

Assessment, Research and Data Unit

Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report

To:	Maritime Authorisations Unit	From:	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Dr. Alison Mc Carthy Dr. Ciar O' Toole	
Date	04/02/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL250010	
Approved for issue by:	John Evans, Director of ARD Unit			
Applicant:	Gas Networks Ireland, Gasworks Road, Cork, Ireland			
Type of maritime usage in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021 (as amended):	<i>(3) Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000</i>			
Location of proposed Maritime Usage:	The surrounds of Foynes Island, Shannon Estuary adjacent to the townlands of Shannakea Beg, Cahiracon, Foynes Island, Leahys and Corrig.			
Licence application received:	28/07/2025			
Request for additional information (RAI) under Section 117(3):	None			
Response to RAI received:	None			
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening:	Not required (EIA Screening Form dated 07/10/2025)			
Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment required:	Yes	Natura Impact Statement received:	28/07/2025	
Public consultation:	12/11/2025 to 15/12/2025			
Submissions from the public received:	Two	Comments from public bodies received:	Nine	

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1. Background

The application submitted by Gas Networks Ireland (GNI), seeks a five-year Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake marine Site Investigations (SI) and environmental surveys, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021 (the MAP Act). The proposed investigations comprise geophysical, geotechnical, environmental, and archaeological surveys. The proposed MUL area covers approximately 11.19 km², extending along the Clare coast from Shannakea Beg to Cahiracon, across the Shannon estuary to Foynes Island, and along the Limerick coast to Leaha. The works are intended to inform site selection and provide baseline data for any future design, environmental impact assessment report (EIAR) and appropriate assessment (AA) for the proposed Strategic Gas Emergency Reserve (SGER), including a potential LNG receiving terminal and Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU). Table 1 outlines the proposed marine environmental surveys and timescales.

Table 1: Proposed maritime usage activities, with duration, number of samples and maximum footprint.

Maximum Survey Activity	Total time for activity	Maximum number of samples	Maximum total footprint per intrusive activity (km ²)
Geophysical survey – all types	Up to 4 months	<u>Side Scan Sonar (SSS), Magnetometer, Sub Bottom Profilers (Parametric, Boomer and Chirper):</u> 20 m spacing of main lines and 100 m spacing of cross lines with 25% overlap onto neighbouring lines <u>Multibeam Echo Sounder (MBES):</u> 5 -20 m line spacing	Area up to 2.155
Marine Refraction-Seismic	Up to 4 months	20 m line spacing	Area up to 2.155
Marine Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT)	Up to 4 months	20 maximum ERT lines	0.0000063
Marine Environmental and Ecological Surveys	Up to 4 months	Habitat surveys including drop down camera/drone surveys 120 subtidal (30 no. grab locations with max 4 samples taken at each location) 120 intertidal (30 no. grab locations with max 4 samples taken at each location)	0.000024
Archaeological	Up to 4 months	Intertidal walkover with metal detector. Drop down camera and dive surveys	

Geotechnical: Drop down video	Up to 4 months	30 transects of up to 30 metres	0.0009
Geotechnical: Boreholes	Up to 4 months	80 boreholes of diameter of 300mm, up to 50m below bed level	0.00000568
Cone Penetration Tests (CPTs)	Up to 4 months	80 CPTs of up to 20m below bed level	0.0000001216
Jack-up barge use	Up to 4 months	640 leg locations (80x borehole and 80 x CPT locations x 4 legs)	0.00064
Geotechnical: Grab samples	Up to 4 months	50 grabs of 0.1m ²	0.000005
6 x Metocean monitoring buoys	Maximum of 24 months (2 years)	12 anchors (2 per buoy)	0.000048

Brief description of the site characteristics

The proposed MUL area overlaps with the Lower River Shannon SAC. The seascape is characterised as a large estuary, and the site is of high ecological value. The site is characterised by a tidally influenced estuarine system which supports a host of intertidal and subtidal habitats.

Key Annex I habitats present within or adjacent to the MUL area include.

- Estuaries. This forms the dominant geomorphological feature of the site.
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide.
- Reefs. These occur in both intertidal and subtidal zones and overlap with the MUL area.
- Large shallow inlets and bays, and sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater at all times. These Annex I habitats occur towards the mouth of the Shannon estuary.

The estuary margins are fringed by saltmarsh habitats, particularly potential Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) which is found growing near the proposed MUL area.

The MUL area overlaps with or lies adjacent to the following benthic community complexes.

- Annemone-dominated subtidal reef community.
- Fucoid-dominated intertidal reef community complex.
- Intertidal sand to mixed sediment community complex characterised by polychaetes, molluscs, and crustaceans, and,
- Subtidal sand to mixed sediment with *Nucula nucleus* community complex.

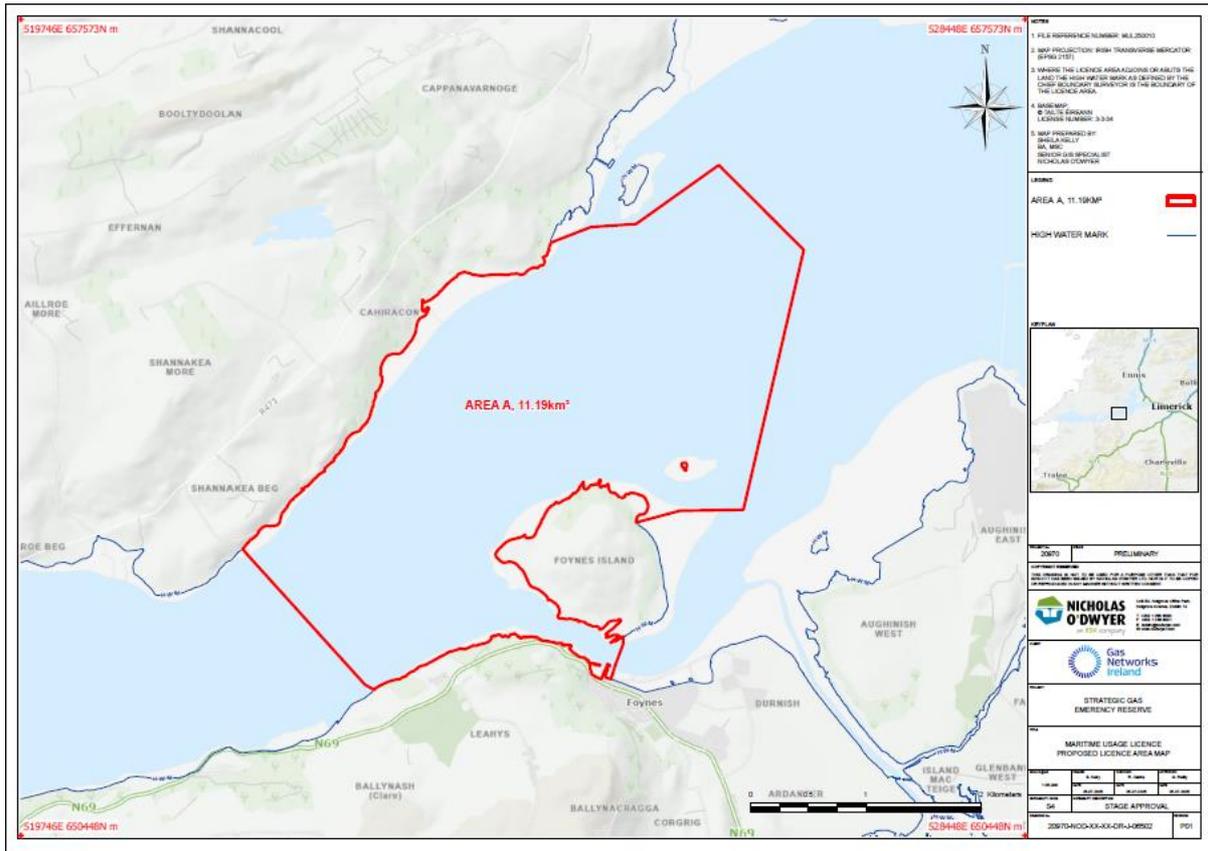


Figure 1: Proposed Maritime usage licence Area

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)

A number of 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 proposal by Gas Networks Ireland to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation within the Shannon Estuary, with the overall objective to assist in the delivery of Ireland's Strategic Gas Emergency Reserve aligns with Natural Gas Storage Policy 1 of the NMPF below: -

Subject to assessments required for the protection of the environment, and only where in keeping with the outcome of the review of the security of energy supply of Ireland's electricity and natural gas systems (which is being carried out by Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications), natural gas storage proposals should be supported.

The NMPF Heritage Assets Policy 1), which seeks to protect marine and coastal heritage assets and ensure that marine proposals do not result in adverse impacts on the historic environment. The applicants submitted an Assessment of Impacts of Maritime Usage (AIMU) report, which identifies the potential effects of the proposed activities on underwater archaeological and cultural heritage. It is recommended that, if consent is granted, a licence condition be included requiring consultation with the National Monuments Service prior to commencement of works and full compliance with any requirements relating to underwater cultural heritage. In addition, it is recommended that geophysical surveys be undertaken in advance of geotechnical surveys to identify any archaeological features on the seabed and to avoid significant effects.

2.2 National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)

Ireland's 4th 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 made an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination on 28/10/2025 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 consultation and the public body consultation on the application along with the marine advisor's own assessment (see AA Report and Determination which accompanies this report). The AA concluded, for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 42(11) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations, that the proposed activities (either individually or in combination with any other plans or projects) will not adversely affect the integrity of any European sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives, subject to the implementation of mitigation measures. The AA report specifies the mitigation measures that

must be included as conditions in the licence, if granted. These conditions are also included in Appendix 1 of this report.

Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive impose obligations on Member States to establish a system of strict protection for animal and plant species listed on Annex IV of the Directive. The applicant submitted 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 the relevant Annex IV species in the proposed maritime usage area (including cetaceans, and list those assessed e.g. turtles, bats etc).

The conclusions of the Annex IV Risk Assessment submitted by GNI are not supported by current scientific evidence, a concern also raised by the IWDG (see Section 5 Public consultation). In particular, the assessment of underwater noise impacts relies on oversimplified assumptions regarding sound propagation within a complex riverine and estuarine environment. The sub-bottom profiler described by the applicant is capable of source levels in excess of 232 dB re 1 μ Pa @1 m, with manufacturer specifications indicating outputs exceeding 240 dB. These levels exceed recognised Permanent Threshold Shift (PTS) thresholds for bottlenose dolphins (Table 2). Additionally, the proposed marine refracted seismic surveys are also capable of causing auditory injury in the absence of mitigation. Given these uncertainties and sensitivity of bottlenose dolphin, it is considered necessary that the proposed survey adheres to national guidance, including pre-start procedures, Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) and the application of a precautionary 1000m monitored mitigation zone for seismic surveys.

Table 2: Reported sound source levels for the proposed parametric sub-bottom profiler (SBP) with published permanent threshold shift (PTS) for bottlenose dolphin.

Survey equipment	Threshold for bottlenose dolphin	Sound levels reported by Applicant	Current evidence	Reference
Parametric Sub-Bottom Profiler (SBP)	198 dB PTS	Up to 232 dB re 1 μ Pa @ 1m	“standard” SBP >240 dB re μ Pa @ 1m	Innomar (2025)

In preparation of this report, I have carried out an assessment of potential impacts on otter in the proposed maritime area, and it is determined that no mitigation is required as the level of potential disturbance to the otter from site investigation work, is not considered to be significant.

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 maritime usage will take place across two transitional water bodies, Foynes Harbour and Lower Shannon Estuary (Table 3).

Table 3: EPA Water Framework Directive (WFD) ecological status and risk classification of transitional water bodies overlapping the proposed MUL area; for the period 2019-2024.

Transitional Water Bodies	Eco Status (Transitional)	Risk status (Transitional)
Foynes Harbour	High	Not at Risk
Lower Shannon Estuary	Good	Under Review

Due to the scale and nature of the proposed maritime usage, it is not expected that the proposed maritime usage will have any impact on the waterbody classification. A number of conditions are recommended in Appendix 1 to minimise the potential risk to water quality from the proposed activities, including the requirement to ensure vessels adhere to Irish Certification Standards, having an oil spill emergency plan in place in the event of an accidental event and the collection of drill arisings during the course of the borehole drilling.

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 assessment under Article 8 of the MSFD¹ states that GES has not been achieved for sea-floor integrity, marine litter and biodiversity (see Table 4).

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

MSFD Descriptor	Good Environmental Status achieved ²	Assessment
Biological diversity	Not achieved	The applicant submitted an Annex IV risk assessment and a marine mammal risk assessment as part of the licence application. There will be no impact on marine mammals subject to the mitigation measures outlined in Appendix 1.
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 in the hulls and ballast water of the relevant vessels and equipment and vehicles used in the intertidal.
Population of commercial fish/shellfish	Partially achieved	<u>Agaculture Sites:</u> There are several Designated Shellfish Water sites within the Shannon Estuary, namely West Shannon Poulasherry Bay, West Shannon Carrigaholt, West Shannon Rinevella and West Shannon Ballylongford. However, these Designated sites are located towards the mouth of the Shannon at a considerable distance to the proposed MUL area. There is a mussels-oysters farm located 3.95km to the east of the MUL site (for production of Pacific oyster and blue mussel. The MUL area overlaps a Fishery Order site for Pacific oyster (T08-004AOFO), with two grab samples and two borehole locations overlapping. However, it is not expected that the proposed project will not impact on this descriptor which relates to population size of commercially exploited stocks. <u>Commercial Fisheries:</u> There are no fishing activities in the proposed maritime usage area. This topic is considered further in Section 2.8.1.

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

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

Marine food webs	Not achieved	The balance and diversity in marine food webs will not be impacted as a result of the proposed activity.
Eutrophication	Partially Achieved	The proposed activity 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	Not achieved	The proposed site investigations will result in localised and temporary disturbance to sea floor integrity associated with the deployment of a jack up barge, including seabed contact with jack-up legs. The spatial extent of disturbance will be limited, short-term and reversible, with no permanent alteration of seabed structure or function anticipated. On this basis, the proposed Maritime Usage Licence is not expected to adversely affect the GES 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	Partially achieved	The proposed Maritime Usage licence 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	Partially achieved	The proposed maritime usage activity 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 activities 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	Partially achieved	The impacts of underwater noise introduced as a result of the proposed maritime usage activity are assessed in the appropriate assessment and the Annex IV Risk Assessment associated with this proposed Maritime Usage application. Mitigations relating to the management of underwater noise and the potential for impact to marine mammals are required and described in Appendix 1.

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

MARA carried out EIA Screening of the MUL applying, having regard to 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

Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act requires relevant bodies, including MARA, to perform their functions in so far as practicable in a manner consistent with the governance framework set out therein. The Act sets legally binding targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. Considering the temporary and short-term nature of the proposed maritime usage, no significant increases in carbon emission are expected and no potential for indirect effects on climate change.

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, a number of conditions will be included in any Maritime Usage licence granted to cover the requirements regarding navigation, fishing, and other users of the licenced area, both commercial and recreational. These are included in Appendix 1.

2.8.1 Commercial Fisheries

The proposed Maritime Usage Area does not overlap with or is adjacent to any commercial fisheries. The nearest fishing activity involves inshore shrimp pot fishing (F105__90) approximately 13km to the west of the proposed MUL area near Tarbert Island. Other fishing activities, namely pot fishing for lobster and crab (creel), lobster (creel), net fishing for bait, line fishing for Pollack and mackerel and periwinkle harvesting occurs towards the mouth of the estuary at greater distances. No midwater trawl fishing, dredge or bottom trawl fishing occurs in the Shannon estuary. It is expected the proposed works will not have any significant impact on local fisheries.

There are several commercially important fish nursery grounds towards the mouth of the Shannon estuary, primarily for White Belly Angler Monk, Mackerel, Horse Mackerel and Cod. However, these nursery grounds are considerable distance from the proposed MUL area it is not expected these grounds will be negatively impacted by the proposed works.

2.8.2 Recreational Users

The Shannon estuary supports a high level of recreational use across both intertidal and maritime areas. Vessel traffic is significant, with approximately 44 routes per sq km per month overlapping with the MUL area, primarily cargo vessels, with some tankers and limited sailing activity. The presence of survey vessels and a jack-up barge is not expected to adversely affect recreational sailing, fishing, or beach use. 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.

Recreational and commercial fishing, including angling, oyster farming, boating (including dolphin-watching), and shooting, also occur within the wider estuary. It is 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.

Intertidal areas are used year-round by beachgoers, with Blue Flag beaches located at Cappagh Pier and Carrigaholt, both some distance from the MUL area. As intertidal works are limited in extent, no significant disturbances to the public is anticipated. Nevertheless, it is recommended that public access be maintained where possible and appropriate public safety measures implemented. It is proposed to include this as a licence condition if the maritime usage activity is granted.

3. Site visit

A site visit was not considered necessary in order to assess the application.

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 12/11/2025 and running until 15/12/2025. Two submissions were received from members of the public. The issues raised in the submissions are noted and addressed as part of this marine advisor report and have been considered as part of the Appropriate Assessment, where relevant.

Submission 1: Member of the Public

Submission summary

The submission notes that the maps to be intended to use be as clear as possible, and publicly available, to reassure interested parties and avoid unnecessary objection. The public advertisement should ideally show the approximate “area of interest” to reassure the public they will not be affected. The submission also notes that oyster beds exist in the area.

MARA response

MARA notes the submission from the member of the public. MARA further notes that all maps submitted as part of the application are published on the MARA website and are prepared in accordance with MARA’s technical guidance, ensuring that the proposed area of interest is clearly defined and publicly available.

Submission 2: The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG)

Submission summary

The submission from the IWDG strongly raises concerns about the adequacy of the Annex IV Risk Assessment for the proposed SI works in the Lower River Shannon SAC, particularly in relation to underwater noise impacts on the resident bottlenose dolphin population. IWDG highlights that high-energy sound sources, including parametric sub-bottom profilers and marine refracted seismic are not sufficiently assessed, and that no site-specific noise modelling has been undertaken – of particular relevance considering the complex estuarine environment of Shannon. The submission emphasises that the Shannon Estuary supports a genetically discrete, resident dolphin population with high fidelity, frequent use of the proposed survey area, and strict protection under the Habitats Directive. They highlight that encounters with dolphins are highly likely. IWDG recommends a precautionary approach, including a 1000 m mitigation zone for both SBP and seismic surveys, the mandatory use of passive acoustic monitoring alongside visual observations, immediate device shutdown if dolphins are detected within the mitigation zone to avoid injury and creating a barrier, and the deployment of sound recorder to collect data to inform future assessments in the estuary.

MARA response

MARA notes the submission from the IWDG, and concerns raised regarding the adequacy of the Annex IV Risk Assessment particularly relating to underwater noise and its impacts on the

resident bottlenose dolphin population in the Shannon Estuary. In response to these issues, MARA recommends that precautionary mitigation measures be put in place to protect the species. This includes the application of an extended 1000m mitigation zone for both the sub-bottom profiler and the seismic surveys, as well as the use of a Marine Mammal Observer (MMO). Further to this, should a licence be granted, the applicant will be required to implement shut down measures where dolphins are detected.

5. Public body consultation

MARA invited observations on the proposed Maritime Usage Licence application from relevant public bodies. Nine 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 have been considered as part of the Appropriate Assessment, where relevant.

Submission 1: Commissioner of Irish Lights

Submission summary
Irish lights have no objection to the licence from a navigational safety perspective. However, the six proposed Metocean buoys will require a Statutory Consent from Irish Lights under the Merchant Shipping Act. Any Appropriate Assessment activity conducted as part of this MUL licensing process should include the impact of the deployment of surface marking buoys and associated moorings, which are proposed as part of the project.

MARA response

MARA notes the submission, and the points raised by Irish Lights. It should be noted that 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 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 2: Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Submission summary
Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) notes that a range of commercial fishing activities occur within the Shannon estuary, primarily pot fishing, gillnets and tangle nets, and that licensed aquaculture areas overlap particularly with the proposed MUL area, including the eastern extent of the oyster Fishery Order (T08-004AOF0), with an additional aquaculture site (T07-007) located approximately 3 km from the proposed activity. While sections of the estuary are designated under the Shellfish Waters

Directive, the nearest active designated shellfish waters are located approximately 22km downstream. BIM considers that the temporary nature of the proposed survey activity and the limited extent of any suspended sediment generation would be unlikely to result in significant effects on commercial fisheries or shellfish waters. BIM recommends that timely and effective communication with fishers be undertaken in advance if works, as well as additional channels of communication including Marine Notices, local media, relevant port offices and local authorities and producer Organisations.

MARA response

MARA notes the issues raised by BIM. Conditions are included as standard in Marine Usage Licences in respect of the requirement to publish marine notices, provision of information to other bodies where required. It is recommended that the licence include a condition to consult with, and comply with the requirements of, Shannon Foynes Port Company prior to commencing the proposed maritime usage.

Submission 3: 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 notes the submission from the GSI. EIAR, SEA and planning are outside the scope of this assessment. If it proposed that a condition is included that requires the License Holder to submit all borehole data generated as part of the licenced activities to the GSI in accordance with GSI data submission requirements.

Submission 4: Shannon Foynes Port Company

Submission summary

Shannon Foynes Port Company (SFPC) welcomes and supports the MUL applications for the Strategic Gas Emergency Reserve Project. SFPC requests that any permission granted under a MUL include a condition regarding all operations within its jurisdictional waters to be approved, agreed, and coordinated in advance with the SFPC Harbour Master.

MARA response

MARA notes the submission from Shannon Foynes Port Company (SFPC) welcoming and supporting the MUL application. It is recommended that a condition be included in the licence, if granted, requiring the Holder to consult with and comply with the requirements of SFPC and the Harbour Master prior to commencement of the proposed maritime usage, in order to ensure the safe coordination of maritime traffic and navigational safety.

Submission 5: Clare County Council

Submission summary

Clare County Council emphasise the need for a coordinated, estuary-wide ecological data-gathering strategy for the Shannon Estuary, noting that the current piecemeal, developer-led surveys undertaken on a site-by-site basis fail to account for cumulative and ecosystem-level impacts and may ultimately delay marine development. A long-term, integrated survey programme would be beneficial for a host of reasons given. Considering the scale and range of surveys proposed, the Council stresses that survey outputs should be made available to the Planning Authority to support robust, evidence-based decision making. Clare County Council recognise that these SI represent one of the most comprehensive survey programmes undertaken in this location to date. The SIFP Steering Group supports long-term monitoring in the Shannon Estuary and welcomes access to the resulting data.

MARA response

A coordinated, estuary-wide data-gathering strategy is outside the scope of this assessment. However, a number of conditions are recommended to ensure appropriate data sharing, including requirements that all underwater noise data are submitted to DCEE; that all Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) reports are published and shared with NPWS and MARA; that all borehole data are submitted to the GS; and that bathymetric data are shared with the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) and INFOMAR following completion of the activities.

Submission 6: Marine Institute

Submission summary

The Marine Institute (MI) comments that while the proposed survey areas do coincide with fishing activities/areas, fish stocks / aquaculture activities, independently the survey operations should not substantially interfere with fishing activities.

It is assumed that necessary notices to mariners / fishing vessels will be made regarding the deployment of devices, sampling, geophysical and bathymetric mapping activities. There is some potential for cumulative impacts if other survey operations occur nearby at the same time.

The MI note the need for appropriate and necessary care to be taken regarding Unexploded Ordnance.

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.

If a licence is granted, a standard condition requiring the publication of marine notices and appropriate communication with relevant fishers and mariners be issued. MARA notes the potential for cumulative effects should other survey activities occur concurrently. It is

recommended that the Licence Holder to coordinate activities with other licence holders where practical to minimise cumulative disturbance. MARA notes the Mis comments regarding unexploded ordnance. the Applicant has stated in their AIMU that magnetometer surveys and CPTs will be undertaken, including CPTs at borehole locations for UXO clearance purposes. It is recommended that a condition be included in any licence granted requiring that all UXO surveys are undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance.

Submission 7: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Submission summary
<p>DAFM have emphasised that sea-fishing and aquaculture are long established, economically important activity that must be fully considered when assessing such proposals.</p> <p>Commercial fishing, including pot fishing, occurs within the Shannon Estuary, and DAFM highlights that available VMS data may be under-represent inshore fishing activity, as vessels under 12m are not required to carry VMS. While the AIMU concludes that any disturbance to fisheries would be temporary and not significant, DAFM stresses the importance of early and ongoing engagement with local fishing interests, including issuing Notices to Mariners to relevant fishing organisations, consulting with stakeholders where indirect impacts on traditional fishing grounds may arise, and appointing a Fisheries Liaison Officer to liaise with sea-going and foreshore users before and during the survey works.</p>

MARA response

MARA notes the content and submission received from DAFM. In assessing the application, MARA has regard for the long-established and economically important nature of commercial sea-fishing and aquaculture activities within the Shannon Estuary. MARA includes in this inshore fishing activity that may not be fully captured by available VMS data due to vessel size. In accordance with the MAP Act, MARA is required to have regard to the rights of the public in respect of navigation and fishing and the principle of maximising co-existence with other maritime users has been incorporated into the licence assessment. If granted, a licence will include standard conditions to promote coexistence with fishing interests, including requiring the publication of marine notices, coordination with the SFPC Harbour Master, and avoidance of damage to fishing gear. DAFM has further requested confirmation that a Fisheries Liaison Officer (FLO) will be appointed by the applicant. The works will not have any impact on fishing activities. The appointment of an FLO is not warranted for a proposed maritime usage of this scale and nature.

Submission 8: Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport

Submission summary

The MSO has no objection to the proposed maritime usage. The MSO note that the proposed MUL is in a busy shipping channel. The submission recommends conditions to be applied to the licence if granted, which relate to navigation safety, the need for vessels to be suitably certified, the requirement for a marine notice to be issued, the requirement for Navtex broadcasts, the need to liaise with the MSO and Commissioners for Irish Lights regarding the marking and lighting of any moored instruments.

Works must account for and not interfere with a submarine gas pipeline which exists at the southern extent of planned surveys. Caution must also be given to Designated Spoil Ground which exists in the MNUL area.

MARA response

MARA notes the observations of the MSO. Conditions have been recommended (see Appendix 1) in relation to the publication of a marine notice and consultation with the MSO, and consulting with the port authority in advance of the activities to ensure that navigational safety is maintained. A condition is also recommended in regard to vessel certification. The onus is on the Holder to comply with any authorisation required by CIL in relation to moored instruments. The Holder must not interfere with or damage any third-party property while undertaking the activities (see Appendix 1).

Submission 9: Development Applications Unit of Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Submission summary

The DAU notes that the proposal involves limited, non-intrusive geotechnical and geophysical surveys with the Shannon Estuary. The presence of bottlenose dolphins is acknowledged, and potential underwater noise impacts from SBP and seismic refraction surveys are appropriately assessed, with mitigation aligned to NPWS (2014) guidance. DAU agrees habitat loss will be negligible and temporary. It recommends that all mitigation measures set out in the NIS and AIMU, including those related to marine archaeology, be attached as conditions of consent and fully implemented. A suitably qualified Project Archaeologist must be appointed, with geophysical and intertidal surveys completed in advance of geotechnical works and compiled into a final Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment for submission to the National Monuments Service. Archaeological licensing, monitoring and stop-work procedures are required should archaeological material be encountered.

MARA response

MARA notes the content of the submission from the DAU. Section 2.1 of this report deals with underwater cultural heritage. Conditions have been recommended in Appendix 1 requiring

the holder to consult with the National Monuments Service prior to the commencement of the activities and to comply with all applicable requirements set forth by them. A condition is also included regarding the timing of geophysical surveys prior to the geotechnical activities.

6. Recommendation

The applicant has requested a five-year licence term to carry out marine Site Investigations (SI) and environmental surveys. The proposed investigations comprise geophysical, geotechnical, environmental and archaeological surveys.

This duration has been sought to allow flexibility owing to the dynamic nature of the natural environment in which the applicant will operate. The term provides the applicant with the ability to adapt to project timelines in response to potential delays arising from weather, supply chain issues, or procurement processes. Given this, it is proposed that MARA grant a licence for a five-year period.

Having considered the information submitted in support of the application, I recommend that a Maritime Usage Licence in accordance with Section 119 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021, as amended, be granted to Gas Networks Ireland, Gasworks Road, Cork, Ireland, for Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000, in Support of the Strategic Gas Emergency Reserve initiative, subject to the conditions in Appendix 1.



Dr Micheál Mac Monagail

Marine Analyst

04/02/2026

Appendix 1 – Recommended Conditions

Recommended term of licence for inclusion in the Particulars Schedule:

1. Recommended Term of licence to be 5 years from date of commencement.

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

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

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

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

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

Reason: To ensure protection of maritime heritage.

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

Reason: To ensure protection of maritime heritage.

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

Reason: To ensure safe navigation in the Shannon Estuary.

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

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

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

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

24. Marine Mammals

- (i) The Holder shall appoint a marine mammal observer(s) for the purposes of overseeing the Permitted Maritime Usage. The Holder shall ensure the marine mammal observer(s) shall satisfy the requirements of the most up to date national guidance. During the activity the Holder shall comply with the directions of the marine mammal observer(s).
- (ii) The Holder shall implement risk control and mitigation measures for marine mammals in strict accordance with the most up to date national guidance.
- (iii) The Holder shall, within 30 days of the completion of the Permitted Maritime Usage, forward a report of the marine mammal observer(s) operations and mitigation undertaken, to offshore@npws.gov.ie and compliance@mara.gov.ie
- (iv) The Holder shall publish the report and recording and data forms on their website within 60 days of completion of the Permitted Maritime Usage unless otherwise agreed with the Grantor

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

25. Intertidal and Birds

- (i) The Holder shall ensure that an ecologist will be on site during all intertidal surveys carried out as part of this Permitted Maritime Usage in order to minimise disturbance and ensure site integrity is maintained.
- (ii) Access to the intertidal area shall be exclusively through existing access routes.
- (iii) Disturbance of intertidal reef shall be avoided by machinery and personnel. The Permitted Maritime Usage shall not result in disturbance or damage to reef habitat and these areas shall be avoided by machinery and personnel.

- (iv) Any temporary access arrangements or structures that are put in place to allow machinery access to the shore area, shall be prepared or installed in consultation with the ecologist. The site should be fully reinstated post works.
- (v) Silt protection measures shall be put in place if deemed necessary by the ecologist.

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

26. Sedimentation

- (i) The Holder shall take all practicable efforts to ensure that any arisings from boring and drilling activities are collected and are stored and disposed of in accordance with the relevant National and European waste legislation and protocols as may be amended from time to time.

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

27. In-combination effects

- (i) Prior to the commencement (time frame can be added if required) of the Permitted Maritime Usage, the Holder shall coordinate with other authorisation holders carrying out geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities within a 20 km radius of the Licensed Area.
- (ii) Where a vessel to vessel distance of greater than 20 km cannot be maintained with respect to geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities, the Holder shall co-ordinate with other authorisation holders to prevent temporal overlap of the activities. Where the Holder can submit evidence that there is a vessel to vessel distance of greater than 20 km, no temporal co-ordination of activities is required. Where the Holder becomes aware of temporal overlap that cannot be resolved within the prescribed distance, the Holder shall notify the Grantor who shall determine the timing of activities.
- (iii) Where the Holder becomes aware of temporal overlap that cannot be resolved within the prescribed distance, the Holder shall notify the Grantor who shall determine the timing of activities
- (iv) Records of all engagements held, and agreements reached, if any, shall be maintained by the Holder and made available to the Grantor if requested

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

28. On completion of the activity, the Holder shall provide the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) at <https://ukhodataupload.admiralty.co.uk/> or sdr@UKHO.gov.uk and the INFOMAR program at support@geodata.gov.ie with the final bathymetric data from this Permitted Maritime Usage so that the appropriate charts can be updated.

Reason: To ensure the safety of navigation at sea and the protection of the marine environment through availability of monitoring data.

29. The Holder shall, as soon as practicable and no later than three months upon completion of the borehole survey works, submit all borehole survey data undertaken in accordance with this Permitted Maritime Usage to the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) of the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment at GeologicalMappingInfo@gsi.ie and in the format requested by the GSI.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment through availability of monitoring data.

30. The Holder, upon completion of the Permitted Maritime Usage, shall submit details of all acoustic surveys undertaken in accordance with this licence to Marine Environment, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment at marine.env@dcee.gov.ie. This data shall be provided in the reporting format of the OSPAR Impulsive Noise registry.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment through availability of monitoring data

31. Accidental events

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

34. The Holder shall consider any publicly available survey data, and usage of same where appropriate and feasible to do so, in order to avoid duplication of survey activity in the Licensed Area.

Reason: To ensure protection of the marine environment.

35. The Holder shall time the Permitted Maritime Usage to ensure that geophysical surveys are undertaken in advance of all geotechnical works to ensure potential significant effects on underwater cultural heritage are avoided.

Reason: To ensure protection of maritime heritage.

References

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.

Innomar (2025) Website accessed on 20/01/2026
<https://www.innomar.com/products/shallow-water/standard-sbp>