

MI Observations on MUL250010 - Gas Networks Ireland Site Investigations Cahiracon Foynest

Jonathan White – Marine Institute – Version 1 – 30/10/2025

Summary

The Seafood Climate Unit of DAFM requested MI observations on possible impacts that Marine Usage Licence ref: MUL250010 might have on the seafood sector, i.e. fish stocks, fisheries, aquaculture, or the environments on which they rely. The application submitted on behalf of Gas Networks Ireland in application to conduct marine Site Investigations and environmental surveys within the Shannon Estuary adjacent to the townlands of Shannakea Beg, Cahiracon, Foynes Island, Leahys and Corrig, to provide baseline data to contribute to basis for site selection and any subsequent design, Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) for the Strategic Gas Emergency Reserve Project, should a site be taken forward to the planning/consenting stage.

Proposed area covers 11.19 km², adjoins the High Water Mark and extending from Shannakea Beg along the Clare coast to Cahiracon (Ed Killadysert), across the Shannon Estuary to Shannon Foynes Island and along the Limerick coast to Leahys.

Activities would include:

- Drop-down camera surveys and up to 30 benthic grab samples to locate and investigate the reef structures reported in the Shannon channel
- Geophysical surveys comprising: Magnetometer survey; sub-bottom profiler survey; side-scan sonar survey; bathymetric survey using either single or multibeam echo sounders; Seismic surveys; Electrical Resistivity Tomography survey
- 60 boreholes
- 80 cone penetration tests (60 at borehole locations to clear for Unexploded Ordnance and 20 as standalone investigation locations)
- 50 grab samples
- 30 surface water samples
- Intertidal sediment cores (vibrocores)
- A further 20 boreholes within the proposed MUL Area at some future date
- Archaeological Surveys
- Metocean Surveys: Allowance for 2 wave buoys or wave sensors.
- 4 buoys supporting: Conductivity, Temperature, Depth Sensors; Optical Salinity Sensor ; Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler; Optical or Electrochemical Dissolved Oxygen Sensor; pH Sensor/Probe; Turbidity sensor; Turbidity meter/sediment trap

No permanent structures will be erected in the area under this licence.

A licence is sought for five years:

Phase 1 Site Investigations

Duration: Approx 16 Weeks; Start Date: Q4 2025

Phase 2 Site Investigation

Duration: Approx 12 Weeks; Start Date estimated start date in 2027 but dependent on consent for the main Project

Metocean monitoring buoys, deployed for a minimum of one year and a maximum of two as soon as feasible following final grant of the MUL.

Any restriction are flagged as being minor and temporary. A notice to mariners will be issued in advance of site investigations accompanied by communication with stakeholders.

The application is accompanied by:

- Supporting information for Screening for Appropriate Assessment (SISAA)
- Natura Impact Statement (NIS)
- Assessment of Impact on the Maritime Usage Report (AIMU)
- Risk Assessment for Annex IV Species (RAAIVS)
- Archaeological Impact Assessment Report

The application notes:

- Several commercial fisheries active in the area, including pot fishing, gillnets and tangle nets; licenced aquaculture areas; designated Shellfish Waters Directive areas in close proximity (approx. 22km west).
- Operations may cause impact to fish, including migratory species depending on the months that survey activities are conducted.
- Overall, significant impact is expected to be unlikely with the implementation of mitigation measures as outlined in the AIMU.
- Potential disturbance to commercial fisheries may occur, will be of a temporary nature and assessed in the AIMU that

The area overlaps an SAC and SPA (<https://dafm-maps.marine.ie/aquaculture-viewer/>).

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. Noting need for appropriate/ necessary care to be taken regarding Unexploded Ordnance.

There is potential for cumulative impacts between these and other survey activities that may be active in the vicinity and near timeframes.