<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Maritime Usage Licensing and Planning Advisory Directorate
Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report</th></tr>
<tr><td>To:</td><td>John Evans,
Director</td><td>From:</td><td>Dr. Alison McCarthy,
Senior Marine Advisor</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date:</td><td>09/06/2026</td><td>Maritime Usage Licence Application No:</td><td>MUL230026</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">MUL Applicant Name:</td><td colspan="2">Wicklow County Council</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">MUL Applicant Registered Address:</td><td colspan="2">County Buildings, Station Road, Wicklow Town, A67 FW96.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Licence application received:</td><td colspan="2">10/05/2024</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">Types of maritime usage activities in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:</td><td colspan="2">1. Dredging (including dredging involving the use of a device to remove any material, whether or not suspended in water, from one part of the seabed to another part of the seabed) other than—
(a) dredging carried out to create a new harbour, berth or waterway, or to deepen existing facilities in order to allow access for larger ships, or
(b) dredging ancillary to development authorised under the Act of 2000, whether or not it involves the removal of any material from the sea or seabed.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">6. The deposit of any substance or object, either in the sea or on or under the seabed, from –
(a) a vehicle, vessel (including a craft capable of travelling on, in or under water, whether or not self-propelled), boat, aircraft or marine structure (other than a pipeline),
(b) a container floating in the sea, or
(c) a structure on land constructed or adapted wholly or mainly for the purpose of depositing solids in the sea.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Location of proposed maritime usages:</td><td colspan="2">Maintenance dredging in Wicklow Harbour and deposit of dredged material at an offshore deposit site 9.5 km northeast of Wicklow Harbour.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening</td><td colspan="2">EIA not required (EIA Screening Form dated 23/06/2025)</td></tr>
</table>

1st request for additional information (RAI) issued:	09/07/2024	Response to 1st RAI received	10/07/2024
2nd RAI issued:	19/05/2025	Response to 2nd RAI received	04/06/2025
3rd RAI issued:	12/06/2025	Response to 3rd RAI received	09/07/2025
4th RAI issued:	21/08/2025	Response to 4th RAI received	12/01/2026
5th RAI issued:	13/04/2026	Response to 4th RAI received	01/05/2026
Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening	AA Screening Determination dated 11/04/2026 (screened out)		
Public body consultation:	16/01/2026–18/02/2026	**Observations from public bodies received:**	Nine

Contents

1. Background

Wicklow County Council (the applicant) has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake maintenance dredging in Wicklow Harbour and to deposit the dredged material at an offshore deposit (or dump) site 9.5 km northeast of Wicklow Harbour. Site investigation activities are also required to inform the dredging and deposit activities. These maritime usages fall under Schedule 7 parts (1), (3) and (6) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 as amended (the MAP Act). The usages (or activities) are required in order to maintain safe navigational depths in the harbour as natural coastal processes and fluvial inputs have led to progressive infilling of the berths and approach channels.

The applicant has also applied to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for a Dumping at Sea permit (EPA application ref. S0037-01), required under the Dumping at Sea Act 1996 as amended, for the loading and dumping of dredged material arising from maintenance dredging in Wicklow Harbour from 2027–2034. Wicklow County Council currently holds a valid Foreshore licence for dredging in Wicklow Harbour for removal of material ashore (ref. FS007583), granted by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage in April 2024 for a period of three years until April 2027.

2. Location and Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage

The applicant proposes to undertake dredging in Wicklow Harbour (MUL application Area A shown on Figure 1) and to deposit the material at a proposed offshore deposit site (MUL Application Area B shown on Figure 1). The application initially sought approval to use an established deposit (or dump site) off the Arklow coast, however the applicant submitted additional information on the application proposing an alternative deposit site, located 9.5 km northeast of Wicklow Harbour, updating the application documents accordingly.

The applicant submitted a Disposal Site Suitability Assessment Report with respect to the proposed deposit site (MUL application Area B) to the northeast of Wicklow Harbour. The assessment was undertaken following EPA guidance[1], including consultation with public bodies and other relevant organisations. The suitability of the proposed site will be considered by the EPA under the context of the Dumping at Sea permit application submitted to them by Wicklow County Council (EPA application ref. S0037-01). The MUL, if granted, will include a condition stating that the MUL does not negate the Holders statutory obligations under any other Law.

[1] Dumping at Sea Dumping Site Selection Guidance Note.

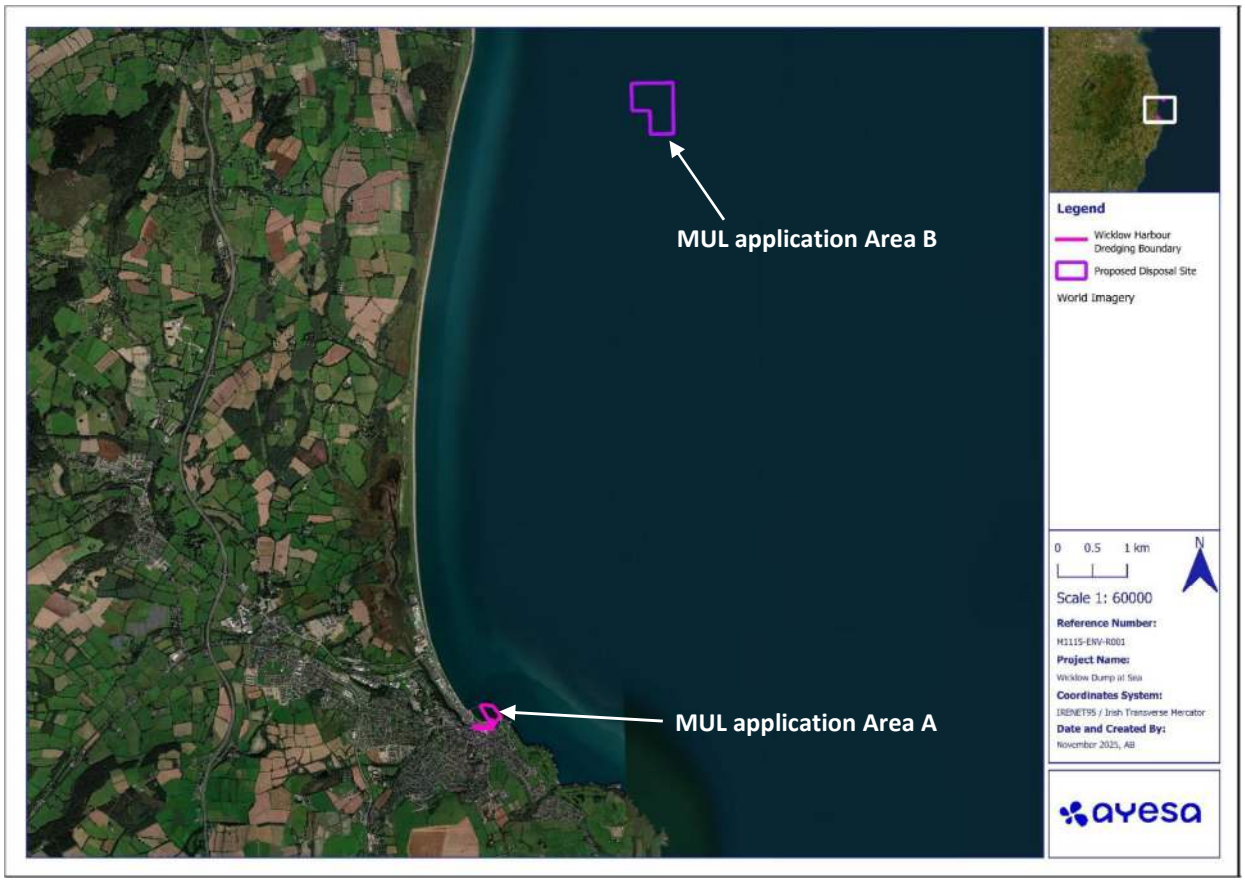


Figure 1: MUL application area A (in pink) in Wicklow Harbour (area = 5.4 ha) and MUL application Area B (in purple), or the deposit site (area = 35 ha) (applicant's map).

Wicklow County Council has applied for an 8-year MUL duration to enable them to maintain the depths in the harbour in the medium term. Tables 1 and 2 show the proposed methods of dredging and deposit and the maximum quantities proposed over the MUL duration. One dredging and deposit campaign is expected annually, lasting from 2–9 weeks. The proposed annual dredge quantities will vary, with the maximum annual quantity shown in Table 3. Bathymetry surveys are proposed to be undertaken annually to determine seabed conditions prior to and following dredging and deposit.

Table 1: Methods of proposed maritime usages and locations.

Maritime usage activity and location	Specific method
Dredging in Wicklow Harbour	1. Trailing Suction Hopper Dredging (TSHD) 2. Mechanical Dredging using a backhoe dredger. Dredged material will be placed in a bottom-opening barge. 3. Water injection dredging (WID) 4. Plough dredging
Deposit at offshore deposit site	1. Bottom release from TSHD 2. Bottom release from barge
Bathymetry surveys in Wicklow Harbour and at deposit site	Annually, using a Multi-beam Echo Sounder (MBES) deployed from a small vessel or an autonomous unmanned survey vessel.

Table 2: Maximum total quantities of material proposed to be dredged and deposited over the year MUL duration, given in tonnes (wet weight).

Method of Dredging	Max total dredge quantity	Max total quantity to be deposited
TSHD/Mechanical dredging	562,500	562,500
WID	157,500	N/A*
Plough	90,000	N/A*
Total	**810,000****	**562,500**

*WID does not involve deposit at the offshore site but involves injecting water into the seabed and suspended sediments move with tidal currents. Plough dredging disturbs sediment and moves it with tidal currents from one area to another. **equivalent to 540,000 m^3.

Table 3: Maximum quantities of material proposed to be dredged and deposited annually over the MUL duration, given in tonnes (wet weight).

Method of Dredging	Max annual quantity to be dredged	Max annual quantity to be deposited
TSHD/Mechanical dredging	157,500	157,500
WID	52,500	N/A*
Plough	11,250	N/A*
Total	**221,250**	**157,500**

2.1 Brief description of the site characteristics

Dredge area – MUL application Area A

Wicklow Harbour lies at the mouth of the River Vartry and is used by commercial vessels, fishing craft and leisure boats and has an RNLI station. Depth in the harbour ranges from 0.1–7.8 m. The applicant undertook benthic sampling in the harbour and characterised the habitat as infralittoral mobile sand with sparse faunal communities typical of fine sediments and with minimal epifaunal (or sessile) species. The sediment samples comprised of approximately 54 % sand, 38 % silt and 8 % fine gravel. The harbour has been subject to maintenance dredging for over 20 years.

Deposit site – MUL application Area B

The deposit site is located approximately 3 km east of the Wicklow coast and 9.5 km northeast of Wicklow Harbour. Depth at the the deposit site ranges from 11–29 m. The applicant undertook benthic sampling and camera surveys in and around the proposed deposit site in 2025. The seabed in the survey area was comprised mainly of coarse sediments (sands) with smaller fractions of gravel, cobble and larger stones which is indicative of a highly dynamic seabed, subject to strong tidal currents. The survey found very low species diversity and abundance, and the species were characteristic of mobile coarse sand habitats. Very few epifaunal or sessile species were found. In the southwest of the survey area, the reef-building polycheate *Sabellaria alveolata* was found in high abundance, forming small mounds. Although no *Sabellaria* reef structures were found in this area, the applicant removed this section from the final proposed deposit site, as it would be sensitive to burial from the deposit of dredged material.

3. Assessment

In assessing a MUL application, MARA must have regard to the criteria specified in the MAP Act, as discussed in this section.

3.1 National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

MARA must have regard to the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) which outlines the government's overarching vision, policies, and principles for managing the country's maritime area. MARA must also have regard to the NMPF, which sets the framework for implementing the forward planning component of our marine planning system as set out in the MPPS. This application aligns with the NMPF sectoral policy objectives on Ports, Harbours and Shipping. The application also aligns with the Ports, Harbours and Shipping Policies 7, 9 and 10 in relation to the statutory environmental assessment process for maintenance dredging, management of dredged material and identification of new disposal sites in accordance with national guidance and stakeholder consultation.

Underwater Cultural Heritage.
The NMPF includes a policy on Heritage Assets, which supports the conservation of the historic environment and heritage assets both along the coast and in the underwater environment. The policy notes that proposals not specifically contributing to enhancing cultural heritage assets must demonstrate that they avoid, minimise or mitigate against harm to heritage assets. The applicant submitted an Underwater Archaeology Impact Assessment (UAIA) in support of the application, which included a desktop review of archaeological features, including wrecks, in the dredge area (MUL application Area A) and an analysis of likely impacts. The applicant proposes to undertake a pre- and post-dredge bathymetry surveys for assessment by a suitably qualified archaeologist in order to ascertain the presence of anomalies of archaeological potential and as well as having protocols for monitoring of dredging operations (in addition to any reporting) by a suitably qualified archaeologist. The applicant also assessed the presence of recorded shipwrecks at the deposit site (MUL application Area B) as part of their Disposal Site Suitability Assessment and reported no known shipwrecks within 6 km of the site.

It is recommended to include a condition in the licence, if granted, requiring the holder to consult with the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, prior to the commencement of the activities and to comply with their requirements in relation to the protection of underwater cultural heritage. See also Section 6 of this report for observations received on this application from the NMS.

3.2 Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2014/52/EU) (EIA Directive)

MARA carried out a screening for EIA of the proposed activities having considered Schedules 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. An EIA Screening Form was issued by MARA on 23/06/2025. It was concluded that the activities do not fall within the scope of the EIA Directive and therefore an EIA is not required.

3.3 National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023–2030. The objectives of the NBAP focus on the conservation and restoration of biodiversity. Objective 2 of the NBAP is to meet urgent conservation and restoration needs. Part of its focus is to elevate efforts to tackle invasive alien species. It is recommended that a condition be included in the licence, if granted, to address the potential risks from invasive alien species as a result of the survey activities.

3.4 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended

Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended (the Climate Act) requires relevant bodies, including MARA, to perform their functions in so far as practicable in a manner consistent with the governance framework set out therein. The Act sets legally binding targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. Considering the temporary nature of the proposed activities, no significant

increases in carbon emissions are expected to be produced. The applicant notes that transporting dredged material to a land-based site would result in higher transport emissions than deposit at sea.

3.5 Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires EU member states to protect and improve water quality in all waters to achieve at least good ecological status in inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater by 2027, at the latest. The ecological status of coastal waterbodies is based on the assessment of biological quality elements (phytoplankton, benthic invertebrates, macroalgae, angiosperms) as well as supporting chemical (specific pollutants), physico-chemical (e.g. temperature, salinity, nutrients) and hydromorphological quality elements. In addition to these elements, fish are also assessed in transitional waterbodies. The WFD waterbodies in which the proposed activities are located are shown on Table 4.

Table 4: Water Framework Directive waterbodies in relation to MUL application areas from the reporting period 2019–2024, including status, risk and significant pressures for the at-risk waterbodies[2].

Waterbody name & code	Waterbody type	Ecological status & Risk*	WFD significant pressures	Proposed activities within waterbody
Broad Lough (IE_EA_130_0100)	Transitional	Moderate & at risk	Urban waste water, combined sewer overflows and agriculture leading to nutrient input and organic pollution	The dredging activities (MUL application Area A) will take place in this waterbody.
Southwestern Irish Sea – Killiney Bay (HA10) (IE_EA_100_0000)	Coastal	Good & Not at risk	None	None. The waterbody is adjacent to the dredging area (MUL application Area A) and approximately 450 m from the boundary of the deposit site (MUL application Area B).

*At risk means at risk of not achieving good status by 2027; not at risk means no risk in maintaining current status.

[2] From www.catchments.ie

The hydromorphological conditions (morphology and hydrodynamic regime) in both waterbodies have been classed as 'good'. In terms of impacts on the hydrodynamic regime, there will be increased suspended sediment concentrations (SSC) in the water column as a result of dredging and deposit of dredged material, and a subsequent increase in turbidity. It is predicted that the peak SSC (of 17,460 mg/l) generated from the dredging activity will occur at the coastal entrance to Wicklow Harbour. This is evident from sediment dispersion and sediment deposition modelling undertaken by the applicant resulting from the WID, as it represents the worst-case scenario in terms of SSC from each of the proposed dredging methods. However, the models predict that any increase in SSC will be very temporary, with values lowering to < 1.77 mg/l within two days of the completion of a dredging campaign, which equates to low turbidity[3]. The SSC plume does not extend westward into the River Vartry or Broad Lough, as the models were based on ebbing tide conditions only, which are the conditions under which WID is proposed to be undertaken. Sediment deposition is also predicted to be highest at the entrance to Wicklow Harbour (mean value of 0.2 m), but not at levels that would impact on the morphology of the Broad Lough waterbody. Furthermore, as the harbour area has been subject to regular maintenance dredging in the past, it is not expected that ongoing dredging would negatively impact on the morphology of the Broad Lough waterbody. Thus, the hydromorphology of the Broad Lough waterbody is not expected to be negatively affected from the dredging.

Modelling of SSC plumes and sediment deposition from the deposit activity at the proposed offshore deposit site was also undertaken by the applicant, under different tidal conditions (flood and ebb, high and low water). Following the deposit of dredged material, the coarser sediment material (sand) will largely settle in the deposit site and suspended sediment plumes, mostly of silt, will be generated. The highest SSCs are predicted at the deposit site (average of 22 mg/l within the centre and 8 mg/l at the edges of the deposit site). It is predicted that the SSC plumes will primarily disperse to the north and south of the deposit site and to a much lesser extent to the east and west. Peaks of SSC of 11 mg/l are predicted to occur 2 km to the north and immediately south of the deposit site at mid flood and high tide conditions respectively. The extent of the plume in a northerly direction is greatest at high water extending as far as Greystones and the extent of the plume in southerly direction is greatest at mid-ebb extending as far as Brittas Bay. However, across the majority of the predicted plume area, the mean SSC levels are similar to background levels and are < 2.5 mg/l, equating to low turbidity[3]. The SSC plumes are predicted to have dissipated fully within 5 days following the completion of a deposit campaign. Following a deposit campaign, the maximum sediment deposition in the deposit site, or bed level change is predicted to be 0.25 m with no discernible increase in bed level change outside of the deposit site. The deposited material

[3] Keogh, Wilkes and O'Boyle. A new index for the assessment of hydromorphology in transitional and coastal waters around Ireland. Marine Pollution Bulletin, 151, 2020.

will disperse over time due to the dynamic nature of the environment. The deposit of dredged material in the proposed deposit (or dump) site will not alter the morphology or hydrodynamic regime of the Southwestern Irish Sea – Killiney waterbody.

In terms of the biological quality elements, there will be a temporary decline in benthic invertebrate abundance in the dredging area, however recovery of the mobile benthic species is expected following the completion of each dredging campaign. There may be temporary disturbance to fish from noise from the dredging activities, or as a result of increased SSC, in particular in relation to WID, and plough dredging to a lesser extent, which generate higher levels of SSC than the other proposed dredging methods. The River Vartry which flows into Broad Lough is designated as a Salmonid water (S.I. No. 293/1988 – EC Quality of Salmonid Waters Regulations). Other fish species that may migrate through the dredging area include Twaite shad, lamprey, brown trout, sea trout and eel. The fish disturbance impacts are likely to be highest in the narrowest section of the proposed dredge area, upstream of the harbour. Thus, mitigation is required in order to minimise impacts on migratory fish (see below).

At the deposit site, the benthic communities surveyed are characterised as having medium sensitivity to sediment deposition[4]. Although there will be a change in bed levels following a deposit campaign, much of the sediment will disperse (over weeks to months) due to the highly dynamic nature of the site and the mobile species found at the deposit site are likely to recover quickly following a deposit campaign. Mitigation is required in order to minimise the impact of sediment deposition at the deposit site (see below).

In terms of supporting chemical conditions, the applicant undertook sediment chemistry testing in the dredging area in 2025. The results of the sediment chemistry testing were submitted with the application and appear to be clean, or not above lower action levels in accordance with national assessment criteria for suitability for disposal in Irish waters[5] . A condition is recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, to ensure that sediment material which is categorised as not suitable for disposal shall not be deposited at sea. In addition, the licence must include a condition stating that the licence does not negate the holder's statutory obligations under any other law, thus a Dumping at Sea permit must also be obtained. These conditions will ensure that only clean material is deposited at sea.

A number of conditions are recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, (see conditions in Proposed Licence) to avoid impacts on WFD waterbodies as a result of the proposed dredging and deposit activities, as follows:

[4] https://www.marlin.ac.uk/habitats/detail/379

[5] Guidelines for the assessment of dredge material for disposal in Irish waters Marine Institute 2006 and 2009 addendum.

- The WID model simulations considered dredging to occur on an ebbing tide only, as this facilitates the removal of dredged material via WID. It is recommended to include a condition in the licence, if granted, to ensure that WID only occurs during an ebbing tide, in line with the modelling submitted by the applicant.
- In addition to this, water quality monitoring for suspended sediments and turbidity is required to be undertaken by the holder of the licence, if granted, in order to validate the dispersion models.
- The Proposed Licence also recommends conditions requiring the holder to put in place measures to avoid reoccurrence of any suspended sediment exceedance and notification to relevant bodies, including the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority.
- To minimise disturbance to migratory fish, plough dredging and WID shall not occur between the months of April to September. In addition, the use of the TSHD shall be limited to daylight hours only and for a maximum of 12 hours per day during April to September in the upper harbour area to minimise impacts on fish migration.
- Deposit of dredged material shall be carried out in a manner that ensures a uniform spread of material in the offshore deposit site.
- Sediment material categorised as not suitable for disposal at sea shall not be deposited in the Licensed Area or in any other part of the maritime area.
- To minimise the suspended sediments generated by the activities, overflow of material from dredging vessels shall not be permitted at any time and the release of suspended solids into the water column shall be limited during dredging and on voyages to and from the offshore deposit site.

Given these recommended conditions as detailed in the Proposed Licence, there is not expected to be a deterioration in the ecological status of any WFD waterbody as a result of the proposed activities.

3.6 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) sets the framework for European marine environmental policy. It aims to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) for all marine waters in Europe and protect the resource base for marine related economic and social activities. Ireland's 2024 assessment[6] under Article 8 of the MFSD sets out the status of the 11 qualitative descriptors that describe the state of the marine environment. Table 5 sets out the status of the relevant descriptors and assesses the potential impacts of the proposed activities.

[6] Ireland's Marine Strategy Part 1: Article 8, 9 and 10 report 2024.

Table 5: Assessment of impact of proposed activities on MSFD descriptors

MFSD Descriptor	Good Environmental Status achieved	Assessment
Biological diversity	Partially achieved	Mitigation measures have been identified and recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, which address potential impacts on biological diversity (see Section 3.3, 3.5 and 3.7 of this report).
Non-indigenous species	Yes	To ensure that the proposed activities will not result in the unintended introduction of non-indigenous species, a condition is recommended in the licence, if granted, relating to the control of invasive species.
Population of commercial fish/shellfish	Partially achieved	This assessment of GES is based on whether stocks are being fished at or below the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and whether spawning stock biomass is above the level that can produce MSY. There are no licensed aquaculture sites in the vicinity of the dredging and deposit areas. There is a mussel seed bed dredging area 1.5 km east of the deposit site. In terms of commercial fish species, the dredging and deposit areas are located within large spawning and nursery grounds of cod and within nursery grounds of horse mackerel and mackerel. Due to the scale and nature of the proposed activities, it is not expected that there will be an impact on fish and shellfish spawning stocks. See Section 3.5 for discussion on suspended sediments and turbidity and recommended conditions to be included in the licence, if granted.
Marine food webs	Unclear	The balance and diversity of marine food webs is not expected be impacted as a result of the proposed activities. Impacts on habitats, benthic communities, fish and water quality have been assessed in Section 3.5 of this report. Only suitable (clean) material will be deposited at the deposit site. Conditions have been recommended to mitigate any impacts on fish, water quality and marine invasive species.
Eutrophication	Yes	The proposed activities do not involve the addition of nutrients to the marine environment and as such will not impact this descriptor achieving GES.
Sea-floor integrity	Partially achieved	See discussion in Section 3.5 of this report. It is not expected that the activities will negatively impact on the GES status of this descriptor.

Alteration of hydrographical conditions	Yes	See discussion in Section 3.5 of this report. The proposed activities will not significantly alter the hydrographical conditions (e.g. changes in wave action, currents, salinity, temperature and turbidity) in the MUL application area. Given the recommended conditions in Section 3.5, there will be no impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Concentrations of contaminants	Yes	GES has been largely achieved for concentrations of most contaminants in seawater, sediments and biota in Irish coastal and marine waters. Section 3.5 of this report includes a discussion on contaminants in relation to the proposed activities. Mitigation measures are recommended to be included as conditions in the licence to ensure that contaminated sediments are not released into the maritime area and that only suitable, clean, material is deposited in the deposit site. It is also recommended to include a condition in the licence, if granted, to ensure the holder has an oil pollution emergency response plan onboard vessels to minimise the impact from any such accidental event.
Contaminants in fish/seafood for human consumption	Yes	As noted, a condition will be required in the licence, if granted, to ensure that sediment material which is categorised as not suitable for disposal shall not be deposited at sea.
Marine Litter	No	A condition is recommended requiring the holder to remove solid and floating waste and to dispose and recover it ashore in accordance with relevant waste legislation and protocols. In addition, the Proposed Licence includes general condition requiring the holder to remove all plant and equipment associated with the activities and to restore the licensed area to its original condition. The GES status of this descriptor will not be impacted.
Introduction of energy including underwater noise	Yes	The impact of underwater noise is discussed in Section 3.7 of this report along with a recommended licence condition in relation to Annex IV species.

3.7 Annex IV species

Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) impose obligations on Member States to establish a system of strict protection for animal and plant species listed on Annex IV of the Directive. The applicant submitted a Risk Assessment for Annex IV Species in support of the application. The risk assessment considered the potential impacts of the proposed activities on the relevant Annex IV species (otter and cetaceans). The risk assessment also considered the impact on seals, though not listed on Annex IV, as a risk assessment in accordance with national guidance should be undertaken where underwater sound may have an impact on

marine mammals in Irish waters[7]. Otters have been recorded in the vicinity of Wicklow Harbour and upstream in the Vartry River and Broad Lough. Grey seals have been observed in the harbour and hauled out in coastal areas north and south of the harbour. Harbour seals have been observed in Wicklow Harbour and in the vicinity of the deposit site. Cetaceans are unlikely to occur in the harbour area however they have been recorded in the vicinity of the deposit site primarily including Harbour porpoise, Common dolphin, Minke whale and Bottlenose dolphin.

Some of these marine mammal species (otter and seals) could be impacted by Temporary Threshold Shift (temporary hearing impairment) from underwater noise in the dredging area, if the activities were to commence while those species were in the harbour. These species may also be impacted by disturbance from underwater noise or increased suspended sediment in the dredging area at further distances (up to 5 km). The deposit activity at the offshore deposit site is not expected to introduce levels of underwater noise that would significantly disturb marine mammals. Temporary increases in suspended sediments and turbidity from the deposit activity are not expected to significantly disturb marine mammals. The applicant has concluded that the potential impacts will be of a low intensity and that specific marine mammal mitigation is not required. However, due to the potential impacts in the proposed dredging area (MUL Application Area A) it is recommended that, as best practice, a marine mammal observer should be engaged to oversee the activities and to ensure that national guidance[7] is adhered to in relation to the dredging. Such a condition is recommended to be included in the licence, if granted.

The applicant has stated that a derogation licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) under the (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended, is not required for the proposed activities.

3.8 Appropriate Assessment Screening

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended (the Regulations) and by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The application was subject to screening for appropriate assessment (AA) by MARA in accordance with the Regulations. MARA made an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination on 11/04/2026 which concluded that the proposed activities will not require Stage 2 AA as it could 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 European sites.

[7] NPWS, 2014

4. Consideration of other maritime users

MARA has had regard to the rights of other users as set out in Section 3 (3)(b) of the MAP Act. There are bathing areas monitored by Wicklow County Council at Murrough Beach, at Wicklow Harbour and at Silver Strand, south of Wicklow Head. These areas are not expected to be impacted by the proposed activities (see discussion on WFD in Section 3.5). Inshore pot fishing for whelk, crab and lobster occurs in the area in which the deposit site is located as well as pelagic trawling. There is a mussel seed bed dredging area 1.5 km east of the deposit site. There are other MUL holders for marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation in the vicinity of the proposed activities (see also AA Screening Report and Determination).

Conditions are recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, to minimise disruption to other users including consulting with the Harbour Master and publication of a marine notice prior to commencement of the activities, as well as not damaging third party property. A condition is recommended to ensure that vessels are certified according to Irish Standards, as required by the Marine Survey Office.

5. Site visit

MARA undertook a site visit of Wicklow Harbour on 20/08/2025 to view the proposed dredging area (MUL Application Area A) and other users of the proposed MUL area. A Senior Executive Engineer from Wicklow County Council was present.

6. Public body consultation

Observations on the MUL application were invited from relevant public bodies to ensure that MARA takes account of all other relevant maritime usages and interests in the consent area. Nine responses were received. The following tables summarise the observations from public bodies with a response given below each submission summary. The MARA website should be consulted to view the full details of the observations received.

1. & 2. Observations summary – Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)
Observations were received from BIM on 06/02/2026 and on 18/02/2026. Both responses included the following: • BIM has reviewed their GIS shapefile data for mussel seed beds, and there are none in proximity to the newly proposed deposit site. • BIM note that the main concern from a fisheries context would be disturbance to fishing and accidental entanglement with static fishing gear and/or by fishing vessels with the deployment of equipment by the dredging/dumping vessels at the proposed dumping location.

- Therefore, timely notification to fishers on the ground, through direct contact through the Irish Fleet Register should be taken. Communication should also be made via Marine Notices, the Producer Organisations such as the IS&EFPO, IIMRO, NIFA, local RIFF, all the relevant harbour port offices and local authority offices, and local media including Marine Times where possible covering the impacted area.

In the response of 06/02/2026 it was also noted that concerns have been raised to BIM by inshore lobster and crab pot fishers in relation to the dump (deposit) site as follows:

- There is a weak tidal influence at the deposit site and therefore dredge spoil may not be dispersed on a continual basis. In strong easterly gales the dredge spoil may be washed ashore;
- There may be damage to the gravelly substrate or habitat for lobster;
- There are concerns regarding the potential toxicity of the dredge spoil as it is coming from a working port;
- The smaller pot fishing boats cannot move their fishing effort further offshore. They mainly fish a 10 mile north-south stretch adjacent to the coastline including the area of the proposed dumpsite. The potential area lost to them will be greater than the size of the dumpsite considering the above.
- Pre-consultation should include fishers on the ground not just state agencies.

MARA Response:

MARA notes the observations from BIM. The applicant has noted the presence of a mussel seed bed 1.5 km west of the proposed deposit site. Conditions are recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, to minimise impacts on other users (see Section 4 of this report). The proposed activities will not require the deployment of equipment that might result in entanglement. Regarding impacts on pot fishers, Section 3.5 of this report discusses the modelled suspended sediment dispersion and sediment deposition from the proposed activities. There will be no discernible increase in bed level change outside of the deposit site from the deposit activity. Conditions are recommended to be included in the licence regarding model validation and turbidity and suspended sediment monitoring. Any exceedances of the values predicted in the models will require measures to be taken by the holder to avoid a recurrence and notification of Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority. A condition is recommended to be included in the licence regarding publication of a marine notice.

3. Observations summary – Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)

Observations were received on 18/02/2026 from the Seafood Climate Unit of DAFM, which included the observations from BIM (as discussed above) and also observations from the Marine Institute (MI) and from the Marine Divisions of DAFM.

The MI observations in relation to potential impacts on sea fisheries and the seafood sector, including aquaculture can be summarised as follows:

- The proposed dumping site was granted Permit (S0002-01) by the EPA in 2011 for disposal of material dredged from Arklow Harbour;
- National and international fishing operations are recorded in close proximity to the mouth of Wicklow Harbour and at the proposed dumping site;
- The dumping area is in close proximity to spawning and nursery grounds of some commercially important species including cod;
- Considering the short nature and small areas of proposed operations, they should not interfere with fishing activities, assuming any necessary Marine Notices are made, or fish ecology/biology, and
- There are no aquaculture sites within or adjacent to the dredge or disposal areas.

The observations from the Marine Divisions can be summarised as follows:

- The importance of primary and secondary food production activities from the sea-fishing and aquaculture sectors must be fully recognised and is reflected in the Government's Good Vision 2030 policy.
- The potential impacts of the maintenance dredging must be considered within the context of the NMPF and the principles of avoiding, minimizing or mitigating impacts on access to existing activities (including specific policies on Fisheries and Aquaculture) should be followed.
- DAFM also summarised the observations from BIM and the MI.

MARA response:

MARA notes the observations of the Marine Institute and DAFM. The applicant had initially applied to deposit material at a previously established dump site off the coast of Arklow coast, however they then proposed an alternative site, to the northeast of Wicklow Harbour. The potential impacts of the proposed activities are discussed in Sections 3.5, 3.6 and 4 of this report and conditions are recommended to minimise impacts on the seafood sector and other users.

4. Observations summary – Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL)
Observations were received from CIL on 18/02/2026, stating no objection to the application. CIL noted that should any requirement arise for marine aids to navigation that such aids will require a Statutory Consent, under the Merchant Shipping Act 1984, from CIL via the Local Lighthouse Authority who in this case is Wicklow County Council. Such aids to

navigation may include temporary removal of existing channel buoyage to facilitate dredging or establishing turbidity buoys to monitor dredging. Any appropriate assessment activity undertaken as part of the licensing process should include the impact of such buoys and moorings.

MARA Response:

MARA notes the observations of CIL. The licence, if granted, does not negate the holder's statutory obligations under any other law.

5. Observations summary – Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

Observations were received on 24/02/2026 from the National Monuments Service (NMS) of DHLGH in relation to underwater archaeology, summarised as follows:

- The NMS described the known wreck locations in the proposed dredge areas and surrounds. Wrecks over 100 years old and archaeological objects underwater are protected under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1987. Wrecks less than 100 years old or potential locations of wrecks can also be protected under that Act. Thus, exclusion zones may be required to protect such wrecks and archaeological objects.
- The dredge area is situated proximal to a number of Recorded Monuments and Places which are afforded protection under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1930–2014.
- National heritage policy is for avoidance of impacts on archaeological heritage as set out in 'Frameworks and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage'. The National Planning Framework and NMPF also recognise the importance of preserving heritage assets.
- The NMS provided a detailed list of specific mitigation to be attached to the MUL, if granted including implementing all mitigations in the applicants Underwater Archaeology Impact Assessment (UAIA), appointing a Project Archaeologist, implementing Archaeological Exclusion Zones and undertaking a detailed list of archaeological monitoring and reporting.

MARA response:

The observations of the NMS are noted by MARA. To ensure that there are no impacts on wrecks or other archaeological or cultural heritage features, a condition has been recommended in the licence, if granted to ensure that the Holder consults with the Underwater Archaeological Unit of the NMS prior to the commencement of the activities and complies with all of their requirements. The licence, if granted, does not negate the Holders statutory obligations under any other law.

6.	**Observations summary – Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI)**
Observations were received on 13/02/2026 from the GSI which recommended the use of numerous GSI datasets when conducting EIAR, SEA, planning and scoping processes for developments, plans and policies. The GSI also noted the availability of INFOMAR data such as bathymetry, backscatter, sediment classification, shipwrecks and survey metadata which can be downloaded free of charge. The GSI also noted that data from the ObSERVE Programme is also available with information on aerial and acoustic surveys on marine megafauna, including cetaceans, seabirds and other protected species.	

MARA Response:

MARA notes the observations from the GSI regarding the availability of datasets.

7.	**Observations summary – Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council**
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council responded on 16/01/2026 that there were no comment or concerns with respect to the application.	

MARA response:

MARA notes the observations from Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

8.	**Observations summary –** Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Observations were received from the EPA on 05/02/2026, summarised as follows: • Wicklow County Council has submitted a Dumping at Sea permit application to the EPA for loading and dumping of dredging material arising from maintenance dredging in Wicklow Harbour and dumping a maximum of 810,000 tonnes (wet weight) at a new proposed dump site 8.5 km north of Wicklow Harbour. That application is under assessment by the EPA. • Wicklow County Council does not hold any other active Dumping at Sea permits. • In considering this application the proposed activity should not result in a contravention of the Water Framework Directive, Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Bathing Water Directive or Environmental Liabilities Directive.	

MARA Response:

MARA notes the observations from the EPA. The assessment of the proposed maritime usage activities has been undertaken according to the criteria set out in the MAP Act (see Sections 3 and 4 of this report).

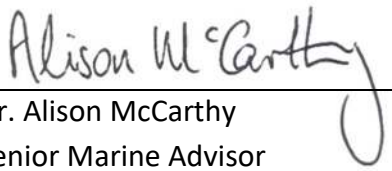
9. Observations summary – Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport
The MSO responded on 16/01/2026 with the view that the proposed dumping ground was considered unsuitable under an EPA application.

MARA response:

MARA notes the observations of the MSO. The applicant had initially applied to deposit material at a previously established dump site off the coast of Arklow coast, however they then proposed an alternative site, to the northeast of Wicklow Harbour. A Disposal Site Suitability Assessment Report was submitted, undertaken following EPA guidance, including consultation with public bodies and other relevant organisations.

7. Recommendation

Having considered the information submitted in support of the application, I recommend that a Maritime Usage Licence in accordance with Section 119 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021, as amended, be granted to Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Station Road, Wicklow Town, for the Schedule 7, parts (1), (3) and (6) maritime usages subject to the conditions in the Proposed Licence.

Signed:	
Prepared by:	Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	09/06/2026