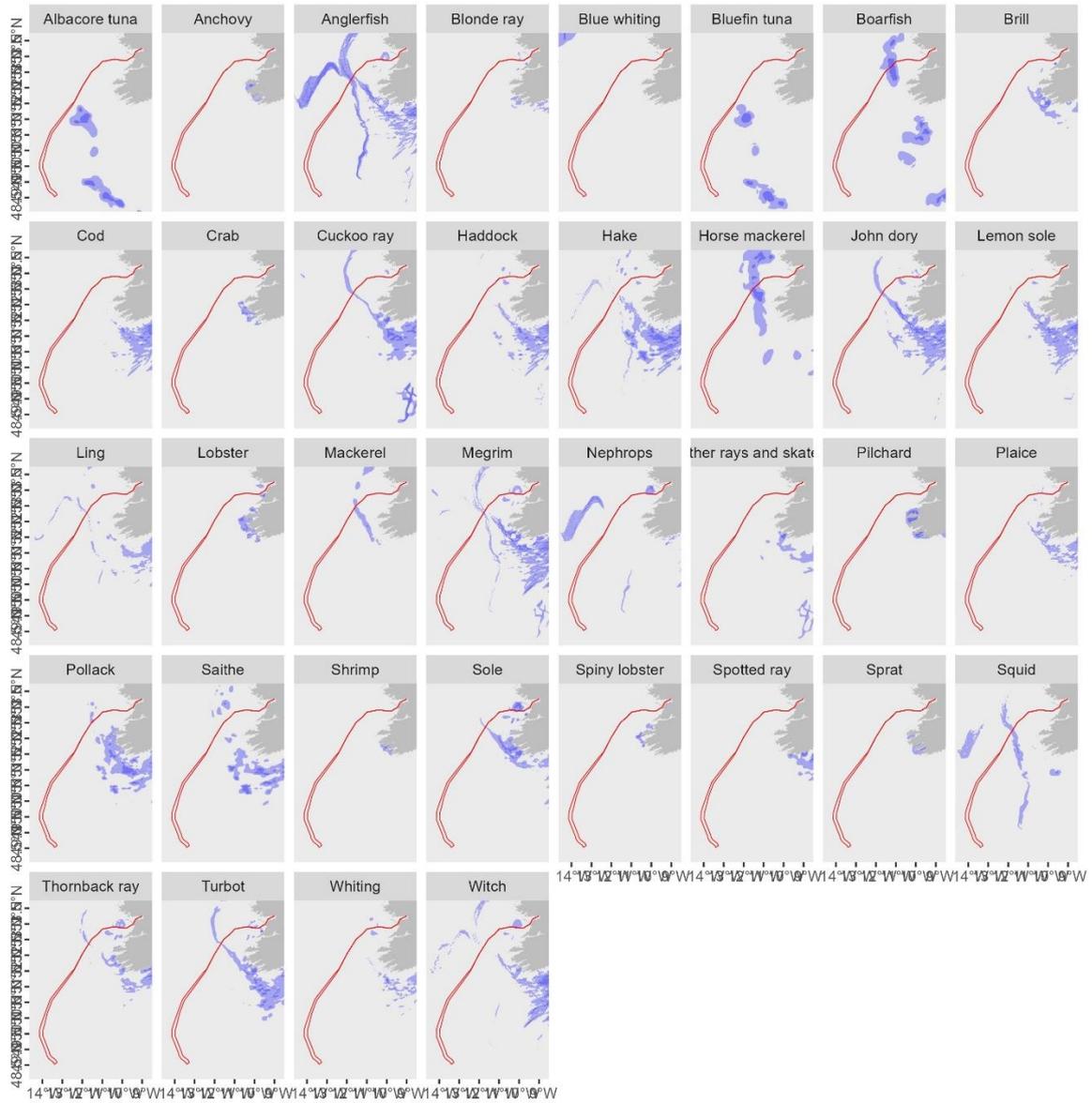


Figure 3. Irish fishing activities, by catch species, relative to the proposed survey route.

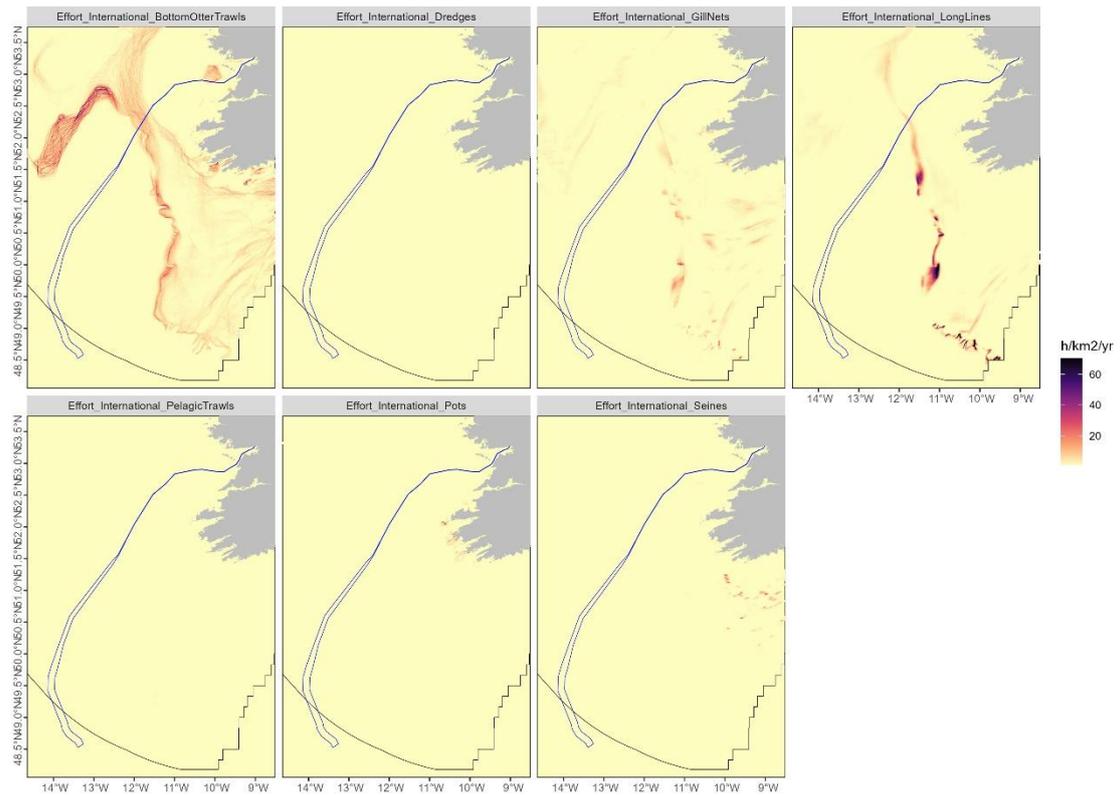


Figure 4. International fishing effort (hours/km²/year) by gear type relative to the proposed survey route.



Figure 5. Irish fishing effort (hours/km²/year) by gear type relative to the proposed survey route.

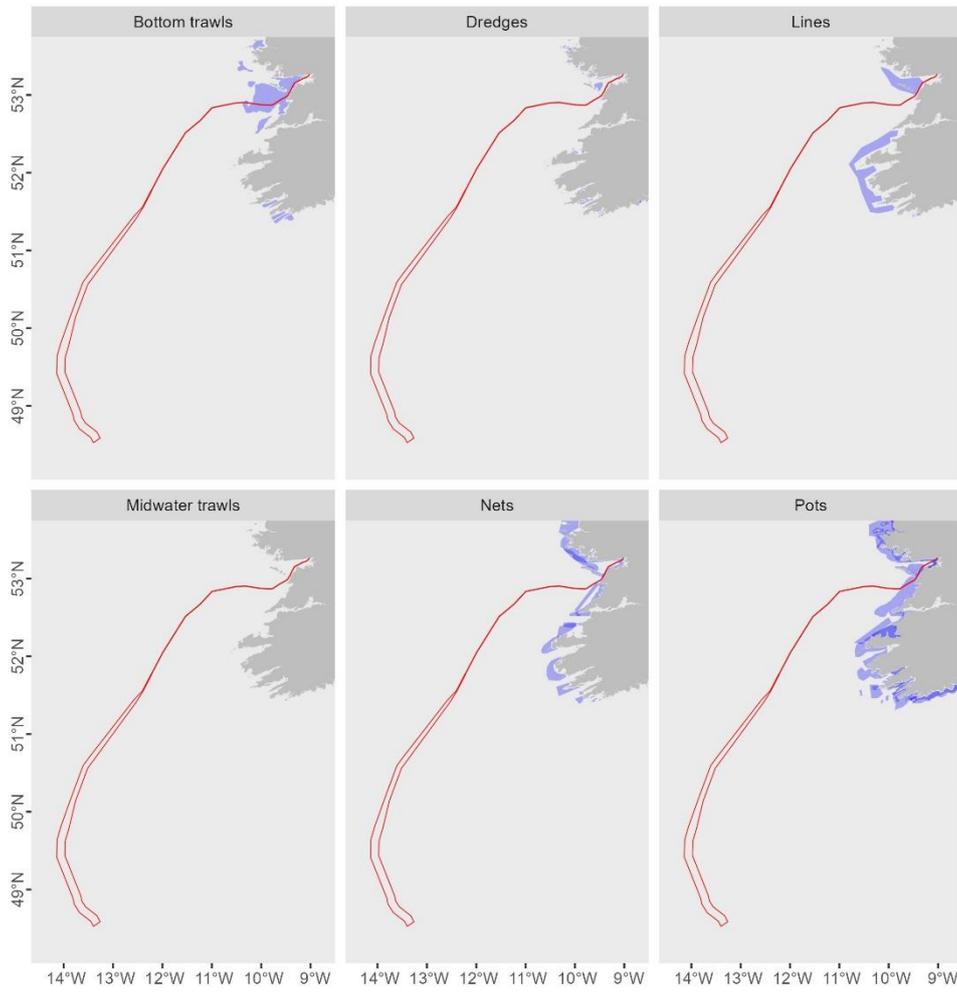


Figure 6. Inshore, under 12m vessels, by fisheries by gear relative to the proposed survey route.