AN t-ÚDARÁS UM CHOSAINT IASCAIGH MHARA | SEA-FISHERIES PROTECTION AUTHORITY

SFPA Observations on Marine Usage Licence Applications

Applicant Name & Area: Helvick Head Offshore Wind Designated Activity Company For site investigation in Tonn Nua	**Application No: MUL250019**
Application Category	
☐ Shellfish Aquaculture Licence ☐ Renewal of Shellfish Aquaculture Licence ☐ Fin Fish Aquaculture Licence ☐ Renewal of Fin Fish Aquaculture Licence ☒ Foreshore Licence	☐ Dumping at Sea ☐ Water discharge ☐ Harbour Developments ☐ Marine Renewables ☐ Cables/ Fiber Optics/ Site investigations

Sea Fisheries Protection Officer Observations

1. *Possible impacts, if any, on existing wild fisheries in the area, with an emphasis on the possible implications for the SFPA in conducting official controls and possible non-compliance issues that could arise.*

Within the confines of the proposed Tonn Nua offshore windfarm site exist commercial fisheries for several ecologically sensitive species including Atlantic cod, whiting, sprat and herring among others (Marine Institute, 2023). The area is also an important nursing ground for juvenile anglerfish and a transitionary area for summer mackerel migration, autumnal/winter bluefin tuna foraging grounds, winter herring/sprat spawning activity and basking sharks feeding during summer months.

The surveying activities are scheduled to take place in quarters 2 and 3 of 2026/2027 which is outside the traditional spawning months associated for some commercial species within the proposed area such as cod (and other gadoids), herring and sprat which use the Waterford estuary as a putative spawning site. The location of the surveying work is likely far enough offshore to minimise potential negative impact on nearby estuarine habitats, or on movement of fish in and out of them, particularly at the River Suir estuary and the Colligan River which flows into the sea at Dungarvan.

It is therefore likely that the projected short duration (2 to 5 months), episodic nature and relatively focused spatial distribution of the proposed geotechnical and

geophysical surveying activities for Tonn Nua will have negligible impact on local fish populations.

From a fisheries control perspective, restriction of fishing activity from the Tonn Nua site during surveying may result in a temporary spatial shift of effort and may impair the enforcement of fisheries control as vessels may operate in new areas and landings may be further distributed along the coast. The effects of this may be increased if seismic surveys result in movement of target species outside the survey area and therefore corresponding movement of effort.

Long term sustainability of these species is incumbent on contemporary assessment of their biological status in conjunction with properly enforced fishery control measures. Therefore, the aforementioned issues should be considered when proceeding with surveying work at the site.

References:

Marine Institute, The Stock Book 2023, URL: https://oar.marine.ie/bitstreams/a1fef2cd-3d0a-4655-a8cd-c98eb03d15eb/download (Accessed 16/12/2025)

2. *Possible impacts, if any, on adjacent or nearby shellfish production areas adjacent, including possible implications for the SFPA in conducting official controls and possible non-compliance issues that could arise.*

The proposed location of the Tonn Nua site is adjacent to significant shellfish production areas, both wild caught fisheries and aquaculture. Wild caught shellfish fisheries in the region include:

- Whelk: Boat stand (west of Stradbally) – Commercially exploited
- Shrimp: throughout the site. Restrictions currently prohibit fishing from March to August during spawning season – Commercially exploited
- Brown crab: crab fishing grounds along this whole site - Commercially exploited
- Lobster: breeding grounds off Helvick Head shelf – Commercially exploited

- Cockle bed: Dungarvan, Tramore, Youghal Bay – not currently exploited

- Razor clams: Youghal, Dungarvan and Tramore – not currently exploited

- Blue mussel: Beds off Youghal and Dungarvan and Waterford estuary – not currently commercially exploited however they do serve to maintain the ecosystem by their process of filter feeding and act a valuable method of removing pollution and toxins.

Aquaculture of Pacific oyster (*Magallana gigas*) currently takes place in Dungarvan Bay and in Woodstown Bay (located in the Waterford estuary).

The primary potential issue concerning shellfish fisheries and aquaculture within the proximity of the Tonn Nua surveying location is disturbance of the sediment resulting in potential physical and chemical issues. Mobilisation and dispersal of sediment in the water column as a result of physical surveying techniques (coring, etc…) may impact feeding ability in epibenthic shellfish species and can result in mortalities in severe instances. Additionally, previously trapped chemical residues deposited as a result of historical heavy industry discharged material, could lead to potential contamination within shellfish. This would have a significant impact on fishers and growers were it to occur. However, the dispersed nature of the sampling sites and their location away from nearshore shallow-water growing sites, in conjunction with prevailing current directions along the south Irish coastline, suggests that the risk posed by these surveying activities is minimal to shellfish production areas.

No significant issues regarding biotoxin prevalence are anticipated due to the surveying activities.
From a compliance perspective, it may be possible that chemical compounds could be confirmed in water samples within designated production areas but, as previously mentioned, the risk of this occurring is believed to be low when considering the spatial, temporal and scale of the surveying work outlined in the proposal documents.

3. *Possible impacts, if any, on seafood safety, with an emphasis on the implications for the SFPA in conducting official controls and possible non-compliance issues that could arise*.

Historical industrial activity and associated untreated discharge waters within Dungarvan and its environs may potentially pose a risk to seafood safety if disturbed due to physical surveying processes. A large tannery factory in the town and heavy industrial works to the east of provided a historic source of industrial chemicals into local waters. These compounds may pose a risk to seafood safety if mobilised in large volumes from the sediment due to surveying activities. Risk to human health would be in the form of entry to the food-chain likely via bioaccumulation in filter feeding molluscs and crustaceans caught within the vicinity.

However, given the relatively small surface area and number of the boreholes (up to 15)/cores (up to 60)/cone pressure tests (up to 40) to be undertaken; the distribution of the grab sampling stations (100 over the entire survey site); the distance of the site to adjacent, shallow inshore waters and aquaculture areas; the prevailing direction of the Celtic Sea current along the south coast of Ireland (Brown *et al*., 2003); and the short duration over which the geotechnical and geophysical surveying will be taking place, it is likely that there will be a low risk to seafood safety as a result of these activities.

References:

Brown, J., Carrillo, L., Fernand, L., Horsburgh, K.J., Hill, A.E., Young, E.F. & Medler, K.J. 2003. Observations of the physical structure and seasonal jet-like circulation of the Celtic Sea and St. George's Channel of the Irish Sea. Continental Shelf Research, Vol. 23(6): 533-561. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0278-4343(03)00008-6.

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