

Assessment, Research and Data Unit

Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	Maritime Authorisations Unit	From:	Maria O Connell Marine Analyst
Date:	14/10/2025	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL240054
Applicant:	Saoirse Wave Energy Ltd, 27 Fitzwilliam Street Lower, Dublin 2, D02KT92		
Type(s) of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:	Schedule 7 (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:	Freagh Point to Ballard Bay, Co Clare		
Licence application received:	16/05/2025		

1. Background

Saoirse Wave Energy Ltd. has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake marine surveys for the purposes of site investigation, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act). This MUL application includes proposed geotechnical, geophysical, metocean, environmental and archaeological investigations within the MUL application area which comprises 114.57km².

The MUL application area ranges from Freagh Point to Ballard Bay off the County Clare Coast (extending seaward 10km). Data obtained from the proposed site investigations is required to inform the design and operation requirements of a small-scale wave energy demonstration site and will specifically assist with the assessment of the location for the array, the export of the cable corridor and landfall options. The applicant proposes a staged series of investigations and a licence duration of 5 years.

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

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

The proposed maritime usage activities are detailed on Table 1. The applicant submitted a Supporting Information for Screening of Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report in support of the application which sets out the proposed maritime usage activities.

Table 1: The details of the proposed maritime usage activities.

Proposed maritime usage activities & survey area
Marine geophysical surveys • Multi Beam Echosounder (MBES) • Sub-bottom profiler (SBP) Side Scan Sonar (SSS) • Ultra-short baseline (USBL) positioning • Ultra-High Resolution Seismic (UHRs) survey • Magnetometer (UXO and archaeological risk assessment) • Gradiometer • Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) surveys
Marine geotechnical surveys • Up to 30 boreholes • Up to 40 cone penetration tests (CPTs) • Up to 40 vibrocores in subtidal areas • Subtidal grab sampling (same campaign as included under environmental surveys)
Marine and intertidal Environmental Surveys • Benthic grab sampling • Camera and video sampling • Video transects • Diving

• Water samples (for conductivity, temperature and depth) • Offshore bat surveys (not confirmed) • Intertidal walkover surveys • Intertidal core sampling • Underwater and intertidal archaeological surveys
Metocean and marine mammal acoustic device • Wave Rider Metocean buoys with a mooring system • Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (ADCP) deployed to seafloor in trawl resistant frames. • Lidar buoys with mooring system. • Acoustic monitoring devices

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The MUL application area is sited adjacent to the some of the most exposed high energy coastlines in Ireland. Broad scale habitat mapping highlights that there is a wide range of seabed habitat types across this high energy region including circalittoral rock and biogenic reefs, circalittoral sand, unspecified infralittoral sediments and circalittoral mixed sediments¹. Water depths of > 70m occur in the western parts of the proposed MUL application area. Three Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are situated directly adjacent to the MUL application area, namely, *Carrowmore Point to Spanish Point and Islands SAC* to the north and *Kilkee Reefs SAC* to the south, *Carrowmore Dunes SAC* to the east. The MUL application area overlaps with the *Mid-Clare Coast Special Protection Area (SPA)* which supports an internationally important population of Purple Sandpiper and nationally important populations of wintering Barnacle Goose. In summer it is utilized by a range of breeding seabirds including a nationally important colony of Cormorant².

3. Identification of relevant European sites

The MUL application is subject to screening for appropriate assessment in accordance with Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended, to determine if it alone, or in-combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European site(s), in view of best scientific knowledge and the conservation objectives of the sites. The 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.

¹ [EMODnet Map Viewer](#)

² [Site Synopsis Mid Clare Coast SPA NPWS](#)

Table 2 - Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests and site-specific conservation objectives.

European site & code	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site Screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
SACs					
Carrowmore Point to Spanish Point and Islands SAC (001021)	Immediately adjacent	<i>Coastal lagoons [1150]</i> <i>Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]</i> <i>Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]</i>	No	Yes	NPWS 2014 Conservation Objectives: Carrowmore Point to Spanish Point and Islands SAC (001021) Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Reefs [1170]	Yes – potential for disturbance/damage/degradation from survey activities.		
Carrowmore Dunes SAC (002250)	Immediately adjacent	Reefs [1170]	Yes – potential for disturbance/damage/degradation from survey activities	Yes	NPWS 2014 Conservation Objectives: Carrowmore Dunes SAC Version 1.0 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		<i>Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]</i> <i>Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120]</i> <i>Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]</i> <i>Vertigo angustior (Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail) [1014]</i>	No		

Kilkee Reef SAC (002264)	Immediately adjacent	<i>Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330]</i>	No	Yes	NPWS 2014 Conservation Objectives: Kilkee Reefs SAC, (002264) Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170]	Yes – potential for disturbance/damage/degradation from survey activities.		
Lower River Shannon SAC (002165)	<25Km	<i>Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time [1110]</i> <i>Estuaries [1130]</i> <i>Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]</i> <i>Coastal lagoons [1150]</i> <i>Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]</i> <i>Reefs [1170]</i> <i>Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]</i> <i>Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]</i> <i>Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]</i> <i>Atlantic salt meadows (Glaucopuccinellietalia maritima) [1330]</i> <i>Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410]</i> <i>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation [3260]</i> <i>Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410]</i> <i>Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0]</i> <i>Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</i>	No	Yes	NPWS 2012 Conservation Objectives: Lower River Shannon SAC (002165), Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		<i>Lampetra planeri</i> (Brook Lamprey) [1096] <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106]			
		<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.		
Kilkieran Bay and Islands SAC (002111)	<50km	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Coastal lagoons [1150] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (<i>Juncetalia maritimi</i>) [1410] Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0] Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i> [3130] Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> , <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) [6510] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] <i>Najas flexilis</i> (Slender Naiad) [1833] <i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour Seal) [1365]	No	Yes	NPWS 2014 Conservation Objectives: Kilkieran Bay and Islands SAC (002111), Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.		
Slyne Head Islands SAC (000328)	<80km	Reefs [1170] <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	No	Yes	NPWS 2024 . Conservation objectives: Slyne Head Islands SAC (000328), Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of

		<i>Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]</i>	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.		Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Slyne Head Peninsula SAC (002074)	<80km	<i>Coastal lagoons [1150], Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]</i> <i>Reefs [1170] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220], Atlantic salt meadows (GlaucoPuccinellietalia maritimae) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410], Embryonic shifting dunes [2110], Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120] Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0] Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) [3110] Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or Isoeto-Nanojuncetea [3130] Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140] European dry heaths [4030] Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210] Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410] Lowland hay meadows (Alopecurus pratensis, Sanguisorba officinalis) [6510] Alkaline fens [7230] Petalophyllum ralfsii (Petalwort) [1395 Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]</i>	No	Yes	NPWS 2015. Conservation Objectives: Slyne Head Peninsula SAC (002074), Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		<i>Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]</i>	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.		
West Connacht Coast SAC (002998)	<85km	<i>Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]</i> <i>Phocoena phocoena (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]</i>	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.	Yes	NPWS 2025 . Conservation objectives: West Connacht Coast SAC (002998), Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Duvillaun Islands SAC (000495)	<155km	<i>Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]</i>	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.	Yes	NPWS 2024 . Conservation Objectives: Duvillaun Islands SAC (000495), Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
		<i>Halichoerus grypus (Grey Seal) [1364]</i>	No		
Blasket Islands SAC (002172)	<85km	<i>Reefs [1170]</i> <i>Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]</i> <i>European dry heaths [4030]</i> <i>Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330]</i> <i>Halichoerus grypus (Grey Seal) [1364]</i>	No	Yes	NPWS 2014 . Conservation Objectives: Blasket Islands SAC Version 1,. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
		<i>Phocoena phocoena (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]</i>	Yes - Potential for disturbance, displacement and harm from underwater noise related to survey activities and collision risk should foraging occur within MUL area.		

SPAs					
Mid-Clare Coast SPA (004182)	Overlap	<i>Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo) [A017]</i> <i>Barnacle Goose (Branta leucopsis) [A045]</i> <i>Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticula) [A137]</i> <i>Sanderling (Calidris alba) [A144]</i> <i>Purple Sandpiper (Calidris maritima) [A148]</i> <i>Dunlin (Calidris alpina) [A149]</i> <i>Turnstone (Arenaria interpres) [A169]</i> <i>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</i>	Yes - Disturbance and displacement from underwater noise and vibration. Disturbance and displacement from above water noise, vibration, increased human presence or vessel activity.	Yes	NPWS 2014 . Conservation Objectives: Mid-Clare Coast SPA 004182. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Cliffs of Moher SPA (004005)	<7km	<i>Fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) [A009]</i> <i>Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) [A188]</i> <i>Guillemot (Uria aalge) [A199]</i> <i>Razorbill (Alca torda) [A200]</i> <i>Puffin (Fratercula arctica) [A204]</i> <i>Chough (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) [A346]</i>	Yes -Disturbance and displacement from underwater noise and vibration. Yes -Disturbance and displacement from above water noise, vibration, increased human presence or vessel activity.	Yes	NPWS 2025 Conservation Objectives: Cliffs of Moher SPA 004005. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Loop Head SPA (004119)	<19km	<i>Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) [A188]</i> <i>Guillemot (Uria aalge) [A199]</i>	Yes -Disturbance and displacement from underwater noise and vibration. Yes - Disturbance and displacement from above water noise, vibration, increased human presence or vessel activity.	Yes	NPWS 2025 . Conservation Objectives: Loop Head SPA 004119. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA (004077)	<9km	<i>Whooper Swan (Cygnus cygnus) [A038]</i> <i>Light-bellied Brent Goose (Branta bernicla hrota) [A046]</i> <i>Shelduck (Tadorna tadorna) [A048]</i> <i>Teal (Anas crecca) [A052]</i> <i>Pintail (Anas acuta) [A054]</i> <i>Scaup (Aythya marila) [A062]</i> <i>Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticula) [A137]</i> <i>Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria) [A140]</i> <i>Grey Plover (Pluvialis squatarola) [A141]</i> <i>Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus) [A142]</i> <i>Knot (Calidris canutus) [A143]</i> <i>Dunlin (Calidris alpina) [A149]</i> <i>Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa) [A156]</i> <i>Bar-tailed Godwit (Limosa lapponica) [A157]</i> <i>Curlew (Numenius arquata) [A160]</i> <i>Redshank (Tringa totanus) [A162]</i> <i>Greenshank (Tringa nebularia) [A164]</i> <i>Wigeon (Mareca penelope) [A855]</i> <i>Shoveler (Spatula clypeata) [A857]</i> <i>Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</i>	No	Yes	NPWS 2012 . Conservation Objectives: River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA 004077. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		<i>Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo) [A017]</i> <i>Black-headed Gull (Chroicocephalus ridibundus) [A179]</i>	Yes - Disturbance and displacement from underwater noise and vibration. Yes - Disturbance and displacement from above water noise, vibration, increased human presence or vessel activity from survey activities.		

Inishmore SPA (004152)	<26km	<i>Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) [A188]</i> <i>Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea) [A194]</i> <i>Guillemot (Uria aalge) [A199]</i> <i>Little Tern (Sternula albifrons) [A885]</i>	Yes -Disturbance and displacement from underwater noise and vibration. Yes - Disturbance and displacement from above water noise, vibration, increased human presence or vessel activity from survey activities.	Yes	NPWS 2025 . Conservation Objectives: Inishmore SPA 004152. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
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4. Assessment of likely significant effects

Table 3: Potential direct and indirect impacts on the Qualifying Interests of European sites identified at screening stage and possible significance of those impacts.

Potential impacts	Possible significance of potential impacts
Habitat disturbance, damage and degradation.	Yes - Potential for habitat disturbance, damage and degradation from survey activities dependant on location, duration and intensity of such activities.
Above water noise, visual disturbance, displacement.	Yes - Potential for sound sources from survey activities, vessel operation and increased human presence to be at a level and duration that would cause a significant negative impact on birds.
Underwater noise disturbance and displacement to seabirds, marine mammals.	Yes - Potential for survey activities such as vessel activity, noise, vibration to be at an intensity and duration that would cause significant disturbance to seabirds and marine mammals.
Vessel collision risk	Yes – Should death or injury of marine mammals foraging in the MUL area occur at a level that could affect marine mammal populations.

In-combination effects

MARA has developed a stepwise approach for identifying other plans and projects that may impact on European sites in-combination with the proposed maritime usage. 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 5Km and the CETS is 5 years. A search of relevant databases was undertaken on the 30/09/2025. Relevant projects within the CESS and the CETS were considered. The definition of the CESS is based on acoustic survey equipment effective deterrence ranges as per the JNCC updated Effective Deterrent Ranges (EDRs) for assessing

the significance of noise disturbance in harbour porpoise³. The CETS is the proposed MUL duration.

Table 4: List of projects which, in particular, were considered regarding potential in-combination impacts on European sites.

Application Ref	Project description	Distance from proposed MUL area	Status
OA07.321697	Offshore Windfarm	Spatial Overlap	With An Coimisiún Pleanála.
MUL240033	Site investigation surveys	Spatial Overlap	Applied

The following plans were also considered:

The National Marine Planning Framework, The Climate Action Plan 2025, Clare Climate Action Plans 2024-2029, Water Action Plan 2024, Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028, and the National Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) for Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) proposal.

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application, the above plans and the projects listed on Table 4, on the conservation objectives of European sites considered in this report cannot be excluded at this stage.

³ [JNCC 2025](#)

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?

No

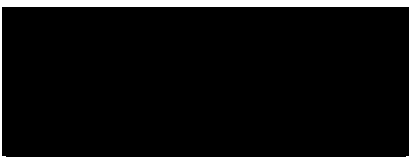
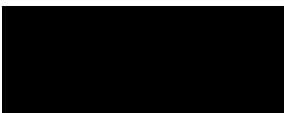
5. Screening Determination Statement

The assessment of significant effects:

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

- The nature, scale and duration of the proposed maritime usage activities,
- The distance to the European sites,
- The potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects,
- Possible disturbance, displacement and harm of marine mammals from vessel collision,
- Possible habitat disturbance, damage and degradation,
- Possible disturbance, displacement, harm from underwater noise and vibration,
- Possible disturbance and displacement from above water noise, vibration and human presence.

Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by Saoirse Wave Energy Ltd, 27 Fitzwilliam Street Lower, Dublin 2, (D02KT92) 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 along the coast line of County Clare from Freagh Point to Ballard Bay MUL (MUL240054) 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	 Maria O Connell, Marine Analyst	Date:14/10/2025
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director of Assessment, Research and Data Unit	Date: 20/10/2025