

Assessment, Research and Data Unit Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report			
To:	Maritime Authorisations Unit	From:	Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	08/12/2025	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL230029
Approved for Issue by:		John Evans, Director of ARD Unit	
Applicant name and address:		Department of Defence, Defence Forces Headquarters, McKee Barracks, Dublin, D07 A065	
Types of maritime usage activities 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>	
Locations of proposed maritime usages:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dredging at Haulbowline Naval Base, Cork Harbour, and • Deposit of dredged material 8 km southeast of Roches Point outside of Cork Harbour 	
Licence application received:		04/06/2024	
Section 117(3) request for additional information (RAI) issued:		02/07/2024, 31/07/2024, 25/09/2024, 15/05/2025, 15/07/2025	
Response to RAI received:		03/07/2024, 17/09/2024, 01/10/2024, 12/06/2025, 22/07/2025	

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening:	EIA not required (EIA consideration Form dated 24/06/2025)		
Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment Required	Yes	Section 117(6)(a) notice requesting Natura Impact Statement issued:	25/07/2025
Natura Impact Statement received:	25/09/2025		
Public consultation:	13/10/2025 to 12/11/2025		
Submissions from the public received:	None	Comments from public bodies received:	Six

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1. Background

The Department of Defence (the applicant) has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake maintenance dredging at Haulbowline Naval Base, situated on Haulbowline Island in Cork Harbour. It is proposed to deposit dredged material at an established deposit site situated 8 km southeast of Roches Point outside of Cork Harbour. The application is required to allow safe navigation of naval vessels into the naval base by restoring and maintaining charted depths. The proposed maritime usages (or activities) are dredging, which falls under Schedule 7(1) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (MAP Act) and deposit of dredged material falling under Schedule 7(6).

The applicant was granted a Dumping at Sea (DAS) permit by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 29/10/2025 under the Dumping at Sea Act 1996 as amended (permit ref. no S0005-03) for loading of dredged material at the naval base and dumping the material at the offshore deposit (or dump) site. An appropriate assessment was undertaken by the EPA as part of that permitting process. The permitted loading areas under the EPA permit include the entrance to the naval base as well as the naval basin. The naval basin was subject to maintenance dredging in 2010 and 2017 under previous authorisations from the EPA (ref. no. S0005-02) and the Foreshore Division of the then Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Foreshore licence ref. FS006564).

2. Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage

It is proposed to undertake maintenance dredging in two discrete locations (MUL application Areas A and B as shown on Figure 1) in the maritime area¹ at Haulbowline Naval Base. Area A is 0.46 ha and is at the entrance to the naval base and Area B is a small section (0.05 ha) of the former graving dock within the naval base. The remainder of the graving dock is outside of the maritime area and outside of the scope of this application. It is proposed to deposit uncontaminated dredged material at MUL application Area C (see Figure 2), which is an established marine deposit (or dump) site, approximately 8 km south of Roches Point and is 377.8 ha.

¹ The limit of the Maritime Area at its landward extent is defined by the High Water line of ordinary or medium tides which is the High Water Mark (HWM) as defined by the Chief Boundary Surveyor (CBS)



Figure 1: Map showing MUL application Areas A and B (dredge areas) within Haulbowline Naval Base in Cork Harbour.

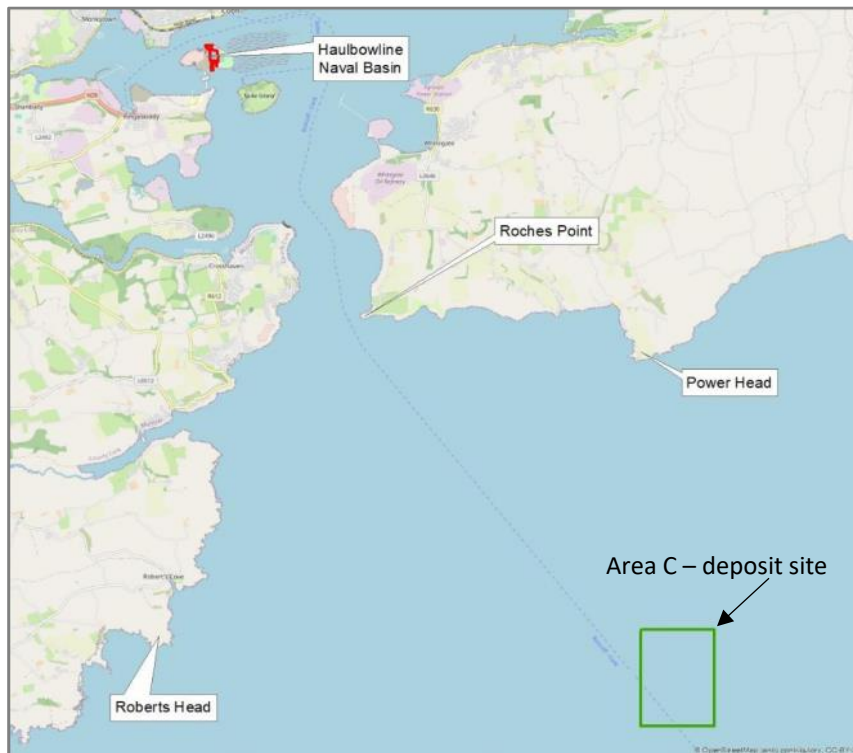


Figure 2: Map showing MUL application Area C, or the proposed deposit site outlined in green, relative to the Haulbowline Naval Base.

Table 1 shows the two proposed methods of dredging and the method of deposit at sea. Table 2 shows the quantities of material proposed to be dredged and deposited. Area A will be dredged to -5.5 m CD (meters below Chart Datum) and Area B will be reestablished to its original depth, or to -5.5 m CD, whichever is the lesser. The applicant has applied for an 8-year MUL duration. This will allow for four dredging campaigns to take place, with each campaign estimated as 10–12 weeks.

Table 1: Proposed methods of dredging and deposit.

Maritime usage activity	Method
Dredging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dredging Outboard Pump (DOP) equipped with a water jet cutter and operated using a crawler crane. Dredged material will be pumped to a hopper barge or taken ashore for appropriate treatment and disposal. 2. Backhoe dredger (i.e. long-reach backhoe excavator). Dredged material will be placed in a hopper barge or taken ashore for appropriate treatment and disposal.
Deposit	Hopper barge (i.e. bottom opening split hopper barge) of 1,000 m ³ capacity. Tug or towboat will transfer the hopper barge to and from deposit site.

Table 2: Proposed quantities of material to be dredged and deposited.

Uncontaminated material*		Contaminated Material°	Uncontaminated material*
Dredge area		Dredge area	Deposit area
Area A	Area B	Area B	Area C
4,040 m ³	450 m ³	1,560 m ³	4,490 m ³

*suitable/°not suitable for disposal (or deposit) at sea in accordance with national assessment criteria.

During the first campaign, it is proposed to dredge 1,560 m³ of contaminated material (i.e. not meeting national assessment criteria for suitability for disposal in Irish waters²) from Area B. This material will be taken ashore for treatment and then for authorised disposal. Sediment from Area B was tested in 2022 and was found to contain high levels of heavy metals, including Lead and Mercury. The onshore treatment of this contaminated material is outside

² Guidelines for the assessment of dredge material for disposal in Irish waters [Marine Institute 2006](#) and [2009 addendum](#).

the scope of this application, and the onus is on the applicant to obtain all necessary waste authorisations prior to the commencement of the dredging.

The applicant proposes that as part of the remaining three dredging campaigns, that 450 m³ of material from Area B will be dredged and then deposited at the offshore deposit site (Area C). The applicant notes that this will require further sediment quality testing to establish the suitability of the material for disposal (or deposit) at sea and, as part of that, that other authorisations will be required including a Dumping at Sea permit from the EPA.

2.1 Brief description of the site characteristics

Haulbowline Naval Base is situated in an industrial and urbanised harbour setting in the lower part of Cork Harbour with many industries, including commercial shipping, commercial fishing activity and leisure amenities occurring in the harbour. The material to be dredged is largely silt with a small fraction of sand (<4 %). Area C is an established deposit (or dump) site which has been in use since the late 1970s. Water depth at the site ranges between 25–50 m. Surveys carried out at the site show that the broad benthic habitat is predominantly hard substrate, or circalittoral rock and biogenic reef, with pockets of circalittoral mud, muddy sand, sand and coarse sediment. Surveys at the site have shown that the benthic habitats there have been broadly stable over time.

3. National Policy and EU Directives

In assessing a MUL application, MARA must have regard to Section 6(8) of the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) and the legislation and policy set out in Section 121(2) of the MAP Act, as discussed in this section.

3.1 National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

The MPPS outlines the government's overarching vision, policies, and principles for managing the country's maritime area. The NMPF sets the framework for implementing the forward planning component of our marine planning system as set out in the MPPS. The NMPF includes a sectoral policy on Ports, Harbours and Shipping. Within this, Policy 1 specifies that any decision-making regarding development and use in ports and harbours must consider existing or planned shipping routes, access to ports and harbours and navigational safety must be taken account of. It is therefore recommended to include a condition in any licence granted to ensure that the Holder of the licence consults with the Port of Cork Company in advance of the activities to ensure that potential disruption to port operations is managed. It is also recommended to include condition in respect of the requirement to publish a Marine Notice via the Marine Safety Division of the Department of Transport prior to the commencement of each dredging campaign.

Policy 7 notes that proposals for maintenance dredging will be supported where the relevant decision by the competent authority incorporates the outcome of statutory environmental assessment processes and where there will be no significant adverse impact on marine activities or uses or the maritime area. Policy 7 also notes that disposing dredged material at sea must utilise existing registered disposal sites in preference of new sites. The deposit site proposed as part of this application is an established site. Subsections 3.4–3.7 of this report detail the statutory environmental assessments undertaken as part of this application assessment.

Underwater cultural heritage

The NMPF includes a policy on Heritage Assets (Policy 1), 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. Dredging is noted to have the potential for significant adverse impacts on heritage assets.

The applicant undertook an Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment (UAIA) of the proposed dredging activity. The UAIA assessed the underwater cultural heritage of the site which included geophysical, dive and metal detection surveys and no new archaeological features were identified. However, the report recommended that dredging should be monitored by an archaeologist in line with the requirements of the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

MARA notes that there is an anomaly 100 m northwest of the deposit site, which has the potential to be of archaeological significance. To align with the Heritage Assets policy of the NMPF, and the recommendation in the UAIA, it is therefore recommended that a condition be included in the licence, if granted, requiring the holder to consult with the National Monuments Service prior to the commencement of the activities and to comply with all of their requirements in relation to underwater cultural heritage.

3.2 National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan³ 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. Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.7 of this report also

³ [4th Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030. Government of Ireland.](#)

address the Habitats and Birds Directives, WFD and MSFD and recommend conditions to avoid biodiversity impacts from the proposed activities.

3.3 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2025 ('the Climate Act')

Section 15(1) of 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.

3.4 Birds and Habitats Directives (79/409/EC and 92/43/EEC)

MARA issued an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination dated 24/07/2025 which concluded that the proposed activities will require Stage 2 AA as it could not 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.

MARA undertook an AA in respect to the proposed activities, considering the documents submitted by the applicant, the observations received on foot of the public body consultation on the application along with the marine advisor's own assessment (see AA Report and Determination which accompanies this report). The AA concluded, for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 42(11) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations, that the proposed activities (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 mitigation measures. The AA report specifies the mitigation measures that must be included as conditions in the licence, if granted. These conditions are also included in Appendix 1 of this report.

Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive 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 an Annex IV Risk Assessment in support of the application and in line with national guidance on underwater noise⁴. The risk assessment considered the scope of the proposed dredging and deposit activities, the relevant Annex IV species (cetacean species) and the potential impacts of the activities on those species. The risk assessment concluded that the sound exposure levels from the activities will be below levels that would cause injury to any cetacean species and the noise generated by dredging and deposit as well as the physical presence of the dredger would cause very low levels of disturbance. As a precaution the risk assessment recommended that marine mammal observers should be employed to

⁴ [DHLGH, 2014](#)

monitor the dredging and deposit activities, in accordance with the requirements set out in national guidance for underwater noise and marine mammals. Therefore, a condition is required to ensure that the applicant adheres to the national guidance with respect to marine mammal observers (see Appendix 1).

The Annex IV Risk Assessment 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.

3.5 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. There are two coastal WFD waterbodies within the MUL application area and one through which vessels will transit (Table 3).

Table 3: 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 waterbodies⁵.

Waterbody name & code	Waterbody type	Ecological status & Risk*	WFD significant pressures	Proposed activities within waterbody
Cork Harbour (IE_SW_060_0000)	coastal	Good & at risk	nutrients & agriculture	The dredging activities within Area A and Area B will take place in this waterbody.
Western Celtic Sea (HAs 18;19;20) IE_SW_010_0000	coastal	High & not at risk	n/a	The northern section of Area C, the deposit site lies, within this waterbody.
Outer Cork Harbour IE_SW_050_0000	coastal	Good & at risk	nutrients & agriculture	None. However, the vessels will transit through it.

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

There is potential for supporting chemical conditions to be impacted by the dredging of contaminated material from Area B during the first dredging campaign, for removal and treatment ashore. This could lead to the inadvertent release of pollutants into the water

⁵ From www.catchments.ie

column via suspended sediment dispersion. A silt curtain will be required to be secured in place while dredging is underway in Area B to prevent this from occurring. This will be required as a condition of any licence granted (see Appendix 1).

The applicant proposes to undertake further dredging in Area B of material as part of subsequent dredging campaigns (see Table 2). It is proposed that this material will be deposited at the offshore deposit site (Area C) pending its suitability for disposal at sea and obtaining any other authorisations including a Dumping at Sea permit from the EPA. A condition will be required in any licence 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. These conditions will ensure that only clean material is deposited at sea.

To prevent water pollution from dredging vessels from occurring, it is recommended to include a condition to ensure that the holder conforms to the appropriate certification standards and that the holder is prepared for any accidental oil pollution event by having a response plan in place. Given these conditions, the proposed activities will not result in changes to the physico-chemical conditions of any waterbody.

The applicant submitted a Sediment Plume Dispersion Assessment with the application. The models predicted the suspended sediment concentrations (SSC) generated by the dredging and deposit activities as well as resultant sediment deposition. The models considered a worst-case scenario, or dredging 47,630 m³ of material in one campaign in both the MUL application area and in the naval basin as permitted under EPA Dumping at Sea permit ref S0005-03⁶). The models predict that the furthest extent of the suspended sediment plume generated from dredging will reach 1 km from Area A, extending in a south-east direction alongside the outer side of Haulbowline island. Peak SSC will occur within the naval basin itself, however SSC will fall quickly to within background levels in the harbour on completion of the dredging. Sediment deposition will be minimal and will be restricted to within the naval basin and the entrance to the naval base.

Modelling of the deposit of dredged material at the deposit site (Area C) indicates that the plume will extend primarily in a western direction but will dissipate to very low levels (<0.5 mg/l) within a 2 km distance on average and will reach background levels at a maximum distance of 5 km. Suspended sediments of <1 mg/l equates to very low turbidity. Deposition of sediment outside of Area C will be minimal (<6 cm within 1 km of Area C). Thus, the

⁶ The naval basin is not under MARA's remit as it is not within the maritime area as defined by the Chief Boundary Surveyor (CBS)

dredging and deposit activities will not impact on the hydromorphological conditions of any of the waterbodies shown on Table 3.

As best practice, and to avoid the accumulation of deposited sediment within the deposit site, it is recommended to include a condition to ensure that dredged material is deposited in a uniform manner across the site. It is recommended that the licence includes conditions requiring pre- and post-dredge monitoring for turbidity⁷ (as a proxy for suspended sediments) in real time, to provide evidence that the Sediment Plume Dispersion Assessment is accurate and reflects the actual dispersion of sediment plumes. A condition is required to ensure that the holder undertakes corrective actions in the event of peaks of suspended solids levels exceeding those predicted in the models.

In terms of biological quality elements, there is expected to be a temporary reduction in benthic species abundance and diversity in Areas A and B as a result of the dredging. However, given the small scale of the activities in relation to the Cork Harbour waterbody, this will not be significant. Similarly, at the deposit site, Area C, a temporary decline in benthic species abundance and diversity is expected. The site is an established deposit (or dumping) site which has been in use since 1978. Benthic habitat surveys carried out in, and adjacent to, the deposit site in 2004 and 2020 showed that the benthic communities and epifaunal species composition has been broadly stable over time and is typical of the benthos found in the wider area. Thus, the benthic communities show signs of recovery following deposit of sediment material. Benthic invertebrate monitoring has been carried out by the Marine Institute in the Outer Cork Harbour coastal waterbody which is <4.5 km from the deposit site and is the nearest waterbody for which this data is available. The Invertebrate Quality Index (IQI) was ‘good’ in this waterbody from 2013–2022 and ‘high’ in 2024. Thus, regular deposit of dredged material does not appear to be negatively impacting on benthic invertebrates in the wider area.

There are a number of other dredging projects in Cork Harbour, both authorised and applied for by the Port of Cork Company. To ensure the combined impacts on water quality are minimised, it is recommended to include a condition stating that the proposed dredging and dumping shall not take place concurrently with any other authorised deposit (or dumping) campaigns in Cork Harbour and at the deposit site.

Given the recommended conditions as detailed in Appendix 1, there is not expected to be a deterioration in the ecological status of any WFD waterbody as a result of the proposed dredging and deposit activities.

⁷ Turbidity is an optical quality of water and describes how clear or transparent the water is. It is a natural phenomenon that occurs in water bodies and indicates how much sediment and organic matter are present in the water.

3.6 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 ('PDR'). An EIA Screening Form was issued by MARA on 24/06/2025 and it was concluded that the activities do not fall within the scope of the EIA Directive and therefore an EIA is not required.

3.7 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 under Article 8 of the MSFD⁸ sets out the status of the 11 qualitative descriptors that describe the state of the marine environment. Table 4 sets out the status of the relevant descriptors and assesses the potential impacts of the proposed activities.

Table 4: Assessment of impact of proposed activities on MSFD descriptors

MFSD Descriptor	Good Environmental Status achieved	Assessment
Biological diversity	Partially achieved	As discussed in Section 3.4, MARA has undertaken an AA in respect to the proposed dredging and deposit activities. Mitigation measures have been included in the AA Report and Determination and are set out in Appendix 1 of this report, which address potential impacts on biological diversity (including protected habitats and species). In addition, Section 3.4 assesses the impact on marine mammal species protected under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and recommends a condition requiring marine mammal observers to be appointed (see Appendix 1).
Non-indigenous species	Yes	To ensure that the proposed activities will not result in the unintended introduction of non-indigenous species, it is recommended that a condition be included in the licence 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 is a herring spawning grounds located circa 5 km east of the deposit site. This herring spawning ground is outside

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

		<p>of the zone of influence of the proposed deposit activity, or area in which the modelled sediment deposition or sediment plume is predicted. Observations from the Marine Institute (see Section 6.1) noted that there is not expected to be an impact on sensitive fish spawning habitats (including herring) from the deposit of dredged material from this application.</p> <p>There is a Fishery Order site for blue mussel (T05-002OFO) 2.5 km to the east of proposed dredging Areas A and B and a site for oysters 10 km to the north (T05-017OFO). There is also a licensed aquaculture site <6.5 km to the east (Rostellen West, North and South) (T05-522B) for bottom culture mussels. All of these sites are outside of the zone of influence, or area in which the modelled sediment deposition or sediment plume is predicted. Suspended solids and turbidity monitoring will be required to be undertaken while dredging is underway at Haulbowline and corrective actions must be taken by the holder of the licence in the event of an exceedance. These measures will ensure there are no impacts on commercial shellfish sites.</p>
Marine food webs	Unclear	<p>The balance and diversity of marine food webs is not expected be impacted as a result of the proposed activities. Impacts on habitats and species have been assessed in the AA Report and Determination which accompanies this report. Conditions have been recommended in Appendix 1 to mitigate any impacts on water quality and marine invasive species.</p>
Eutrophication	Yes	<p>The proposed activities do not involve the addition of nutrients to the marine environment and as such will not impact this descriptor achieving GES.</p>
Sea-floor integrity	Partially achieved	<p>Impacts on benthic habitats are discussed in Section 3.5. The dredging and deposit activities will give rise to temporary impacts on benthic habitat condition in the MUL application areas however recovery is expected to occur following the completion of activities. The proposed activities will not negatively impact on the status of this descriptor.</p>
Alteration of hydrographical conditions	Yes	<p>The proposed activities will not significantly alter hydrographical conditions (e.g. temperature, salinity, currents, tides, waves, depth and turbidity) in the receiving waters. Predicted sediment dispersion is discussed in Section 3.5 and monitoring of turbidity will be required as a proxy for suspended sediments. Corrective actions will be</p>

		required to be taken in the event of peaks of suspended solids levels exceeding those predicted in the models.
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 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 (Area C).
Contaminants in fish/seafood for human consumption	Yes	As discussed in Section 3.5, the proposed activities will not lead to the release of contaminants into the receiving waters, subject to mitigations measures recommended to be included as conditions in the licence. There will be no impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
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. The GES status of this descriptor will not be impacted.
Introduction of energy including underwater noise	Yes	The impacts of underwater noise from the dredging and deposit activities are expected to be very low (see Section 3.4). The provision of marine mammal observers operating in accordance with national guidance is recommended as a precaution to ensure marine mammals are not impacted by the activities.

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. Conditions are recommended to be included to ensure minimal disruption to other users including consulting with the Port of Cork Company, publication of a marine notice and not interfering with fishing activities. Consideration of the aquaculture and fishing industry is discussed in Section 3.7 of this report. The nearest bathing water, designated under the Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC), is at Fountainstown which is 10 km from the MUL application area. The primary impacts on water quality at bathing water beaches are contamination from urban waste water, agriculture, dog fouling and marine birds. The proposed activities will not impact on the quality of bathing water beaches.

5. Site visit

A site visit was undertaken on 05/09/2025 to view the naval base and Areas A and B where dredging is proposed.

6. Public consultation

A public consultation was undertaken between 13/10/2025 to 12/11/2025, under Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and under section 117(6)(b) of the MAP Act. No submissions were received from members of the public.

MARA invited observations on the MUL application from relevant public bodies and six responses were received. The following tables summarise the observations from public bodies with a response given below each submission summary. The observations from the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Marine Institute (MI) were submitted with the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) response and are therefore summarised together. The MARA website should be consulted to view the full details of the observations received.

6.1 Public body observations

1. Observations summary – Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport
<p>Observations were received on 17/10/2025 from the MSO, stating no objection to the proposed maintenance dredging from a navigational safety perspective.</p> <p>The MSO included a number of recommendations as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that safety of navigation is maintained during the activities and that any hazards to safe navigation are easily identifiable to all mariners; • Engagement with the Port of Cork authorities regarding local notices to mariners and Navtex and radio broadcast warnings; • The need to liaise with the MSO and Commissioner for Irish Lights (CIL) regarding the marking and lighting of any moored instruments and their compliance with the International Association of Aids to Navigation (IALA) requirements; • The requirement for a marine notice to be issued; • The requirement for the holder to undertake a bathymetry survey following completion of the activities and providing bathymetry data to the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) and the INFOMAR programme, and • Engagement with the MSO, Dublin to ensure that vessels conform to Irish Certification standards and the potential requirement for an Irish Load Line survey.

Marine Advisor's Response:

MARA notes the observations of the MSO. Appendix 1 includes a condition requiring the holder of the licence, if granted, to consult with the Port of Cork Company in advance of the activities to ensure potential disruption to port operations is managed. With regard to safety of navigation, it is recommended to include condition in respect of the requirement to publish a marine notice via the Marine Safety Division of the Department of Transport. With regard

to moored instruments, the onus is on the applicant to ensure that all of the necessary consents are obtained, prior to the commencement of activities. A condition is included as standard in every MUL granted stating that nothing in the licence shall be construed as negating the Holder's statutory obligations under any other law. A condition is also included in relation to Irish Certification standards as required by the MSO – see Appendix 1 for all recommended conditions.

2. Observations summary – Commissioner of Irish Lights (CIL)

Observations were received on 20/10/2025 from CIL stating no objection to the granting of the licence from a safety of navigation perspective. It was noted that should any requirement arise for marine aids to navigation, a Statutory Consent would be required from CIL. It was noted that any AA conducted as part of the assessment of the MUL application should include the deployment of surface marking buoys and associated moorings.

Marine Advisor's Response:

MARA notes the observations of CIL. The onus is on the applicant to ensure that all the required statutory consents are in place prior to the commencement of the proposed activities. As noted, all MULs granted include a standard condition stating that the MUL, if granted, does not negate the Holder's statutory obligations or requirements under any other law. All aspects of the proposed application submitted to MARA have been considered as part of the AA Report and Determination.

3. Observations summary – Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Observations were received on 21/10/2025 from the EPA noting that the Department of Defence applied to the EPA for a Dumping at Sea (DaS) permit for loading of dredged material arising from maintenance dredging at Haulbowline Naval Base over an 8-year period and dumping 166,500 tonnes (wet weight) of dredged material at the established dump site. The EPA noted that the hydromorphological conditions of transitional and coastal waters in Ireland are assessed by the EPA using the Hydromorphological Quality Index (HQI) and that the HQI classification for Cork Harbour is currently classed as 'good'. The EPA advised that based on the information supplied with the DaS permit application, that there will be no change in the HQI classification as a result of those activities.

The EPA advised that in considering and deciding on the MUL application, that the activity does 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, in particular in relation to the HQI classification. The Dumping at Sea permit granted by the EPA to the Department of Defence has been considered by MARA in relation to the cumulative impacts of both applications. Section 3 of this report considers the impacts of the proposed activities under the legislative provisions of the MAP Act. Bathing waters are discussed in Section 4. There are no obligations under the Environmental Liabilities Directive in regard to the proposed application.

4. Observations summary – Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) including observations from the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Marine Institute (MI).

A submission was received on 28/10/2025 from DAFM which included individual observations from the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Marine Institute (MI).

SFPA

The SFPA were unclear on the MUL application areas and expressed concern about the effectiveness of differentiating contaminated sediment from uncontaminated sediment areas. In particular, as the deposit site is in an area used by the fishing industry (both crustacean and demersal fisheries) and the dredging areas are approximately 4 nautical miles east of an active oyster production area in the Rostellan/Aghada area, dredging of contaminated sediment could have a serious impact on the microbiological quality of the oysters produced there. The SFPA noted that the impact on existing fisheries is expected to be low.

MI

The Seafood Climate Unit of the MI noted that based on the application documentation submitted by the applicant including the sediment plume modelling, that likely impacts on fish stocks and associated fisheries are expected to be minimal. There is not expected to be an impact on sensitive fish spawning habitats (including herring) from the deposit of dredged material. The modelling also indicates that the sediment load will reach background levels before reaching the nearest licensed aquaculture site at Rostellan. The MI noted that resuspension of contaminated sediment could be a concern and that the applicant has proposed to take contaminated sediment ashore for treatment.

DAFM

The sea-fishing and aquaculture sectors must be fully recognised and given priority in the assessment of the proposed dredging activity, given the importance of these sectors as primary food producers. DAFM summarised the comments of the MI and the SFPA and also commented that Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) believe that the proposed works will have a negligible impact. DAFM noted that the proposed activities will not unduly impact on nearby pot fishers, but that notices to mariners should be required to limit potential disturbance. DAFM sought confirmation that a Fisheries Liaison Officer would be

appointed. The principles of the NMPF of avoiding, minimising or mitigating impacts on access to existing activities should be followed.

Marine Advisor's Response:

MARA notes the observations received from the SFPA, the MI and DAFM. Section 3.5 of this report discusses contaminated sediment and mitigation measures are recommended as licence conditions which will ensure that there will be no contamination of water quality as a result of the dredging activities and that disposal of dredged material which is not suitable for deposit at sea does not occur.

MARA notes the SFPA observations that impacts on the fishing industry are expected to be low. In addition, the comments of the MI are noted in relation to minimal impacts on fish stocks and no expected impact on sensitive fish spawning habitats (including herring). MARA notes the comments of DAFM that the activities will not unduly impact on pot fishers. Considering the overall comments received in relation to fisheries impacts, it is not considered necessary that a Fisheries Liaison Officer is required in this instance. However, conditions are recommended to be included to ensure that the holder does not interfere with any third party property or fishing gear or obstruct any fishers or fishing vessels engaged in fishing while the activities are underway.

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 the Department of Defence, Defence Forces Headquarters, McKee Barracks, Dublin, D07 A065, for the purposes of undertaking maintenance dredging and deposit of dredged material, subject to the conditions in Appendix 1.



Dr Alison McCarthy

Senior Marine Advisor

08/12/2025

Appendix 1 - Recommended Conditions

Recommended term of licence for inclusion in the *Particulars Schedule*:

Recommended Term of licence to be 8 years from the date of commencement.

Reason: To ensure the orderly administration of licensed maritime usages in the maritime area.

Recommended conditions for inclusion in *Appendix 2: Specific Conditions of the Marine Usage Licence, if granted*.

1. The Permitted Maritime Usage shall be carried out in accordance with the plans and particulars submitted in support of the application for this Licence.

Reason: To clarify the scope of this licence and ensure protection of the marine environment.

2. Prior to the commencement of the Permitted Maritime Usage the Holder shall consult with the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage, National Monuments Service, located at G37, Custom House, Custom House Quay, Dublin 1, D01 W6X0, and comply with all applicable requirements set forth by the Unit.

Reason: To ensure protection of maritime heritage.

3. The Holder shall, a minimum 14 days prior to the commencement of each dredging campaign, arrange for the publication of a Marine Notice with the Marine Safety Policy Division, Department of Transport. This Marine Notice shall include details of the Licence Holder, and the Licence Number as granted by MARA.

Reason: To ensure safe navigation.

4. The Holder shall not damage or interfere with any third party's property while carrying out the Permitted Maritime Usage.

Reason: To minimise impact on other users of the marine environment.

5. Prior to the commencement of the Permitted Maritime Usage the Holder shall consult with the Port of Cork Company to plan and schedule the Permitted Maritime Usage in order that any potential disruption to port operations is managed.

Reason: To ensure the orderly undertaking of the proposed maritime usage.

6. The Holder shall ensure that all vessels engaged in this Permitted Maritime Usage conform to Irish Certification standards for vessels, as required by the Marine Survey Office.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

7. The Holder shall demonstrate all reasonable practical measures are taken to ensure that all vessels used in the Permitted Maritime Usage are free of invasive marine species on their hulls and in their ballast water and that all vehicles and equipment used in the Permitted Maritime Usage are free of invasive marine species.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

8. 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 the completion of the Permitted Maritime Usage, forward a report of the marine mammal observer(s) operations and mitigation undertaken, to offshore@npws.gov.ie and 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.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment and protected species.

9. Accidental events

The Holder shall ensure that there is an oil pollution emergency plan on-board any survey vessels. This plan should specify:

- (i) Information on the location and detail of spill response resources on-board;
- (ii) Information on crew training in relation to oil pollution response;
- (iii) How crew will interface with other site investigation operators, where applicable.

Reason: To provide appropriate controls on the Permitted Maritime Usage to ensure protection of the marine environment.

10. While conducting the Permitted Maritime Usage the Holder shall not interfere with any fishing gear or obstruct any fishers or fishing vessels engaged in fishing.

Reason: To minimise impact on other users of the marine environment.

11. Marine Litter

- (i) The Holder shall take all practicable efforts to remove any solid waste collected during the maritime usage activity and returned to shore.
- (ii) The Holder shall take all practicable efforts to remove floating material collected during the maritime usage activity and returned to shore.
- (iii) The Holder shall ensure that material dredged by mechanical dredging is passed through grid screens no larger than 30cm to minimise the amount of man-made materials disposed of at sea. Any solid waste must be separated from the dredged material and disposed or recovered ashore.
- (iv) Disposal or recovery of solid waste shall only take place in accordance with the conditions of this licence and in accordance with the appropriate National and European legislation and protocols.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

12. The Holder shall ensure that the Permitted Maritime Usage does not take place concurrently with other authorised dredging or deposit (or dumping) campaigns in Cork Harbour and in the Licensed Area, unless otherwise agreed by the Grantor.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

13. Turbidity and Suspended Solids Monitoring

- (v) The Holder shall undertake monitoring of turbidity and suspended solids during the course of each dredging campaign, and for seven days before and after the dredging campaigns. The monitoring shall be undertaken in accordance with the “Sediment Plume Dispersion Assessment” submitted with the licence application.

- (vi) The Holder shall undertake the monitoring of turbidity and suspended solids as follows:

Parameter	Analysis Method	Frequency
Turbidity	Alarmed turbidity sensor deployed on a moored buoy.	Continuous for the duration of each dredge campaign and at a minimum one week before and one week after the completion each dredge campaign.
Suspended Solids	Standard method*	A sufficient number of samples shall be taken during each campaign to establish the relationship between turbidity and suspended solids.

*A National, European or internationally recognised procedure e.g. I.S. EN, ISO, CEN, BS or equivalent.

- (vii) The Holder shall undertake monitoring of turbidity and suspended solids at the following locations:

Sample site	Latitude (N)	Longitude (W)
Downstream (control)	51°50.61'	8° 18.18'
Entrance to naval base	51°49.38	8° 16.66'

- (viii) Where the suspended solids exceed the predicted values in the “Sediment Plume Dispersion Assessment”, the Holder shall put in place measures to avoid recurrence of the exceedance, where the exceedance is a consequence of the Permitted Maritime Usage.

- (ix) The Holder shall retain a record of all data generated from the monitoring and have it available for inspection by the Grantor.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

14. The parameters, analysis method or frequency of the monitoring, as set out in the “Turbidity and Suspended Solids Monitoring” condition may be amended with the agreement of the Grantor following evaluation of the monitoring results.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

15. Quantities of dredged material associated with the Permitted Maritime Usage

The quantities associated with the Permitted Maritime Usage shall not exceed the following:

Location	Associated activity	Maximum Quantity per campaign (m ³)
Area A	Dredging (campaign 1)	1,280
Area B	Dredging (campaign 1)	1,560*
Area A	Dredging (campaigns 2–4)	920
Area B	Dredging (campaigns 2–4)	150°

*for removal ashore °subject to Condition 18

Location	Associated activity	Maximum Quantity over MUL duration (m ³)
Area C	Deposit	4,490°

°subject to Condition 18

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

16. Deposit of dredged material shall be carried out in a manner that ensures a uniform spread of material in the Licensed Area.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

17. The Holder shall ensure that, prior to the commencement, for the duration and following the completion of dredging within Area B, an appropriate silt curtain is secured at the entrance to the graving dock within Haulbowline Naval Base as shown on drawing No. CM1265-BLA-XX-DR-C-09001 submitted with the application.

Reason: To ensure the protection of the marine environment.

18. 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.

Reason: To ensure the protection of the marine environment

The definition of "**Material not suitable for disposal at sea**" must be clearly stated in the licence as meaning sediment that is chemically contaminated such that it does not meet the assessment criteria to be suitable for disposal in accordance with current Marine Institute Guidelines for the Assessment of Dredged Material in Irish Waters.