

**Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate**  
**Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report**

<b>To:</b>	John Evans, Director	<b>From:</b>	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Marine Analyst	
<b>Date</b>	24/03/2026	<b>Maritime Usage Licence Application No:</b>	MUL240012	
<b>Applicant:</b>	Uisce Éireann, Colvill House, 24-26 Talbot St, Dublin 1, D01 NP86			
<b>Type of maritime usage in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021 (as amended):</b>	3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.			
<b>Location of proposed Maritime Usage:</b>	Uisce Eireann intends to conduct a strategic modelling study of water currents within Donegal Bay and Sligo Bay.			
<b>Licence application received:</b>	16/08/2024			
<b>Request for further information (RFI) under Section 117(6)a:</b>	16/10/2024; 28/11/2024; 23/09/2025 and 24/10/2025			
<b>Response to RFI received:</b>	18/10/2014; 04/12/2024; 21/10/225 and 21.11.2025			
<b>Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening:</b>	Not required (EIA Screening Form dated 15/09/2025)			
<b>Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment required:</b>	Yes	<b>Natura Impact Statement received:</b>	21.11.2025	
<b>Public consultation:</b>	03.02.2026 to 08.03.2026			
<b>Submissions from the public received:</b>	None	<b>Comments from public bodies received:</b>	Eleven	

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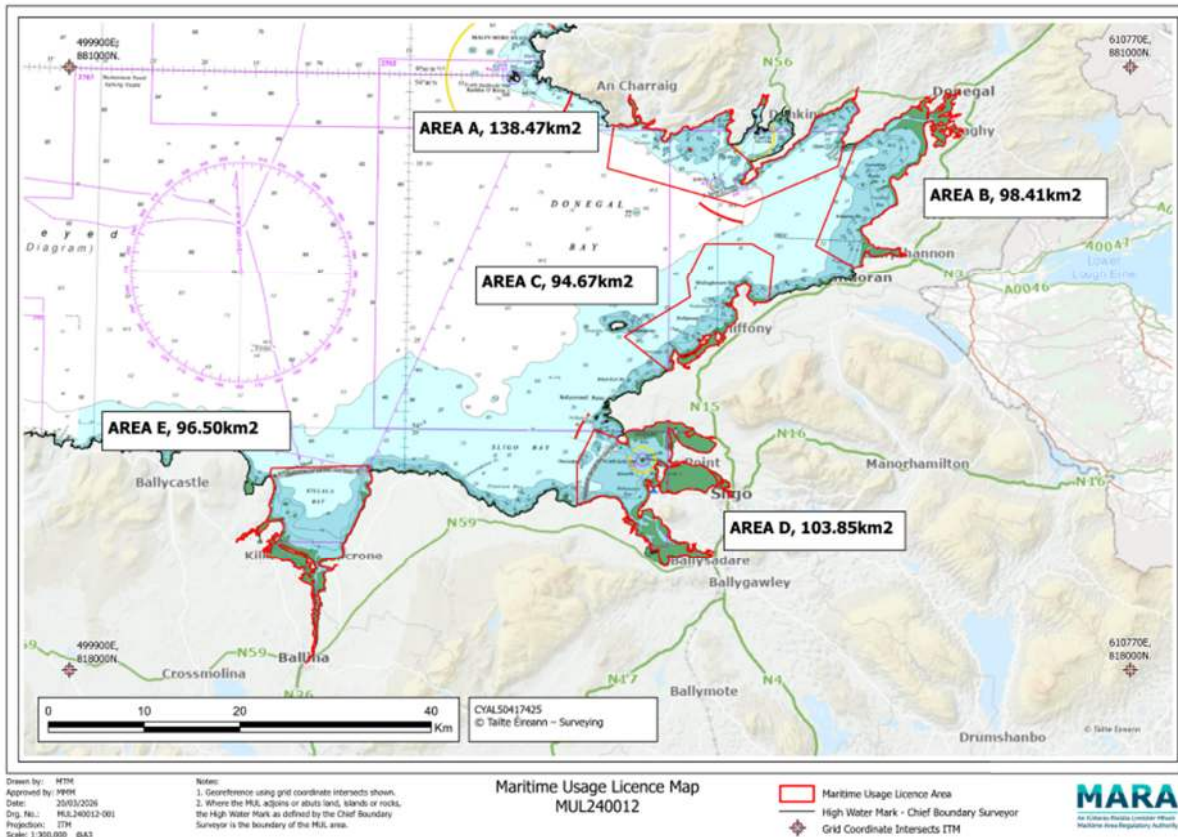
## 1. Background

Uisce Éireann has applied to MARA for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act), to undertake marine environmental surveys for site investigation purposes. Uisce Éireann proposes to undertake vessel-based ADCP monitoring, intertidal bathymetric surveys, and the deployment of tidal gauges at five locations along the Donegal and Sligo coasts (Figure 1). These activities will collect data on water currents, bathymetry, temperature, conductivity, and salinity within Donegal Bay, Sligo Bay, and adjoining waters, and may occur at any time of year. The data will support numerical modelling to inform the design and placement of wastewater infrastructure and to assess potential effects on water quality and designated shellfish waters. Table 1 outlines the proposed survey activities and timescales. A licence duration of three years is sought. The applicant currently holds a foreshore licence (FS007553; determination date: 22 March 2024), for the deployment of twenty-three Acoustic Doppler Current Profilers (ADCPs) at various locations within the same areas as the proposed maritime usage.

**Table 1:** Proposed marine environmental surveys and the estimated duration of activities, across all sites, unless otherwise stated.

Proposed activity	Estimated duration
Deployment of vessel-mounted ADCPs	30 mins – 1 hour per location and/or 13-hour continuous deployment
Deployment of tidal gauges	Minimum of 3 months (coinciding with other sampling)
Bathymetric surveys of intertidal areas	One occasion, to cover all intertidal areas applied for
Collection of conductivity, temperature and depth (CTD) data	Periodically over 13-hour deployment periods

There are five distinct areas of the proposed maritime usage licence, as shown in Figure 1; Area A: Carrigan Head east to Dorrin Point, Area B: Dorrin Point south to Aughrus Point, Area C: Mullaghmore Head south to Streedadh Point, Area D: Sligo Harbour and Ballysadare Bay and, Area E: Killala Bay.



**Figure 1:** Proposed Maritime Usage Licence Areas A to E.

### Brief description of the site characteristics

Overall, the five proposed maritime usage areas represent a diverse assemblage of limestone-dominated coastal and estuarine environments with significant intertidal flats, estuaries, and reef habitats of ecological importance, and are briefly described.

Area A covers approximately 138.47 km<sup>2</sup>, extending from the townland of Croaghlin at the western extent of the MUL area to Raneel, Mountcharles, in the east. The area of Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre, in Killybegs, County Donegal, is regulated by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Marine and as such cannot be licenced by MARA at this time. The proposed MUL area overlaps St. John’s Point SAC and Slieve League SAC. Major rivers within or draining to the area include the Owenwee River, Glenaddragh River, Stragar River, Tullaghacullion River, Bruckless River and the Eany River. The underlying geology comprises Tournaisian Basal Clastics and Visean Calp Limestone. The area supports extensive reef communities on solid bedrock substrata, typically occurring between 17–26 m depth. Towards Teelin, at the western extent of the MUL area, the seascape is dominated by high granite and sandstone cliffs with plateau landscapes. In contrast, McSwines Bay is characterised by a large limestone bay with low-lying, undulating hinterland and associated coastal wetlands.

Area B covers approximately 98.41 km<sup>2</sup>, extending from Tullyvoose in the west to Finner Road to the south. The proposed MUL area overlaps Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC and Durnesh Lough SAC. Major rivers associated with the area include the Gortilosky River, Eske River, and the Erne River. The area is underlain by Carboniferous limestone and shale and is dominated by intertidal habitats, including mudflats, sandflats, estuarine channels, tidal rivers, and sandy beaches. The seascape comprises a large limestone bay with low a low lying, undulating hinterland and extensive coastal wetlands.

Area C covers approximately 94.67 km<sup>2</sup>, extending from Bunduff to Agharrow. The proposed MUL area overlaps Bunduff Lough and Machair/Trawalua/Mullaghmore SAC and Streedagh Point Dunes SAC. Major rivers in the area include the Cartonkillerdoe River and the Grange River. This is an exposed coastal system underlain by sedimentary geology, including limestone, shale and sandstone, and strongly shaped by prevailing Atlantic winds and wave energy. The seascape is characterised by a large limestone bay, a low-lying and undulating hinterland, and associated coastal wetlands.

Area D covers approximately 103.85 km<sup>2</sup>, extending from the townlands of Raghly to Soodry, and comprises Cummeen Strand/Drumcliff Bay (Sligo Bay) SAC and Ballysadare Bay SAC. Major rivers include the Drumcliff River, Drumcliff/Glebe River, Garavogue River, Portavaud River and the Ballysadare River. These are two extensive shallow limestone bays, underlain by Carboniferous limestone and fed by several river systems. The seascape is characterised by a large limestone bay, low-lying and undulating hinterland, and coastal wetlands.

Area E covers approximately 96.50 km<sup>2</sup>, extending from the townland of Rathlee in County Sligo to Kilcummin in County Mayo. The proposed MUL overlaps Killala Bay/Moy Estuary SAC, located between Inishcrone and Killala. Major rivers include the Moy River, Glenree River, and Cloonaghmore River. The area features a long estuarine channel through which the River Moy discharges to the sea. It supports extensive intertidal mud- and sandflats, with water depths reach approximately 10 m in the outer bay. The seascape is characterised by a large limestone bay, a low-lying undulating hinterland, and coastal wetlands.

## 2. National Policy and EU Directives

In undertaking the assessment of this licence application MARA had regard to the requirements of Section 6(8), the Marine Policy Planning Statement, and Section 121(2) of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021, as amended, which sets out the marine policy and legislation to which regard must be had in considering a licence application.

## 2.1 National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

In accordance with the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (MAP Act), MARA is required to have regard to the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) and the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), which together set out the national policy framework for the sustainable development of Ireland's maritime area. The NMPF comprises overarching marine planning policies structured under three high level objectives – Environmental – Ocean Health, Economic – Thriving Maritime Economy and Social – Engagement with the Sea – as well as sector-specific policies. Several environmental policies detailed in the NMPF are covered in other sections of this report, including, but not limited to, the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP), the Birds and Habitat Directives, the Water Framework Directive, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

The proposed maritime usage by Uisce Éireann involves site investigations to inform the design and placement of wastewater infrastructure and to assess potential impacts on water quality and designated shellfish waters, is consistent with the broader objectives of the NMPF.

In addition, the proposal aligns with relevant sector-specific policies of the NMPF relating to wastewater treatment and disposal, which seek to:

- To bring and maintain public water and wastewater services to acceptable international benchmarks, verified by independent monitoring and reporting, through increased wastewater treatment based on best available techniques, with a focus on, inter alia, ensuring full compliance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and wastewater licensing requirements.
- To support communities and sustainable development in coastal areas through the provision of resilient water services, now and into the future.

The proposed site investigations are necessary to support the future delivery of such infrastructure and are therefore consistent with these policy objectives.

With regard to other NMPF policy areas:

Environmental – Ocean Health: The NMPF requires that proposals protect and, where possible, enhance marine ecosystem health. The proposed maritime usage is temporary and non-intrusive in nature and not expected to result in significant impacts on marine habitats and species.

Environmental – Water Quality: The NMPF water quality policies seek to prevent deterioration in water quality, including waters of designated shellfish areas. The proposed maritime usage is not expected to result in discharges or disturbance that would significantly affect water quality.

Environmental - Air Quality: The survey vessel is small and will operate at low speeds. The proposed maritime usage will not result in significant emissions, during the operation or recovery of survey equipment.

Economic – Thriving Maritime Economy: The NMPF supports the provision of infrastructure that helps sustainable economic development in coastal areas. The proposed maritime usage would inform the design and delivery of wastewater infrastructure essential in supporting the future development of coastal communities.

Social – Engagement with the Sea - Heritage Assets: The NMPF requires proposals to avoid or minimise impacts on marine cultural heritage assets. No significant impacts to culture heritage are anticipated.

## 2.2 National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)

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

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

MARA published an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination on 24.10.2025 which concluded that it could not exclude, 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(s).

MARA undertook an AA in respect to the proposed site investigation 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.

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 a Risk Assessment for Annex IV Species in support of their MUL application. The risk assessment considered the scope of the proposed site investigation activities, and consideration of the potential impacts on some of the relevant Annex IV species in the proposed maritime usage area (particularly cetaceans). MARA accepts the Risk Assessment for Annex IV species submitted by the Applicant. However, it should be noted that, since the risk assessment was submitted, updated guidance has been published. Updated JNCC guidance (JNCC, 2025) confirms that MBES/SBS do not produce underwater noise at levels associated with risk to cetaceans and therefore do not warrant mitigation. As such, no conditions relating to underwater noise impacts on marine mammals are required.

Regarding the need to apply for a Regulation 54 Derogation Licence for Annex IV species from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for this proposed Maritime Usage Activity, the applicant carried out their own assessment following the most recent NPWS guidance. They concluded that a Derogation Licence in relation to Annex IV species was not required for this proposed maritime usage.

#### 2.4 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 Status in inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater by 2027, at the latest. The proposed activity will take place across several coastal water bodies and transitional water bodies (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Summary of WFD ecological status, pollution status, and risk classification for coastal and transitional water bodies overlapping the proposed MUL area.

Area	WFD Coastal Water Bodies	Eco Status (Coastal)	Pollution Status	*Risk status (Coastal)	Transitional Water Bodies	Eco Status (Transitional)	Pollution Status	Risk status (Transitional)
A	Donegal Bay Northern Killybegs Harbour McSwines Bay Inver Bay Donegal Bay (Erne)	High Moderate High High High	Unpolluted Unpolluted Unpolluted Unpolluted	All <i>Not at Risk</i>	Teelin Bay Eany Water Estuary	High High	Unpolluted Unpolluted	Both <i>Not at Risk</i>
B	Donegal Bay (Erne)	High	Unpolluted	<i>Not at Risk</i>	Inner Donegal Bay Erne Estuary	Good Moderate	Unpolluted Unpolluted	Both <i>Not at Risk</i>
C	Donegal Bay (Erne) Donegal Bay Southern Donegal Bay Northern	High High High	Unpolluted Unpolluted Unpolluted	All <i>Not at Risk</i>	None	-		-
D	Sligo Bay	Good	Unpolluted	<i>At Risk</i>	Drumcliff Estuary Garavoge Estuary Ballysadare Estuary	Moderate Poor Moderate	Unpolluted Unpolluted Unassigned	Drumcliff <i>Not at Risk</i> Garavoge <i>Under Review</i> Ballysadare <i>At Risk</i>
E	Killala Bay Western Atlantic Seaboard	Good High	Unassigned Unpolluted	Both <i>Not at Risk</i>	Moy Estuary Cloonaghmore Estuary	Moderate Moderate	Intermediate Unpolluted	Moy <i>At Risk</i> Cloonaghmore <i>Not at Risk</i>

\*Risk status indicates whether a water body may fail to meet Water framework Directive environmental objectives due to identified pressures

### Coastal Water Bodies

Ecological status across the coastal water bodies overlapping the proposed MUL area ranges from Good to High, indicating generally favourable conditions. Killybegs Harbour (Area A) is the only coastal water body classified as Moderate ecological status. All coastal water bodies overlapping the MUL area are classified as Unpolluted, reflecting the overall high and stable coastal water quality. In terms of future WFD objectives, these coastal water bodies are generally considered Not at Risk of losing their current ecological status. The sole exception is Sligo Bay (Area D), which is classified as At Risk of not meeting its WFD objectives.

### Transitional Water Bodies

Ecological status within transitional water bodies overlapping the proposed MUL area is more variable. Several estuaries are classified as Moderate ecological status (Erne Estuary, Drumcliff Estuary, Ballysadare Estuary, Moy Estuary and Cloonaghmore Estuary), while the Garavoge Estuary is Classified as Poor ecological status (Area D). In contrast, Teelin Bay and the Eany Water Estuary achieve High ecological status (Area A).

All transitional water bodies are classified as Unpolluted, with the exception being the Moy Estuary, which is classified as Intermediate.

Most transitional water bodies are considered Not at Risk of failing to meet their WFD objectives; however, Ballysadare Estuary and the Moy Estuary (Area D and E), both of which are classified as At Risk, while the Garavoge Estuary is currently Under Review.

Given the location of the proposed MUL activities, which involve primarily vessel-based bathymetric and environmental monitoring, there is minimal potential for water quality impacts, in both coastal and transitional areas, due to this proposed maritime usage. It is not expected that the proposed maritime usage will have any impact on the existing classification of the waterbodies listed above. To further minimise any residual risk to water quality, standard conditions are recommended, including compliance with Irish vessel certification standards and the inclusion of an oil spill emergency response plan.

Water quality results were sourced from the most recent “WFD Risk Waterbodies Data Geodatabase – August 2022”; “WFD Status 2016-2021”; and “National Summary File 2019-2024”.

## 2.5 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. The 2024 draft assessment under Article 8 of the MFSD<sup>1</sup> states that GES has not been achieved for sea-floor integrity, marine litter and biodiversity (See Table 3).

**Table 3:** Assessment of MFSD descriptors in relation to this maritime usage licence application.

MFSD Descriptor	Good Environmental Status achieved nationally <sup>2</sup>	Assessment
Biological diversity	Partially achieved	The applicant submitted an Annex IV risk assessment and Supporting Information for Screening for Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report as part of the licence application. In view of the information provided the potential for survey activities to be at a level and duration that would significantly impact biological diversity is not considered likely, and there will be no impact subject to the mitigation measures recommended in this report.
Non-indigenous species	Yes	To ensure that the proposed maritime usage activity does not result in the unintended introduction of non-indigenous species, it is recommended that a condition be included in the proposed maritime usage licence, if granted, relating to the control of invasive species.
Population of commercial fish/shellfish	Partially achieved	<p><u>Aquaculture Sites:</u> Aquaculture sites and Fishery order areas are present across several parts of the proposed maritime usage licence area.</p> <p>Within Area A, two designated Shellfish Areas are present in McSwines Bay and Inver Bay. This area supports a range of licensed aquaculture activities, including finfish (Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout) and shellfish cultivation (blue mussel, Pacific oyster, European flat oyster, Manila clam and seaweed).</p> <p>Area B overlaps with the Donegal Bay Shellfish Area, where aquaculture activity is limited to shellfish cultivation, specifically Pacific oyster and European flat oyster. Fishery Orders are found in Area B and D.</p> <p>There is no aquaculture installations present within Area C.</p> <p>Within Area D, two Shellfish Areas are present are Drumcliff and Sligo Bay, where aquaculture operations for European flat oyster, Pacific oyster and seaweed.</p> <p>Area E includes the Killala Bay Shellfish Area, within which a small number of licenced aquaculture installations are in operation, specifically for the cultivation of Pacific oyster and seaweed.</p>

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

<sup>2</sup> As per [Ireland's Draft Marine Strategy Part 1: Article 8, 9 and 10 report 2024](#)

		<p>The proposed maritime usage does not overlap directly with any aquaculture installations and will not negatively impact any aquaculture activities in the area. It is therefore not expected that the proposed maritime usage will impact on the GES status of this descriptor.</p> <p><u>Commercial Fisheries:</u> There are some fishing activities in the proposed maritime usage areas. This topic is considered further in Section 2.8.2.</p>
Marine food webs	Unclear	The balance and diversity in marine food webs will not be impacted as a result of the proposed maritime usage.
Eutrophication	Yes	The proposed maritime usage does not involve the addition of nutrients to the marine environment and as such will not impact this descriptor achieving good environmental status.
Sea floor integrity	No	The proposed site investigations involve no disturbance to sea floor integrity. It is not expected that the proposed maritime usage will impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Alteration of hydrographical conditions	Yes	The proposed maritime usage will not significantly alter the hydrographical conditions in the benthic area to be surveyed. It is not expected that the proposed maritime usage will impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Concentrations of contaminants	Yes	The proposed maritime usage will require inclusion of a condition relating to preparation of an oil pollution emergency plan in the case of an oil spill to mitigate for any accidental introduction of contaminants to the marine environment. There are no other pathways identified where the proposed maritime usage could negatively impact contaminant concentrations in the survey area.
Contaminants in fish/seafood for human consumption	Yes	The proposed maritime usage will not result in the introduction of contaminants in fish or seafood and therefore, will not impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Marine Litter	No	The proposed maritime usage will not result in the introduction of marine litter to the marine environment and thus will not impact on the achievement of GES status of this descriptor.
Introduction of energy including underwater noise	Yes	The impacts of underwater noise introduced because of the proposed maritime usage are assessed in the appropriate assessment and the Annex IV Risk Assessment associated with this proposed maritime usage application. No mitigations are recommended relating to marine mammals and the management of underwater noise disturbance.

## 2.6 Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2014/52/EU)

MARA carried out EIA Screening of the MUL applying, dated 15/09/2025, having regard for Schedules 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. It was concluded that the project does not fall within the scope of the EIA Directive and therefore an environmental impact assessment is not required.

## 2.7 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015

In accordance with Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended), MARA is required to perform its functions in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, including legally binding targets for greenhouse gas reductions by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. The proposed maritime usage is temporary and short-term in nature and is not expected to result in significant increases in carbon emissions. Furthermore, the proposed maritime usage will support the design and delivery of wastewater infrastructure, contributing to climate adaption objectives set out in the Climate Action Plan 2025 and the National Climate Adaptation Framework. In this regard, the proposed maritime usage is consistent with the Climate Act and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended).

## 2.8 Consideration of Other Users

MARA had regard to the rights of other users as set out in Section 3,3(b) of the MAP Act 2021. Although the proposed maritime usage activity is short term and temporary in nature, specific conditions will be included in any maritime usage licence granted to cover the consideration of other users of the licenced area, particularly regarding the publication of marine notices and navigation safety. In addition, the users below were considered in more detail.

### 2.8.1 Commercial Vessels

The proposed MUL areas support varying levels of commercial vessel traffic. This is particularly significant around Area A, especially in the vicinity of Killybegs and adjoining waters, where traffic densities can reach up to 402 routes per sq km per month, primarily associated with cargo and fishing vessels. Commercial vessel traffic is significantly lower in Areas B-E, with a maximum of 7 routes per sq km per month. Given the intensity of commercial traffic, it is recommended that any licence granted include a condition requiring the issuance of a Marine Notice during vessel-based operations to inform other users. It is also recommended that a licence condition require the Holder to avoid damage to, or interference with, third-party property, infrastructure, or fishing gear during the permitted maritime usage.

## 2.8.2 Commercial Fisheries

The proposed Maritime Usage Area (Area A-E) overlaps with several commercial fisheries. Bottom trawling for mixed demersal, dredging for cockle, as well as line fishing, net fishing and pot fishing are all present, targeting species such as mackerel, pollock, sprat, wrasse, lobster, crab and Nephrops. Periwinkle harvesting takes place in several areas (See Table 4 for details).

However, given the short-term nature of the activities across the licence period and their predicted ecological impact, it is not thought the proposed maritime usage will have a significant impact on local fisheries. No specific conditions are proposed to any licence granted in relation to commercial fisheries.

**Table 4:** Overlapping commercial fisheries within the proposed Maritime Usage Area.

Area	Overlapping Fisheries and Species
A	Bottom Trawl Fishing (Mixed Demersal), Line Fishing (Mackerel, Squid, Pollack & Mackerel), Midwater Trawl Fishing (Sprat), Net Fishing (Salmon, Sprat, Wrasse, Pollock), Periwinkle Harvesting (Periwinkle), Pot Fishing (Lobster & Crab, Nephrops),
B	Dredge (Cockle), Net Fishing (Pollock, Wrasse), Periwinkle Harvesting (Periwinkle), Pot Fishing (Lobster & Crab),
C	Bottom Trawl Fishing (Mixed Demersal), Line Fishing (Pollack & Mackerel), Net Fishing (Wrasse, Pollock), Pot Fishing (Lobster & Crab, Lobster)
D	Dredge (Cockle), Net Fishing (Pollock), Periwinkle Harvesting (Periwinkle), Pot Fishing (Lobster)
E	Dredge (Cockle), Line Fishing (Pollack & Mackerel), Net Fishing (Pollock), Periwinkle Harvesting (Periwinkle), Pot Fishing (Lobster)

The proposed MUL area also overlaps several commercially important fish nursery and spawning grounds (Table 5). Cod, horse mackerel, mackerel and whiting all use Areas A-E as nursery or spawning grounds. Herring nursery grounds occur in Areas A, C and D, with spawning grounds overlapping with Areas A and E. However, given the small size of the proposed maritime usage areas, the short-term nature of the activities across the licence period and their predicted impact, it is not expected these will have a negative impact on spawning or nursery areas.

**Table 5:** Overlapping commercial fish species and associated habitats

Species	Habitat	Area
Cod	Nursery	A – E
Herring		A, C, D
Horse mackerel		A - E
Mackerel		A - E
Herring	Spawning	A + E
Whiting		A - E

### 2.8.3 Recreational Users

The proposed MUL areas experience varying levels of recreational use across both intertidal and maritime zones, with use generally associated with beach-based recreation and small-scale maritime activity.

Within Area A, recreational use of the intertidal zone occurs year-round, particularly around the popular Blue Flag beach located at Fintra. Additional recreational activities include local diving and recreational fishing.

In Area B, intertidal recreational use is also year-round, particularly at the Blue Flag beaches of Murvagh and Rossnowlagh, which are popular for beach use and water sports. Recreational boating and angling occur locally.

Within Areas C and D, intertidal use remains consistent throughout the year, particularly associated with the Blue Flag beaches at Mullaghmore, Streedagh and Rosses Point. Recreational fishing occurs in both areas, while marsh shooting is locally practiced in the upper reaches of Area D.

In Area E, year-round recreational use of the intertidal zone is associate with Blue Flag beaches at Enniscrone and Ross Beach (Killala), both of which represent significant regional amenity areas. Recreational beach use and angling are the primary activities in these areas.

Due to the limited extent of intertidal survey works proposed, no disturbance to recreational beach users is anticipated. The presence of a single survey vessel is not expected to adversely affect recreational sailing or fishing activity. It is recommended that any licence granted include a condition requiring the issuance of a marine notice during vessel-based operations to inform other marine users.

Overall, given the limited nature of the proposed works and the low survey footprint, no disturbance to other users of the maritime area is anticipated.

### 2.8.3 Site visit

A site visit to the MUL areas was undertaken on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2025. A site walkover was conducted which included the intertidal area of Area A-E.

### 2.8.4 Public consultation

A 30-day public consultation period was undertaken under Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations (2011, as amended) and under section 117(6)(b) of the Maritime Area Planning Act (2021, as amended), commencing on 03/02/2026 and running until 08/03/2026. No submissions were received from members of the public.

### 2.8.5 Public body consultation

At the same time as the public consultation, MARA also invited observations on the proposed maritime usage licence application from relevant public bodies. Eleven observations were received from these bodies. The following table summarises the submissions received. The MARA website should be consulted for details of the full submissions. The issues raised in the submissions are noted and addressed as part of this marine advisor report and also as part of the Appropriate Assessment, where relevant.

#### Submission 1: Port of Sligo

Submission summary
The Port of Sligo Harbour Master notes that several ADCPs are in the main shipping channel to the Port of Sligo and may present a risk to the safe navigation of vessels. The Harbour Master has requested to be consulted prior to the commencement of works to agree suitable positions.

#### MARA response

MARA notes the submission, and the points raised by the Port of Sligo Harbour Master. It is recommended that a condition be included in the licence, if granted, requiring the Holder to consult with Sligo Port prior to commencement of the proposed maritime usage, in order to ensure the safe coordination of maritime traffic and navigational safety.

#### Submission 2: Commissioner of Irish Lights

Submission summary
Irish lights have no objection to the licence from a navigational safety perspective. However, if marine aids to navigation (e.g. markers for ADCPs) are required, statutory consent from Irish Lights under the Merchant Shipping Act will be necessary. Any Appropriate Assessment should consider potential impacts from the deployment of surface buoys and moorings associated with these aids.

MARA response

MARA notes the submission and the points raised by Irish Lights. It should be noted that, while no fixed ADCP’s form part of this application, the requirement for statutory consents in respect of the deployment of buoys lies with the Commissioner for Irish Lights. The onus is on the applicant to ensure that all the required statutory consents are in place in order for the proposed marine usage activity to go ahead. It is recommended that a condition be included in the licence, if granted, stating that the MUL does not negate the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they have all the necessary consents to undertake the proposed activity.

Submission 3: Inland Fisheries Ireland

Submission summary
Inland Fisheries has no objection to the licence. They noted that the mitigation proposed for marine mammals in the NIS will also effectively address potential impacts on diadromous fish.

MARA response

MARA notes the submission from IFI.

Submission 4: Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Submission summary
Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) has requested early and ongoing engagement with local stakeholders to prevent conflicts. BIM noted no significant impacts on shellfish or aquaculture are expected. Their main concern relates to potential disturbance or gear entanglement involving survey vessels, though such impacts are likely to be minimal. They recommended timely notifications to fishers through the Irish Fleet Register and communication via established channels, including Marine Notices, producer organisations, harbour offices and local media.

MARA response

MARA acknowledges the submission received from BIM. If a licence is granted, it will include standard conditions to promote coexistence with fishing interests, including the publication of marine notices, notification of the Sligo Port Harbour Master, and measures to avoid damage to fishing gear.

#### Submission 5: Geological Survey Ireland

##### Submission summary

The Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) has recommended using various data sets when conducting the EIAR, SEA, planning and scoping processes for developments, plans and policies.

#### MARA response

MARA acknowledges the submission received from GSI.

#### Submission 6: Donegal County Council

##### Submission summary

Donegal County Councils planning authority and Environmental Section have no objections to the proposed licence. They state they consider the studies as valuable for informing future wastewater treatment plant upgrades.

#### MARA response

MARA notes the submission and the point raised by Donegal County Council.

#### Submission 7: Sligo County Council

##### Submission summary

Sligo County Council authority had no observations to make in relation to this maritime usage licence.

#### MARA response

MARA notes the submission from Sligo County Council.

#### Submission 8: Marine Institute

##### Submission summary

The Marine Institute (MI) comments that the survey activities are not expected to significantly affect fish stocks or fishing/aquaculture operations, assuming appropriate notification to mariners are issued. They note the areas coincide with several important spawning and nursery grounds (cod, herring, horse mackerel, mackerel, and whiting). There is some potential for cumulative impacts if other survey operations occur nearby at the same time.

MARA response

MARA notes the observations of the Marine Institute. The proposed survey activities are not anticipated to result in significant interference with fishing activities. MARA notes the comment regarding the potential for cumulative effects should other survey activities occur concurrently. This has been taken into consideration as part of MARA’s assessment. If a licence is granted, a standard condition requiring the publication of marine notices and appropriate communication with relevant fishers and mariners be issued.

Submission 9: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Submission summary
DAFM have emphasised in their submission that sea-fishing and aquaculture are long established, economically important activities that must be fully considered when assessing such proposals.
Because the works overlap the Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre, DAFM states that a Foreshore License from DAFM is required for that portion of the project.
DAFM also state that the study area is heavily used by Ireland inshore fleet, although Vessel Monitoring System data is limited for vessels under 12m. They request that early and clear Notices to Mariners are provided, and local fishing organisations should be informed. Additionally, they request consultation with local, stakeholders and the hiring of a local Fisheries Liaison officer.

MARA response

Killybegs Fisheries Harbour Centre which lies within Area A of the proposed MUL application is a primary fisheries harbour with associated fisheries traffic and under the S.I. No. 235 of 1987 Fishery Harbour Centre (Killybegs) Order 1987. It is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to regulate the area as spatially depicted on the maps/charts associated with this legislation. Therefore, MARA is not currently able to incorporate the area as depicted as the Killybegs Harbour Centre in a maritime usage licence. If a licence is granted, it will include standard conditions to promote coexistence with fishing interests, including the publication of marine notices, notification of the Sligo Port Harbour Master, and measures to avoid damage to fishing gear.

Submission 10: Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport

Submission summary
The MSO states that it has no objection to the proposed maritime usage activity from a navigational safety perspective. The MSO recommended that, if a licence is granted, conditions should address navigational safety, vessel certification, the publication of

marine notices, Navtex broadcasts, liaison with the MSO and the Commissioners of Irish Lights regarding the marking and lighting of any moored instruments, and the provision of relevant information to the UK Hydrographic Office.

#### MARA response

MARA notes the observations and recommendations of the MSO. Conditions relating to the publication of marine notices, vessel certification, and the provision of information to the UKHO are standard requirements in the issuing of MULs. Additional conditions are recommended requiring consultation with the MSO, and liaison with the Sigo Port harbour Master in advance of activities to ensure navigational safety. The licence will also require that the Holder comply with any authorisations required by the Commissioners of Irish Lights in relation to moored instruments and ensure that no third-party property is interfered with or damaged during the permitted maritime usage activities.

#### Submission 11: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

##### Submission summary

A submission from the Development Applications Unit (DAU) of DHLGH recommends conditions relating to the retrieval of survey equipment be carried out upon completion of the surveys, compliance with Marine Mammal Observer protocol during any vessel work, and adherence to MARPOL requirements and pollution prevention procedures. The DAU provide several recommendations and several suggested conditions in relation to Underwater Archaeology. The DAU specifically note that MUL area is proximal to several internationally significant wrecks.


#### MARA response

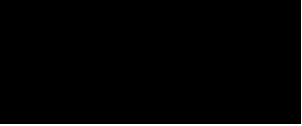
MARA notes the content of the submission from the DAU of DHLGH containing inputs relating to Nature Conservation and Underwater Archaeology. In terms of nature conservation, MARA has included these factors in their assessment. The submission also contains a detailed list of requirements for mitigating impacts on underwater archaeology. It is recommended that any licence granted should include a condition to consult with, and comply with the requirements of, the National Monuments Service prior to commencing the proposed maritime usage.

### 3. 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 part-granted to Uisce Éireann, Colvill House, Dublin 1, for the purposes of Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000, subject to the conditions in the Proposed Licence.

Killybegs Fisheries Harbour Centre which lies within Area A of the proposed MUL application is a primary fisheries harbour with associated fisheries traffic and under S.I. No. 235 of 1987 Fishery Harbour Centre (Killybegs) Order 1987. It is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to regulate the area as spatially depicted on the maps/charts associated with this legislation. Therefore, MARA is not currently able to incorporate the area as depicted as the Killybegs Harbour Centre in a maritime usage licence.

Signed:	
Prepared by:	<b>Dr Micheál Mac Monagail</b> Marine Analyst
Date:	30/03/2026

Signed:	
Approved and Determined by:	<b>John Evans</b> Director of Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Authority Directorate
Date:	30/03/2026

## References

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Lyons D.O., (2004) Summary of National Parks & Wildlife Service surveys for common (harbour) seals (*Phoca vitulina*) and grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*), 1978 to 2003. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 13. National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Dublin, Ireland

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