

Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate

Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Dr. Alison McCarthy, Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	02/04/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL230026
Applicant:	Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Station Road, Wicklow Town, A67 FW96		
Types of maritime usage in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021:	<p>1.) <i>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—</i></p> <p>(a) <i>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</i></p> <p>(b) <i>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.</i></p> <p>6. <i>The deposit of any substance or object, either in the sea or on or under the seabed, from –</i></p> <p>(a) <i>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),</i></p> <p>(b) <i>a container floating in the sea, or</i></p> <p>(c) <i>a structure on land constructed or adapted wholly or mainly for the purpose of depositing solids in the sea.</i></p>		
Location of proposed Maritime Usage(s):	Maintenance dredging in Wicklow Harbour and deposit of dredged material at an offshore deposit site 9.5 km northeast of Wicklow Harbour.		
Licence application received:	10/05/2024		

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. These maritime usages fall under Schedule 7(1) and 7(6) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 as amended (the MAP Act). The activities are required in order to maintain safe navigational depths in the harbour.

2. Description of maritime usages and local site characteristics

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

Tables 1 and 2 show the proposed dredging and deposit methods and quantities. An 8-year MUL duration is proposed, with one dredging and deposit campaign expected annually, lasting from 2–9 weeks.

Table 1: Methods of proposed maritime usage and locations.

Maritime usage activity and location	Specific method
Dredging in Wicklow Harbour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bottom release from TSHD 2. Bottom release from barge
Bathymetry surveys*	Once annually, using a Multi-beam Echo Sounder.

*bathymetry surveys are ancillary to the dredging and deposit activities.

Table 2: Maximum total quantities of material proposed to be dredged and deposited over MUL duration.

Method of Dredging	Quantity to be dredged (tonnes, wet weight)	Quantity to be deposited at offshore deposit site (tonnes, wet weight)
TSHD/Mechanical dredging	562,500	562,500
WID	157,500	N/A
Plough	90,000	N/A
Total	810,000*	

*equivalent to 540,000 m³

Brief description of the site characteristics

Wicklow Harbour lies at the mouth of the River Vartry and is used by commercial vessels, fishing craft, leisure boats and the RNLI station. The harbour lies within the Water Framework Directive ‘Broad Lough’ transitional waterbody. Depth in the harbour ranges from 0.1–7.8 m and the sediment comprises approximately 54 % sand, 38 % silt and 8 % fine gravel. Depth at the the deposit site ranges from 11–29 m. The site is subject to strong tidal flows and the seabed is mainly coarse sediments with smaller fractions of gravel, cobble and larger stones.

3. Identification of relevant European sites

The MUL application is subject to screening for appropriate assessment in accordance with Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended, to determine if it alone, or in-combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European site(s), in view of best scientific knowledge and the conservation objectives of the sites. The applicant submitted a Supporting Information for Screening of Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report in support of the application which was referred to during this assessment

The proposed maritime usages are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European sites. The European sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)) listed on Table 3 have been considered for appropriate assessment, given the nature, scale and Zone of Influence of the maritime usage, the conservation objectives of the European sites and using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.

4. Assessment of likely significant effects

The potential direct and indirect impacts on the conservation objectives of European sites, taking into account the nature and scale of the proposed maritime usage, are summarised below.

Potential Impacts	Possible significance of Potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)
Increased suspended sediments in the water column causing habitat disturbance and decreased foraging opportunities.	Annex I habitats protected as part of the Murrough Wetlands SAC and the Wicklow Reef SAC are not likely to be disturbed as a result of the dredging and deposit activities. This is supported by sediment dispersion and deposition modelling undertaken by the applicant in 2023, 2024 and 2025 which indicates that increases in suspended sediment concentrations (SSC) from dredging and deposit will be temporary and not significantly

	<p>above background levels in the SACs. Furthermore, the relevant Annex I habitats are not sensitive to such short-term increases in SSC¹. Increased SSC in the water column will be short term and will not impact on foraging opportunities for seabirds or marine mammals. Therefore, no likely significant impact has been identified on QI species and habitats.</p>
<p>Underwater noise disturbance</p>	<p>The dredging will occur in a busy and enclosed harbour area which is not regularly frequented by Harbour porpoise. The deposit activity will not introduce levels of underwater noise appreciably beyond background noise levels and will be very temporary in nature. The MBES will operate at a frequency above the hearing range of Harbour porpoise.</p>
<p>Visual and above water noise disturbance.</p>	<p>The activities will not produce above water noise and visual disturbance appreciably above background levels.</p>

¹ <https://www.marlin.ac.uk/evidence>

Table 3 - Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests and site-specific conservation objectives.

European & site code	Approx. distance from MUL application area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-Pathway-Receptor)	European Site screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
The Murrough Wetlands SAC (002249)	1.2	Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7210] Alkaline fens [7230]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2021) Conservation Objectives: The Murrough Wetlands SAC 002249. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Wicklow Reef SAC (002274)	2.8	Reefs [1170]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2013) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Reef SAC 002274. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Magherabeg Dunes SAC (001766)	7	Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Magherabeg Dunes SAC 001766. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage,

		Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130] Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]			Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
Buckroney-Brittis Dunes and Fen SAC (000729)	11	Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130] Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (<i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i>) [2150] Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> (<i>Salicion arenariae</i>) [2170] Humid dune slacks [2190] Alkaline fens [7230]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Buckroney-Brittis Dunes and Fen SAC 000729. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
Bray Head SAC (000714)	11	Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] European dry heaths [4030]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Bray Head SAC 000714. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC (003000)	20	Reefs [1170] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS, 2013 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 (003015)	34	Submarine structures made by leaking gases [1180] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Codling Fault Zone SAC 003015. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
The Murrough SPA (004186)	Within application area	Red-throated Diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>) [A001] Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>) [A043] Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) [A046] Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) [A052] Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179] Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) [A184] Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) [A050] Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>) [A195] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: The Murrough SPA 004186. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Wickow Head SPA (004127)	1	Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188]	No significant S-P-R identified	No	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Head SPA 004127. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

4.1 In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed dredging and deposit activities must be considered individually and also in combination with other plans or projects. All types of plans or projects that could, in-combination with this application, have a significant effect, have been considered. This in-combination assessment has been undertaken using professional and scientific judgement and is assessed primarily in terms of potential spatial and temporal impacts.

The spatial scope of the in-combination assessment is the maximum spatial extent of the modelled suspended sediment plume from the deposit activity (i.e. 14 km north and 26 km south of the deposit site and 7 km east). The temporal scope of the in-combination assessment is based on the period over which the activities are proposed (i.e. eight years). A search of relevant databases was undertaken on the 27/03/2026. Table 4 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in-combination with the proposed maritime usage.

Table 4: Projects considered for in-combination impacts on European sites

Application Ref.	Project description	Distance from MUL area (km)	Project Status
FS007583	Foreshore licence for bed levelling and mechanical dredging in Wicklow Harbour for removal ashore (no offshore deposit activities), from April 2024 to April 2027.	overlap	Granted
S0037-01	EPA Dumping at Sea permit application – Wicklow County Council associated with maintenance dredging activities and dumping at sea at offshore deposit site from 2027 to 2034 inclusive (same activities as under this MUL application).	overlap	Applied
MUL240026	Uisce Éireann. Site investigations	< 0.3	Applied
FS007546	Codling Wind Park Ltd. Foreshore licence for site investigations.	overlap	Granted
ACP320768	Planning application for Codling Wind Park	< 10	Applied
MUL230034	Codling Wind Park Ltd. site investigations MUL	overlap	Granted
FS007188	RWE Renewables Ireland. Foreshore licence for site investigations.	overlap	Granted
MUL240023	Iarnród Éireann site investigations MUL	overlap	Granted

The following plans were also identified:


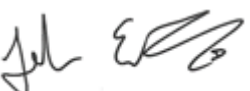
- The Climate Action Plan 2025;
- Water Action Plan 2024: Ireland's third River Basin Management Plan;
- Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028;
- National Ports Policy 2013, and
- National Marine Planning Framework.

The activities involved in those projects on Table 4 are not likely to have significant in-combination effects with the proposed dredging and deposit activities on the conservation objectives of any European site and can be excluded at this stage. Any increases in suspended sediments generated as a result of those projects on Table 4 will not be at a level that would give rise to combined impacts on European sites. The levels of above water and underwater noise generated from the dredging and deposit activities will not result in significant combined impacts. The plans identified are not expected to have in-combination effects as, in general, they promote sustainable development in the maritime area as well as the protection of water quality.

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?

No

5. Screening Determination Statement

<p>The assessment of significant effects:</p> <p>On the basis of the information on file, and having regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature and scale of the proposed maritime usage activities; • The results of sediment dispersion and sediment deposition modelling; • The Qualifying Interests and Conservation Objectives of the European sites assessed; • The background conditions of the receiving environment, and • The lack of in-combination effects with other plans and projects <p>Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by Wicklow County Council to carry out 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 (Schedule 7(1) and Schedule 7(6) maritime usages) (MUL230026) will not require Stage 2 appropriate assessment. It can 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 a European site.</p>		
Signature and Date of Recommending Officer	 Dr. Alison McCarthy	02/04/2026
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director of Assessment, Research and Data Unit	11/04/2026