

Guidance Note

Marine Mammal and Seabird Observations during Licensed Activities at Sea





This guidance is for licence holders conducting offshore activities in Irish waters and aims to support licence holders in ensuring compliance with licence conditions relating to marine mammal observations and bird recording.

By implementing these measures, license holders can improve the effectiveness, transparency, and consistency of their monitoring activity.

Note that licence holders must first and foremost comply with licence conditions. This MARA Guidance Note is additional to, and does not replace, the conditions of a licence or national guidance produced by NPWS that may be referenced in any condition of a licence.

Where there is any doubt, contact MARA at compliance@mara.gov.ie



Data collection and retention	Marine Mammals	Seabirds
Use the current standardised recording and reporting forms	Recording Form MMO reporting template As at 30.09.2025.	Use current standardised data forms Sea Birds at Sea Forms As at 30.09.2025.
Maintain consistency in recorded fields: sighting coordinates, distances, species, observer effort, and behaviour.	Cover Sheet. As at 30.09.2025	Follow European Seabirds at Sea ESAS-based methods.
Record all relevant information – e.g. environmental data, operational logs, communications and incident reports, with details to demonstrate measures taken.		Where appropriate also develop bird incident logs and protocols.
Retain all records including data collected, datasheets and recording forms, as well as logs of actions advised, and actions taken.		

Observer coverage & competency	Marine Mammals	Seabirds
Ensure verified at-sea mitigation training and experience of observers as well as certification through recognised programmes and submit details of qualifications with reports.		
Ensure a minimum of two qualified observers per vessel for visual coverage for shifts longer than 12 hours to avoid observer fatigue, or in cases where 360 visibility is not possible from the vessel.		
Assign a dedicated operator of specialist equipment operation	Passive Acoustic Monitoring Operator (PAMO) for 24-hr or in low-visibility.	
Use a Lead Observers + Assistant Observers to support mentoring and data quality.		
Maintain logbooks of Observer activity endorsed by lead/senior staff.		

Mitigation measures	Marine Mammals	Seabirds
Follow the guidance for mitigation triggers, watch periods, and reporting expectations.		
Identify and record improvements for mitigation measures in addition to those prescribed by licence conditions and national guidance.		

Communications	Marine Mammals	Seabirds
Incorporate the practice of vessel staff reporting at end of shift/day.		
Ensure all contractor and sub contacted vessel operators are briefed of the observer activity and requirements.		
Develop vessel- specific flowcharts etc for decision making.		