

Assessment, Research and Data Unit			
Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report			
To:	Maritime Authorisations Unit	From:	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Marine Analyst
Date:	05/11/2025	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL230038
Applicant:		Uisce Éireann, 1 Foley Street, Mountjoy, Dublin 1, D01 WA07	
Type(s) of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:		3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.	
Location of proposed maritime usage:		Marine surveys within Ballyness Bay, Falcarragh, Co. Donegal	
Licence application received:		12.12.2024	

1. Background

Uisce Éireann has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act). The proposed maritime usage activities are required to inform water quality models supporting Uisce Éireann's capital delivery programme to improve wastewater treatment. The MUL is being submitted for the proposed installation of meteorological stations, the deployment of tide and flow gauges, current meters and the utilisation of drones and a remotely controlled boat (ARCBoat) at Ballyness Bay, Falcarragh, Co. Donegal. No permanent works are proposed, and all survey equipment will be removed following completion of data acquisition. The maritime usage licence duration sought is for 5 years to enable works to be scheduled and completed in favourable weather conditions.

2. Description of maritime usage(s) and local site characteristics

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

The Applicant has applied for a proposed maritime usage licence to inform the outfall discharge location for a proposed upgrade to Falcarragh Water Treatment Plant (WWTP), Co. Donegal (MUL Application Area; Figure 1) in the maritime area¹. The proposed maritime usage activities are outlined in Table 1.

The applicant submitted a Supporting Information for Screening of Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report in support of the application.

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)

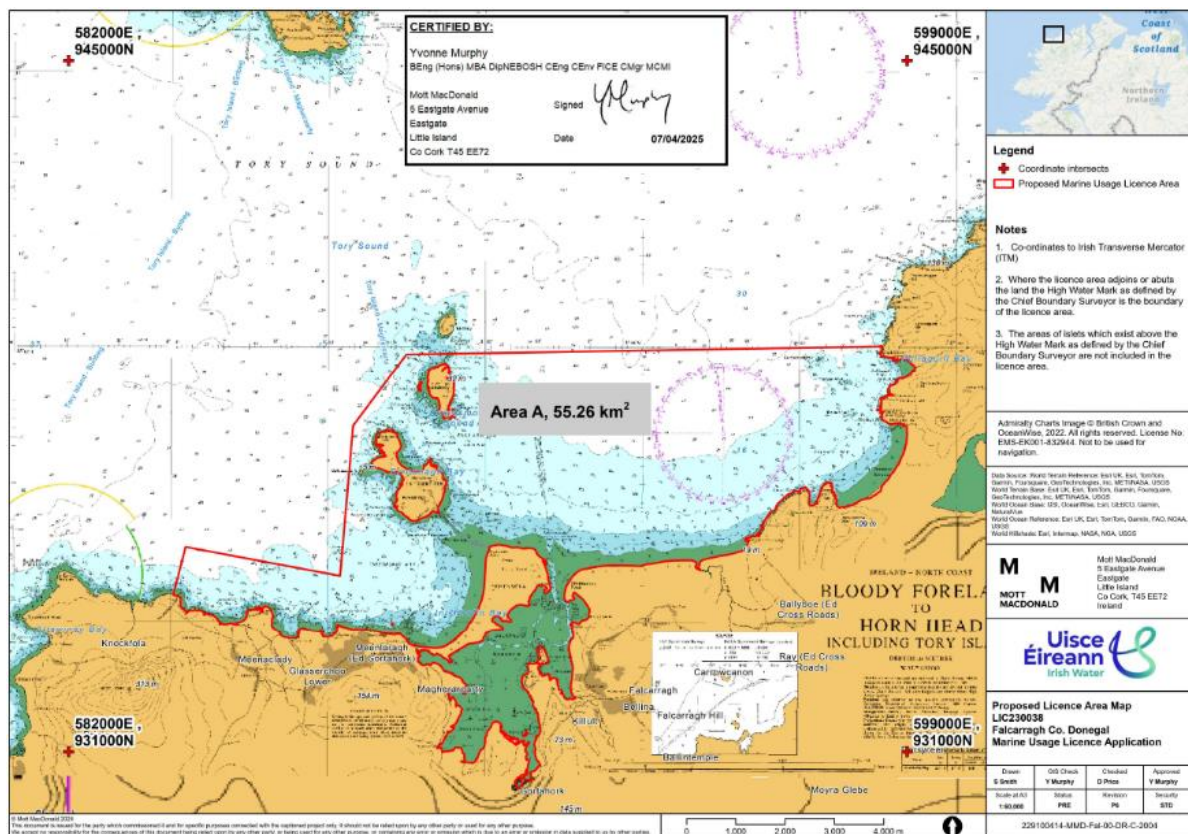


Figure 1 - Map of MUL application area, showing Ballyness Bay, Donegal, and surrounds.

Proposed works

Table 1 - Description of activities and expected duration of proposed maritime usage

Activity	Expected duration / Frequency
Installation of 1 no. weather station to aid in the validation of data	12 months
Installation of 5 no. tidal gauges	12 months
Installation of 4 no. current meters with vertical profiles and conductivity, temperature, and depth (CTD) device	≥ 35 days
Installation of 3 no. river flow and stage gauges	12 months
Deployment of an aerial drone to conduct a Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey to establish bathymetry of the licence area	5-7 days
Deployment of Multi Beam Echo Sounder (MBES) via boat to complement the LiDAR dataset	1 occasion
Deployment of an ARCBoat	≥ 35 days
Deployment of drone and hydro-drone to conduct dye and microbial tracing survey to understand dispersion pattern of effluent and to aid conceptual model calibration and verification processes under different conditions	≥ 3 occasions
Water quality sampling within the bay and rivers	12 months
Maintenance of the tidal and flow gauges, and 1no. weather station	As required throughout 12-month period
Decommissioning/removal of all surveying equipment at the end of the survey period.	1 occasion

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

Ballyness Bay is a sheltered tidal inlet located in north-west Donegal, adjacent to the towns of Gortahork and Falcarragh. The bay forms part of the Ballyness Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code IE001090), designated under the EU Habitats Directive for the protection of habitats such as estuaries, mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, embryonic shifting dunes, and fixed coastal dunes. These habitats provide important feeding and roosting grounds for a range of bird species. The site also overlaps with a mobile sand community complex of benthic subtidal communities.

The substrate at the proposed site is composed primarily of sands and muds, underlain mostly by pelitic geology, with smaller areas of limestone and quartzite. Ballyness Bay is a large, shallow estuarine complex characterised by extensive sandflats that become exposed at low

tide. Sea angling and sailing occur on a small scale, and some motorboats also operate from Magheraroarty Pier, including the regular ferry service to Tory Island.

Immediately adjacent to Ballyness Bay SAC are the Horn Head to Fanad Head Special Protection Area (SPA) (Site Code IE004194) and Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC (Site Code IE000147). Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC is a diverse coastal site containing a wide range of habitats—from high, rocky quartzite cliffs in the north to mudflats, sandflats, dunes, and a brackish lake in the south. The Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA supports nationally and internationally significant populations of breeding seabirds, including Fulmar, Kittiwake, Guillemot, and Razorbill. The close proximity of these sites highlights the strong ecological connectivity between the intertidal, coastal, and offshore environments in this region.

To the west of Ballyness Bay lies the Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC (Site Code IE001141), while the Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA (Site Code IE004149) extends along both the eastern and western sides of the bay. Gweedore Bay and Islands is an extensive coastal site between Burtonport and Bloody Foreland, comprising a long stretch of undulating coastline with exposed rock knolls. The site is underlain by granodiorite, a basic igneous rock. Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA, designated under the EU Birds Directive, is of special conservation interest for the Corncrake (*Crex crex*) and is one of a suite of western seaboard sites that regularly support nationally important breeding populations of this species.

Offshore, the Inishbofin, Inishdooey and Inishbeg SPA (Site Code IE004083) comprises three small to medium-sized islands located just north-west of Ballyness Bay. This site supports nationally important wintering populations of Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*), Corncrake, Common Gull (*Larus canus*), Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), and Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*).

3. Identification of relevant European sites(s)

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 sites, in view of best scientific knowledge and the conservation objectives of the sites.

The proposed maritime usage is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s). The European sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)) listed on Table 2 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.

Table 2 - Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests and site-specific conservation objectives. Those Qualifying Interests marked in **bold** have been screened in for Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

European site & site code	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site Screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Ballyness Bay SAC 001090	MUL area overlapping Ballyness Bay SAC	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] 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] Humid dune slacks [2190] <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> (Geyer's Whorl Snail) [1013]	No	No	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Ballyness Bay SAC 001090. Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC 000147	MUL area overlapping Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	Yes – environmental surveys within site boundary of selected species	Yes – possible visual and above water noise disturbance	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC 000147. Version 2.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		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] Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> (<i>Salicion arenariae</i>) [2170] Humid dune slacks [2190] Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0] Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i> [3130] <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> (Geyer's Whorl Snail) [1013] <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> (Petalwort) [1395] <i>Najas flexilis</i> (Slender Naiad) [1833]	No	No	
Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC 001141	~2km	<i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	Yes – environmental surveys within otter foraging range	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC 001141. Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Coastal lagoons [1150] Reefs [1170] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]	No	No	

		Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130] Decalcified fixed dunes with <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> [2140] 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] Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0] Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i> [3130] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130] <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> (Marsh Fritillary) [1065] <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> (Petalwort) [1395] <i>Najas flexilis</i> (Slender Naiad) [1833] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]			
Tory Island Coast SAC 002259	~5km	Coastal lagoons [1150] Reefs [1170] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330]	No	No	NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Tory Island Coast SAC 002259. Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Sheephaven SAC 001190	~7km	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330] 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] Humid dune slacks [2190] Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> (Marsh Fritillary) [1065] <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> (Petalwort) [1395]	No	No	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Sheephaven SAC 001190 Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Mulroy Bay SAC 002159	~13km	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] Reefs [1170]	No	No	NPWS (2012) Conservation Objectives: Mulroy Bay SAC 002159 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Slieve Tooey/Tormore Island/Loughros Beg Bay SAC 000190	~50km	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	Yes – surveys within grey seal foraging range (51.29km, Cronin et al. (2011))	Yes – possible visual and above water noise disturbance	NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Slieve Tooey/Tormore Island/Loughros Beg Bay SAC 000190 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco- Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) [1330] 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] Decalcified fixed dunes with <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> [2140] 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] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] <i>Vertigo angustior</i> (Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail) [1014] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	No	No	

West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC 000197	~50km	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330] 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] Decalcified fixed dunes with <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> [2140] 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] Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0] Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (<i>Littorelletalia uniflorae</i>) [3110] Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i> [3130] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]	No	No	NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC 000197 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
--	-------	---	----	----	--

		<i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites) [6210] Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>) [6410] Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150] Alkaline fens [7230] <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> (Geyer's Whorl Snail) [1013] <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] <i>Euphydrias aurinia</i> (Marsh Fritillary) [1065] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] <i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour Seal) [1365] <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> (Petalwort) [1395] <i>Najas flexilis</i> (Slender Naiad) [1833]			
--	--	---	--	--	--

Cloghernagore Bog and Glenveagh National Park SAC 002047	~7km	<i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	Yes – surveys within otter foraging range	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Cloghernagore Bog and Glenveagh National Park SAC 002047 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		<i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]	Yes - survey within site boundary of selected species	Yes – possible barrier to connectivity and recruitment disruption	
		Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (<i>Littorelletalia uniflorae</i>) [3110] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation [3260] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>) [6410] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0]	No	No	

		<i>Vandenboschia speciosa</i> (Killarney Fern) [6985]			
Rutland Island and Sound SAC 002283	~22km	<i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour Seal) [1365]	Yes – surveys within harbour seal foraging range (33.65km, Sharples et al. (2012))	Yes – possible visual and above water noise disturbance	NPWS (2013) Conservation Objectives: Rutland Island and Sound SAC 002283 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Coastal lagoons [1150] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] 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] Humid dune slacks [2190]	No	No	
Lough Swilly SAC 002287	~45km	Estuaries [1130] Coastal lagoons [1150] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritima</i>) [1330]	No	No	NPWS (2011) Conservation Objectives: Lough Swilly SAC 002287 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinia caerulea</i>) [6410] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]			
Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA 004149	MUL area overlapping Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA	Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122]	Yes – possible foraging	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA 004149 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Inishbofin, Inishdooey and Inishbeg SPA 004083	MUL area overlapping Inishbofin, Inishdooey and Inishbeg SPA	Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122] Barnacle Goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>) [A045] Common Gull (<i>Larus canus</i>) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>) [A183] Arctic Tern (<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>) [A194]	No Yes – surface feeder Yes – possible foraging	No Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Inishbofin, Inishdooey and Inishbeg SPA 004083 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA 004194	MUL area overlapping Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA	Chough (<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>) [A346] Peregrine (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) [A103] Barnacle Goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>) [A045] Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) [A395] Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>) [A200] Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>) [A199] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188]	No	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA 004194 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) [A017] Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>) [A018]	Yes – possible foraging (Woodward et al. 2024)	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	
Tory Island SPA 004073	~5km	Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122] Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>) [A200] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>) [A204]	No	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Tory Island SPA 004073 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA 004039	~5km	Red-throated Diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>) [A001] Merlin (<i>Falco columbarius</i>) [A098] Peregrine (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) [A103] Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina schinzii</i>) [A466]	No	No	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Tory Island SPA 004073 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Greers Isle SPA 004082	~19km	Common Gull (<i>Larus canus</i>) [A182]	Yes – possible foraging (Woodward et al. 2024)	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Greers Isle SPA 004082 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service,

		Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179] Sandwich Tern (<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>) [A863]	No	No	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
West Donegal Coast SPA 004150	~6km	Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) [A184] Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) [A017] Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>) [A018]	Yes – possible foraging (Woodward et al. 2024)	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: West Donegal Coast SPA 004150 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Peregrine (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) [A103] Chough (<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>) [A346] Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>) [A200] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188]	No	No	
West Donegal Islands SPA 004230	~6km	Common Gull (<i>Larus canus</i>) [A182] Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) [A184] Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>) [A018]	Yes – possible foraging (Woodward et al. 2024)	Yes - possible disturbance from above water noise	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: West Donegal Islands SPA 004230 Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Barnacle Goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>) [A045] Corncrake (<i>Crex crex</i>) [A122]	No	No	

4. Assessment of likely significant effects

Table 3 - Identification of all potential direct and indirect impacts that may have an effect on the conservation objectives of a European site, taking into account the nature and scale of the proposed maritime usage.

Potential Impacts	Possible significance of Potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)
Temporary visual and above water noise disturbance to marine mammals	Potential for survey activities to generate noise, vibration and increased human presence, or vessel and drone activity to be at an intensity and duration that could cause short term, temporary disturbance of seals and otters.
Temporary visual and above water noise disturbance to birds	Short term disturbance to birds within intertidal and coastal areas may occur due to drone activity during survey. Several SCI species could experience temporary displacement or altered behaviour, as they are present in the SPA at various times of year.
Barrier to connectivity	Potential for temporary acoustic barriers to connectivity for mobile species such as salmon from vessel noise and associated disturbance from survey activity. Disturbance to migratory salmon could indirectly affect pearl mussel recruitment, as a percentage of the species depends on salmonid hosts for larval development (Moorkens, 2000).

Within the proposed survey area, which overlaps several SACs, including Ballyness Bay SAC [001090], Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC [001141] and Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC [000147], environmental monitoring equipment such as current meters, tide gauges, CTDs (conductivity, temperature, depth profilers), and river flow gauges will be deployed, as indicated in the mapped information provided by the applicant. These survey activities are considered to result in low levels of environmental disturbance on habitats within these SACs and are unlikely to cause significant effects. Estuaries [1130] and Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] were screened out as the proposed activities will result in only negligible and temporary physical interaction with these QI habitats. The equipment is small, nonintrusive, and deployed with minimal impact on sediment structure, community composition or habitat function.

The sound emitted by the current meters (300–1200 kHz) lies outside the auditory range of cetaceans and pinnipeds, and no behavioural responses of these is to be expected (Coakley, 2011).

Similarly, water quality sampling, maintenance, and the decommissioning of equipment at the end of the survey period are also considered to pose low-impact, non-significant effects on the environment.

Rhodamine WT dye will be released from the baseline discharge locations within the red line boundary shown in Figure 1. Releases will be undertaken during the ebb phases of both spring and neap tides, on a maximum of two separate occasions. Rhodamine WT is a fluorescent dye widely used as a tracer in hydrological investigations due to its strong fluorescence even at low concentrations. Previous studies have demonstrated the low ecotoxicological risk of Rhodamine WT (Parker, 1973; Field, 2005). The proposed dye tracing will be conducted below the maximum allowable concentration quality standard of <910 µg/L, as set out in Skjolding et al. (2021). The effects of the microbial dye tracing are therefore considered to be non-significant and are not likely to result in adverse impacts to water quality, sensitive species, or habitats. Accordingly, this activity is screened out from further assessment.

The proposed multibeam echosounder (MBES) is expected to operate at a frequency of approximately 500 kHz, which is above the auditory range of pinnipeds (<86 kHz), bottlenose dolphin (<160 kHz) and harbour porpoise (<180 kHz) (JNCC, 2025; Southall et al., 2021); therefore, no impacts on marine mammals are anticipated.

The proposed use of aerial drones during survey operations for LiDAR data collection and dye tracing introduces potential for short-term visual or noise disturbance to foraging bird species that are Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) of nearby SPAs. Although the overall temporal footprint of drone operations will be limited, such activity can cause temporary behavioural responses such as flushing or displacement (Cantu et al. 2023). As a result, potential disturbance to SPA bird populations, particularly foraging species associated with the Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA [004149], Inishbofin, Inishdooey and Inishbeg SPA [004083], Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA [004194], Greens Isle SPA [004082], West Donegal Coast SPA [004150], and West Donegal Islands SPA [004230], cannot be ruled out at screening.

Given the proximity of known grey seal haul-out sites within the Horn Head and Rinclevan SAC [000147], and the fact that the MUL area lies within the foraging range of harbour and grey seals from several more distant SACs—including Slieve Tooley/Tormore Island/Loughros Beg Bay SAC [000190] and Rutland Island and Sound SAC [002283] — there is potential for short-term behavioural disturbance arising from vessel and ARCBoat activity, aerial drone presence, and other associated survey operations. Harbour seals are particularly sensitive to visual and above-water noise disturbance (Paterson et al., 2019). Although grey seals are not known to haul out within the immediate MUL area, resting and breeding sites occur within approximately 3.5 km of the red line boundary.

Although significant effects on either species are unlikely, given the short duration of the proposed activities and the wide availability of suitable foraging habitat, potential disturbance to both harbour and grey seals cannot be ruled out at screening.

In-combination effects

MARA has developed a stepwise approach for identifying other In-Combination plans and projects.

Using professional and scientific judgement, the key steps for assessing cumulative effects are as follows:

1. Defining the Cumulative Effects Spatial Scope (CESS)
2. Defining the Cumulative Effects Temporal Scope (CETS)
3. Impact identification
4. Pathway identification
5. Prediction
6. Identification of Plans or Projects that could act in combination
7. Screening Stage Cumulative Effects Assessment conclusion
8. Managing cumulative impacts - to be carried out as part of Stage 2 AA process

The CESS has been defined as the red line boundary and the CETS as 5 years. The definition of the CESS is based on acoustic survey equipment effective deterrence ranges as per JNCC Guidance on Assessing the Significance of Noise Disturbance against Harbour Porpoise SACs Conservation Objectives (JNCC, 2025). And the CETS is the proposed MUL duration.

A search of relevant databases was undertaken on the 28/10/25, including, but not limited to; MARA MAC and MUL applications, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment Foreshore applications, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage EIA Portal, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Aquaculture Viewer (AQUAMIS), Donegal County Council Planning System, EPA authorisation databases.

Relevant projects within the CESS and the CETS were considered. No projects were found to have the potential to act in combination with the proposed maritime usage.

The following plans, related to the development of the maritime environment were also identified:

- The Climate Action Plan 2025
- Donegal County Council Development Plan 2024-2030
- Water Action Plan 2024
- Uisce Éireann Regional Water Resources Plan – North-West – 2023

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application and the plans listed above and projects considered, on the conservation objectives of the European sites considered in this report can be excluded at this stage.

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?

No

5. Screening Determination Statement

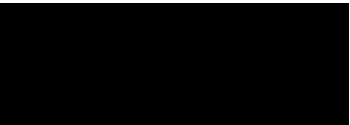
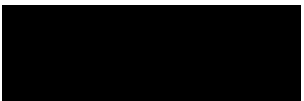
The assessment of significant effects:

On the basis of the information on file, and having regard to:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development
- The distance to the nearest European sites
- Possible barriers to connectivity and secondary habitat loss
- Possible visual and above water noise disturbance

Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by **Uisce Éireann, 1 Foley Street, Mountjoy, Dublin 1, D01 WA07**, to carry out Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000 at Ballyness Bay, Falcarragh, Co. Donegal MUL230038 will require Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

It cannot 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.

Signature and Date of Recommending Officer	 Dr. Micheal Mac Monagail Marine Analyst	05.11.2025
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director of Assessment, Research and Data Unit	12/11/2025

References

Cantu de Leija, A., Mirzadi, R. E., Randall, J. M., Portmann, M. D., Mueller, E. J., & Gawlik, D. E. (2023). A meta-analysis of disturbance caused by drones on nesting birds. *Journal of Field Ornithology*, 94(2), 3. <https://doi.org/10.5751/JFO-00259-940203>

Coakley (2011). Environmental Assessment of a Marine Geophysical Survey by the R/V Marcus G. Langseth in the Arctic Ocean (2011) Prepared for University of Alaska Geophysics Institute 900 Yukon Drive Fairbanks, AK 99775 and National Science Foundation Office of Polar Programs 4201 Wilson Blvd., Suite 755 Arlington, VA 22230.

Cronin, M. A., Ó Cadhla, O., Duck, C., Strong, D., & NPWS (2011). Tracking grey seals on Ireland's continental shelf: Final report 2011. National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Retrieved from https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/Tracking%20grey%20seals_Final%20report%202011.pdf

Field, M. S. (2005). Assessing aquatic ecotoxicological risks associated with fluorescent dyes used for water-tracing studies. *Environmental & Engineering Geoscience*, 11(4), 295-308.

JNCC. 2025. Updated Effective Deterrent Ranges (EDRs) for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of harbour porpoise Special Areas of Conservation (England, Wales & Northern Ireland). JNCC Report 803.

Moorkens, E. A. (2000). Conservation Management of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel *Margaritifera margarifera* — Part 1: Biology of the Species and its Present Situation in Ireland. Irish Wildlife Manuals No. 8. Dublin: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Parker, G. G. (1973). Tests of Rhodamine WT dye for toxicity to oysters and fish. *Journal of Research US Geological Survey*, 1(4), 499.

Paterson, W. D., Russell, D. J. F., Wu, G.-M., McConnell, B., Currie, J. I., McCafferty, D. J., & Thompson, D. (2019). Post-disturbance haulout behaviour of harbour seals. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 29(S1), 144-156. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.3092>

Sharples, R. J., Moss, S., Patterson, T. A., & Hammond, P. S. (2012). Spatial variation in foraging behaviour of a marine top predator (*Phoca vitulina*) determined by a large-scale satellite tagging program. *PLoS ONE*, 7(5), e37216.

Skjolding, L. M., Dyhr, K. S., Köppl, C. J., McKnight, U. S., Bauer-Gottwein, P., Mayer, P., Bjerg, L. & Baun, A. (2021). Assessing the aquatic toxicity and environmental safety of tracer compounds Rhodamine B and Rhodamine WT. *Water Research*, 197, 117109.

Southall, B. L., Nowacek, D. P., Bowles, A. E., Senigaglia, V., Bejder, L., & Tyack, P. L. (2021). Marine mammal noise exposure criteria: assessing the severity of marine mammal behavioral responses to human noise. *Aquatic Mammals*, 47(5), 421-464.
<https://doi.org/10.1578/AM.47.5.2021.421>

Woodward, I., Thaxter, C. B., Owen, E., Bolton, M., Ward, R. M., Cook, A. S. C. et al. (2024) "The value of seabird foraging ranges as a tool to investigate potential interactions with offshore wind farms." *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Vol. 254, 107192