

Maritime Usage Licensing and Planning Advisory Directorate

Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report

To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Dr Ciar O'Toole Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	06/07/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application Reference No:	MUL250021
MUL Applicant Name:	National Oceanography Centre		
MUL Applicant Registered Address:	Waterfront Campus, European Way, Southampton, Hampshire, UK.		
Licence application received:	10/12/2025		
Types of maritime usage activities in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:	<i>7(2) Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of scientific discovery or research</i>		
Location of proposed maritime usages:	Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel, approx. 100 km off the Southwest coast of Ireland		
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening	EIA not required (EIA Screening Form dated 27/05/2026)		
Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening	AA Screening Determination dated 27/05/2026		
Notice requesting Natura Impact Statement (NIS) issued:	28/05/2026	NIS received:	29/05/2026
Public body consultation:	12/01/2026 to 12/02/2026	Observations from public bodies received:	Six
Public consultation:	04/06/2026 to 06/07/2026	Submissions from the public received:	None

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1. Background

The National Oceanography Centre (the applicant) has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of scientific discovery or research, falling under Schedule 7(2) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act). The activities are part of a scientific research project funded by the United Kingdom's Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) to conduct systematic scientific surveys in the deep-sea Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel. The project will assist with providing a more detailed environmental characterisation in these key deep-sea sites in Irish waters, increase the understanding of environmental marine conditions within ecologically-important, but poorly understood deep-sea sites, characterise the transport pathways of pollutants such as microplastics into the deep-sea, and will aid in the wider understanding of similar sites that exist worldwide.

2. Location and Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

- i) **temporary deployment of short oceanographic moorings** (with no sea surface expression), which will be recovered after a period of approximately 12 months to be deployed at five locations in Irish waters between water depths of 1500m and 3400m. Each mooring will comprise: an anchor (1000 kg weight comprising chain or train wheels) connecting to a vertical wire (approximately 30 m long) that connects to buoyancy. Scientific instruments will be attached to the vertical mooring line that will include: a Teledyne Sentinel 600 kHz Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler; sediment trap and Seabird Scientific MicroCAT that measures temperature and salinity and an acoustic release link that will enable recovery of the mooring.
- ii) **sampling of seafloor sediments**. For each offshore campaign: an OSIL megacorer (0.5 m deep x 0.06 m diameter cores – 30 sampling locations proposed, at each sampling location 4 cores to be acquired, so a total of 120 cores), NIOZ box cores (0.5 m deep x 0.5 wide sampler – 15 cores proposed), and Standard Gravity Piston coring (up to 6 m deep x 0.1 m diameter cores – 16 cores proposed).
- iii) **seafloor video surveys** acquired using a robotic underwater vehicle (RUV) controlled via fibre optic cable connected to the ship. Video transects will be performed at six key locations during the second offshore campaign across the submarine canyon/channel systems.
- iv) **short-term (4 weeks maximum) deployment of two autonomous underwater oceanographic gliders** (Kongsberg Seaglider owned and operated by the National Oceanography Centre) to monitor ocean currents using an integrated Nortek 1 MHz ADCP and measure temperature and salinity using a SeaBird Electronics CTD sensor. The glider will be deployed at the start of the first offshore campaign and then recovered on the vessel that deployed it. The glider will dive from the surface to 1000 m and back approximately every 3 hours.

v) **short-term (30 hour maximum) deployment of Autonomous Underwater Vehicle** (AUV – Autosub5) using multibeam echosounder (Norbit WBMS 400kHz multibeam echosounder), side scan sonar (Edgetech 2205 Dual Frequency Sidescan Sonar - 420 kHz and 120 kHz), sub-bottom profiler (Edgetech 2205 Sub Bottom Profiler, 2-16 kHz), a camera system (AESA 2.5 Camera System), a Conductivity, Temperature and Density (CTD) sensor (Seabird CTD9+), a Hydroptic UPV6 and Fluidion Deep Water Sampler, and an Acoustic Doppler Current (ADCP) profiler. Autosub 5 will be deployed and recovered multiple times during the two offshore campaigns, and aside from launch and recovery will move beneath the sea surface with no surface expression and will not involve any contact with the seafloor.

vi) **measurement of vertical profiles in the water column to characterise temperature, salinity, current velocity and turbulent mixing.** This will include vertical profiles made using a CTD package and Lowered ADCP (two RDI 300 kHz Workhorse). A Vertical Microstructure Profiler (VMP-2000) will also be used. The VMP- 2000 is equipped with cm-scale velocity probes (shear probes), high-resolution temperature sensors (fast thermistors), and a high-accuracy Seabird CTD.

vi) **shipboard measurements to be made while vessel is underway**, which include single beam echosounding (Kongsberg EA640 10/12 kHz), multi beam echosounding (Kongsberg EM122 12 kHz and EM710 70 to 100 kHz), sub-bottom profiler (Kongsberg SBP27 Subbottom profiler 2-9 kHz), AML Micro-X Sound Velocity probe and hull mounted ADCPs (75 kHz and 150 kHz RDI Ocean Surveyors).

Table 1 showing summary of proposed maritime usage activities.

Activity	Equipment Type	Frequency of Sampling	Duration
Deployment of short oceanographic moorings	Teledyne Sentinel 600 kHz Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler to measure currents; sediment trap and Seabird Scientific MicroCAT	Deployed at five locations	12 months deployment
Sampling of seafloor sediments	OSIL megacorer NIOZ box core sampler Standard Gravity Piston coring	0.5 m deep x 0.06 m diameter cores, 30 sampling locations proposed, with 4 cores at each location – 120 cores total per survey. 0.5 m deep x 0.5 wide – 15 cores proposed per survey up to 6 m deep x 0.1 m diameter cores – 16 cores proposed per survey	Across survey time – max three weeks per year x 2 years

Seafloor video surveys	Robotic underwater vehicle (RUV)	Six occasions per survey	Across survey time – max three weeks per year x 2 years
Autonomous underwater oceanographic gliders x 2	Kongsberg Seaglider with an integrated Nortek 1 MHz ADCP and a SeaBird Electronics CTD sensor	Multiple deployments across survey time	Across survey time – max three weeks per year x 2 years
Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV)	Multibeam echosounder, Sidescan Sonar, sub-bottom profiler, camera system Conductivity, Temperature and Density (CTD) sensor, Hydroptic UPV6 and Fluidion Deep Water Sampler, Acoustic Doppler Current (ADCP) profiler.	Multiple deployments across survey time	30-hour maximum deployment across 3 weeks survey time per year
Measurement of vertical profiles in the water column	CTD package and Lowered ADCP (two RDI 300 kHz Workhorse) mounted on a conventional CTD/Carousel frame and a Vertical Microstructure Profiler (VMP-2000)	Multiple deployments across survey time	Across survey time – max three weeks per year x 2 years
Shipboard measurements to be made while vessel is underway,	Single beam echosounding (Kongsberg EA640 10/12 kHz), multi beam echosounding (Kongsberg EM122 12 kHz and EM710 70 to 100 kHz), sub-bottom profiler (Kongsberg SBP27 Subbottom profiler 2-9 kHz), AML Micro-X Sound Velocity probe and hull mounted ADCPs (75 kHz and 150 kHz).	Continuous	Across survey time – max three weeks per year x 2 years

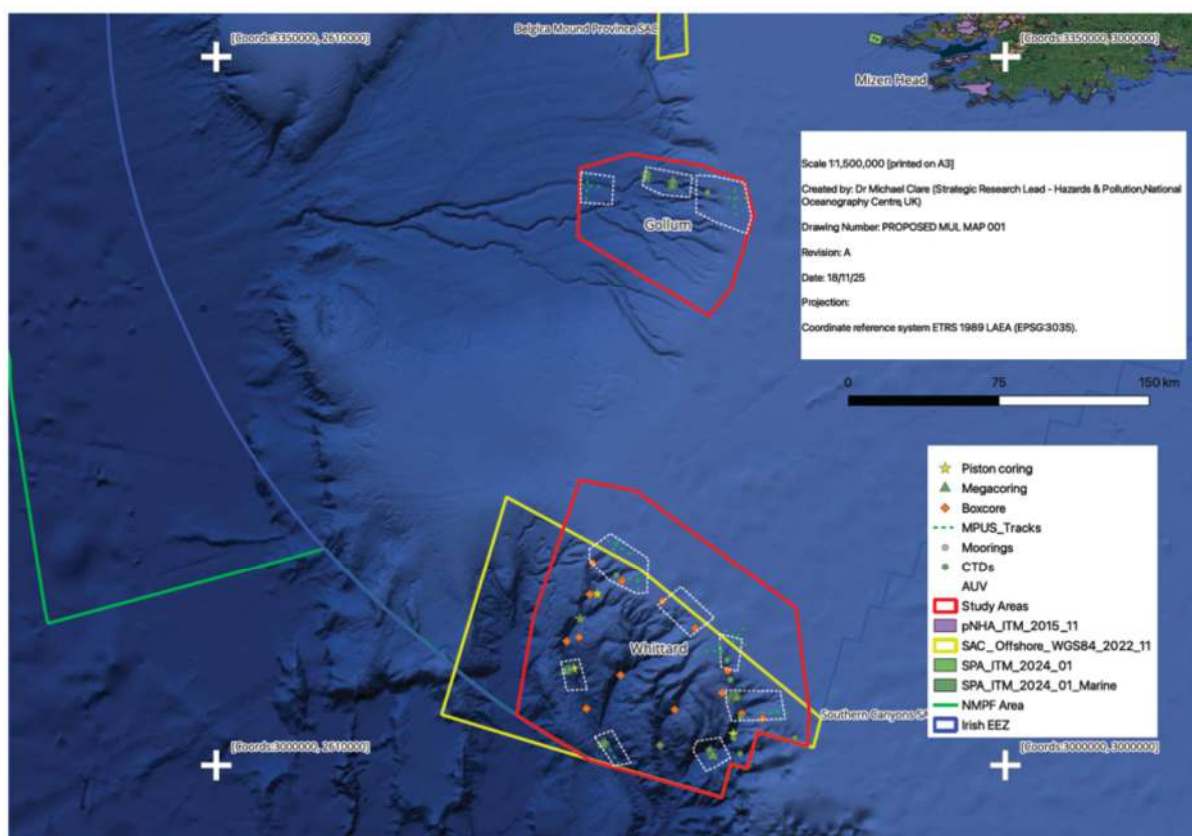


Figure 1 showing indicative sampling locations within the two red line areas and showing the Southern Canyons SAC (yellow line).

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

Whittard Canyon area - the proposed maritime usage area covers 15,054 km². This area lies 262 km south-south-west of Mizen Head, County Cork and a large section of the proposed MUL area falls within the Southern Canyons SAC [Site code 002278]. It is the more southerly of the two red line areas shown in Figure 1. Water depths are between 400m and 3500 in this area. The benthic environment is composed primarily of a series of deep canyons sloping down to the Biscay Abyssal Plain. The proposed MUL area contains both geogenic and biogenic reef habitat. Within the canyons systems there are known to be bedrock cliffs and boulders, carbonate cliffs, boulders and small mounds.

Gollum Channel area - the proposed maritime usage area covers 4765 km² within which targeted scientific activities will occur. This area lies 108 km south-west of Dursey Island, County Cork and is the more northerly of the two red line areas shown in Figure 1. It is also an area of marine canyons and water depths are between 400m to over 1000m.

3. Assessment

In assessing a MUL application, MARA must have regard to the criteria specified in the MAP Act, as discussed in this section.

3.1 National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

MARA must have regard to the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) which outlines the government's overarching vision, policies, and principles for managing the country's maritime area. MARA must also have regard to the NMPF, which sets the framework for implementing the forward planning component of our marine planning system as set out in the MPPS.

In terms of this proposed MUL activity, the applicant notes that it should assist with Ireland's ability to protect and restore ocean health, especially in poorly understood deep-sea areas. It also supports the implementation of the MSFD and is consistent with Environmental Policy – ocean health Policy 1 and associated policies on biodiversity, non-indigenous species, water quality, seafloor and water column integrity, marine litter and underwater noise.

3.2 Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2014/52/EU) (EIA Directive)

MARA carried out a screening for EIA of the proposed maritime usage activities having considered Schedules 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. An EIA Screening Form was issued by MARA on 27/05/2026 and it was concluded that the activities do not fall within the scope of the EIA Directive and therefore an EIA is not required.

3.3 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 to address the potential risks from invasive alien species as a result of the survey activities. Sections 3.5–3.7 of this report also address the Habitats and Birds Directives, WFD and MSFD and recommend conditions to minimise impacts on biodiversity from the proposed activities.

3.4 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended

Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended (the 'Climate 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 nature of the proposed activities, no significant increases in carbon emissions are expected to be produced.

3.5 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 ecological status in inland surface waters,

transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater by 2027, at the latest. Given the offshore location of the proposed maritime usage, the WFD does not apply to this application.

3.6 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. Ireland's 2024 assessment¹ under Article 8 of the MFSD sets out the status of the 11 qualitative descriptors that describe the state of the marine environment. Table 4 sets out the status of the relevant descriptors and assesses the potential impacts of the proposed activities.

Table 2: Assessment of impact of proposed activities on MSFD descriptors

MFSD Descriptor	Good Environmental Status achieved	Assessment
Biological diversity	Partially achieved	MARA has undertaken an AA and an Annex IV risk assessment in respect to the proposed MUL activities (see Section 3.8). Mitigation measures have been identified and included in the Proposed Licence, which address potential impacts on biological diversity (including protected habitats and species). The data collected by the proposed MUL activity will potentially contribute to our understanding of marine biodiversity in this region.
Non-indigenous species	Yes	To ensure that the proposed activities will not result in the unintended introduction of non-indigenous species, a condition is recommended in the Proposed Licence relating to the control of invasive species.
Population of commercial fish/shellfish	Partially achieved	There will be some overlap between some spawning and nursery grounds and the proposed MUL area. However, given the short-term localised impact of the proposed MUL activity, no significant impacts are predicted and therefore, no impact on the GES for this descriptor.
Marine food webs	Unclear	The balance and diversity in marine food webs are not expected be impacted as a result of the proposed

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

		activity. The data collected by the proposed MUL activity will potentially contribute to our understanding of marine food webs in this region.
Eutrophication	Yes	The proposed maritime usage does not involve the addition of nutrients to the marine environment and as such will not impact this descriptor achieving GES.
Sea-floor integrity	Partially achieved	The seabed habitat in the MUL application area will experience temporary disturbance due to the geotechnical activities. Some disturbance is possible to protected reef habitats within the Southern Canyon SAC, but mitigation measures to counteract this are proposed in Section 3.8.3. Therefore, it is not expected that the activities will negatively impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Alteration of hydrographical conditions	Yes	The proposed activities will not alter the hydrographical conditions (e.g. changes in wave action, currents, salinity, temperature) in the MUL application area. There will be no impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Concentrations of contaminants	Yes	The proposed activities will not result in the addition of contaminants in the MUL application area. There will be no impact on the GES status of this descriptor. The data collected by the proposed MUL activity will potentially contribute to our understanding of contaminants in this region.
Contaminants in fish/seafood for human consumption	Yes	The proposed activities will not result in the addition of contaminants in the MUL application area. There will be no impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Marine Litter	No	The proposed maritime usage 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. Any proposed Licence will include a general condition requiring the holder to remove all plant and equipment associated with the activities and to restore the licensed area to its original condition. The data collected by the proposed MUL activity will

		potentially contribute to our understanding of marine litter in this region.
Introduction of energy including underwater noise	Yes	In order to inform the data collected as part of MSFD requirements, it is recommended that the holder should provide details of all acoustic surveys to the Marine Environment Section of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in the reporting format of the OSPAR Impulsive Noise Registry (see Proposed Licence).

3.7 Annex IV species

Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) 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 an Annex IV risk assessment which considered potential impacts on relevant Annex IV species, which are primarily cetacean species in this instance. The applicant suggested the use of mitigation as proposed in the current national guidance to manage risk to marine mammals from anthropogenic noise (NPWS, 2014). MARA agrees with the need to apply this guidance for the proposed MUL activities.

The applicant has stated that a derogation licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) under the (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, is required for the proposed maritime usage. The applicants have been granted a Section 54 derogation licence by the NPWS for the proposed MUL activity, DER-CETACEAN-2026-02.

3.8 Appropriate Assessment

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended (the Regulations) and by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The application was subject to screening for appropriate assessment (AA) by MARA in accordance with the Regulations. MARA made an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination on 27/05/2026 which concluded that the proposed MUL activities will require Stage 2 AA as it could not 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 European sites

Twenty-six European Sites were screened in for appropriate assessment by MARA. These included ten Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and sixteen Special Protection Areas (SPA). These European sites, their Qualifying Interests (QIs) also referred to as Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) for the SPA sites and likely or potential source of impact as a result of the

proposed maritime usages are given in Appendix 1. The applicant submitted a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) in support of the application, dated 29/05/2026.

3.8.1 Assessment of Likely/Potential Impacts on European Sites

The impacts identified are from above water noise and visual disturbance and underwater noise. This section discusses those impacts individually. Any mitigation measures recommended on foot of the assessment in this section will be included in any licence granted.

Underwater noise disturbance

Birds

The potential for underwater noise from the activities to cause a significant disturbance to birds was identified at the AA screening stage. The impact of underwater noise disturbance on birds is not greatly understood, though some studies have shown behavioural responses in some diving bird species which spend comparatively longer periods of time underwater than other birds. Flushing disturbance can be expected to displace diving seabirds from close proximity to the survey vessels and underwater equipment, thereby limiting their exposure to the highest sound pressures generated. The likelihood of these birds being in the vicinity of the noise generating activities is low, due to the surface activity associated with such operations disturbing the birds prior to commencement of the underwater noise.

Given the temporary nature of the proposed activities, the mobile nature of the birds and their temporary displacement due to flushing, underwater noise would be very unlikely to have a significant effect on diving seabird populations from those SPAs with bird species as listed in Appendix 1.

Marine Mammals

Harbour Porpoise and Bottlenose Dolphin

The appropriate assessment screening report and determination issued by MARA identified the potential for underwater sound sources from survey activities to be at a level and duration that would cause a significant negative impact on marine mammals. In terms of the conservation objectives of relevant European sites, the target for marine mammals is that underwater noise would not be at a level that would result in a significant negative impact on their populations.

Marine mammals depend on sound for a wide range of functions including navigation, perception of their environment, communication, prey identification and capture, and the detection of predators. The production of underwater noise from the proposed site investigation activities could interfere with these functions by inducing permanent auditory injury (or Permanent Threshold Shift) at very close range or temporary hearing impairment

(or Temporary Threshold Shift – TTS) and disturbance at further distances from the noise source. The frequency of noise produced by the activities (described on Table 1) is within the hearing ranges of Harbour porpoise (200 Hz–180 kHz) and Bottlenose dolphin (150 Hz–160 kHz). Section 3.8.3 details the mitigation measures which must be undertaken during geophysical and geotechnical activities to mitigate any potential risk to Harbour porpoise and Bottlenose dolphin. Taking into account these mitigation measures (see Section 3.8.3) then there will not be significant adverse impacts on marine mammal populations.

Physical habitat disturbance or destruction

The proposed maritime usage has the potential to cause physical disturbance or destruction to protected reef habitat within the Southern Canyons SAC, which overlaps with the proposed MUL area during coring activities. It is recommended to include a condition in any licence granted to ensure geophysical assessments are carried out before geotechnical works, to ensure the avoidance of reef habitat during coring activities.

3.8.2 Assessment of In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed maritime usage must be considered individually and also in combination with other plans or projects. All types of plans or projects that could, in combination with this application, have a significant effect have been considered. This in-combination assessment has been undertaken using professional and scientific judgement and is assessed primarily in terms of potential spatial and temporal impacts. Table 3 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in combination with the proposed maritime usage.

The spatial scope of the in-combination assessment is based on the maximum distance of underwater noise generated by the proposed equipment, and the Effective Deterrence Range² of Harbour porpoise which is most sensitive to underwater noise. This is a distance of 3km. The temporal scope of the in-combination assessment is based on the period over which the activities are proposed, which is two years in this case.

Table 3 Potential sources of impact that could act in-combination with the application.

Potential Impacts	Possible significance of Potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)
Disturbance from underwater noise	Possible temporal impacts on marine mammals and birds that are Qualifying Interests from a number of identified European sites from noise generated from a

² Effective Deterrence Range – the radius of a circular area assumed to be disturbed

	number of proposed activities which will be occurring within their foraging ranges.
Physical habitat disturbance or destruction	Possible habitat disturbance or destruction of habitat to protected reef habitat within the Southern Canyons SAC which overlaps with one of the two proposed red line areas.

Prediction:

The magnitude and extent of identified likely cumulative effects have been predicted below.

Disturbance and displacement from underwater noise

There is the potential for increased underwater noise disturbance effects on birds and marine mammals if other relevant projects, capable of producing similar underwater noise sources, were to take place at the same time.

Physical habitat disturbance or destruction

There is the potential for increased potential disturbance or destruction of physical habitats if other relevant projects, capable of producing similar underwater noise sources, were to take place at the same time.

Identification of Plans or Projects that could act in combination.

A search was carried out on 06/07/2026 of relevant databases including those of the EPA, An Coimisiún Pleanála and MARA's own database for other plans and projects with characteristics that may cause in-combination effects with the proposed maritime usage on the QIs of the European sites identified in Appendix I. The projects shown in Table 4 are within the spatial and temporal scope of the proposed maritime usage.

Table 4: Projects identified with the potential to have in-combination effects given the nature and location of the activities

Application Ref.	Project description	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	Project Status

LIC230033 (MUL) Apollo Submarine cable System Ltd.	Proposed installation and operation of the 2Africa Submarine Cable System within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The planned cable will extend from Widemouth Bay in Cornwall to a number of countries in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East	Overlaps with the more southerly of two red line areas.	Granted on 28/06/2024
MUL230031 Amazon MCS Ltd.	Geophysical survey and site investigations for a proposed transatlantic subsea fibre optic cable having a landfall at Castlefreke, County Cork to evaluate options for the route across the Celtic Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to a landfall on the East coast of the USA.	Overlaps with the more northerly of two red line areas.	Granted on 22/04/2025
MAC250018 Amazon MCS Ltd.	The installation, operation, monitoring, maintenance, repair and decommissioning of a subsea fibre optic cable system.	Overlaps with the more northerly of two red line areas.	Applied for on 11/12/2025

The following plans were identified as having the potential to result in in-combination effects.

- The Climate Action Plan 2025

In-Combination Effects Assessment conclusion

Projects have been identified which include activities in close proximity to the MUL application area. Mitigation is required as a licence condition to avoid such in-combination effects as set out in Section 3.8.2.

3.8.3 Mitigation measures

Mitigation measures for those impacts identified in Section 3.8.1 and 3.8.2 are detailed below. These mitigation measures will be included as conditions of any licence granted.

Underwater noise disturbance

Birds

No specific mitigation required

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

Physical habitat disturbance or destruction

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 reef habitats are avoided.

In-combination mitigation

Prior to the commencement of the Permitted Maritime Usage, the Holder shall coordinate with other authorisation holders carrying out geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities within a 6 km radius of the Licensed Area.

- (ii) Where a vessel to vessel distance of greater than 6 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 6 km, no temporal co-ordination of activities is required.
- (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.

3.8.4 Residual effects

This assessment has identified likely/potential significant impacts on European Sites and their conservation interests in Section 4.1 and recommends mitigation measures as conditions in the Proposed Licence. It is considered that the mitigation measures described and their implementation through licence conditions will remove, or reduce to imperceptible levels, all negative impacts and that residual effects will not arise.

3.8.5 Assessment of Transboundary effects

The mitigation measures proposed as part of this appropriate assessment will mitigate against any transboundary effects on other European sites.

3.8.6 Appropriate assessment conclusion

The appropriate assessment screening process identified likely/potential significant impacts due to underwater noise and physical habitat disturbance or destruction. Likely significant impacts from the proposed activities could not be ruled out, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, without mitigation. The potential for in-combination effects from the proposed activities with other plans and projects could not be ruled out, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, without mitigation.

Mitigation measures were identified to ensure that impacts on European sites and their QIs and SCIs do not occur. Therefore, with adherence to the mitigation measures specified in Section 3.8.3 and in view of best scientific knowledge, and of the sites' conservation objectives, the project, individually, or in-combination with other plans or projects, will not have adverse effects on European sites.

The appropriate assessment determination is detailed in Section 9.

4. Consideration of other maritime users

MARA has had regard to the rights of other users as set out in Section 3 (3)(b) of the MAP Act. Conditions are recommended in the Proposed Licence to ensure minimal disruption to other users including publication of a marine notice and not interfering with third party property. Given the offshore location of the proposed MUL area, there are limited potential interactions with other users outside fishing vessels primarily

5. Site visit

No site visit was undertaken due to the offshore location of this proposed maritime usage area.

6. Public body consultation

Observations on the MUL application were invited from relevant public bodies to ensure that MARA takes account of all other relevant maritime usages and interests in the application area were received. The following tables summarise the observations from public bodies with

a response given below each submission summary. The MARA website should be consulted to view the full details of the observations received.

1. Observations summary – Commissioner for Irish Lights (CIL)
Observations were received from CIL stating no objection to the granting of the licence from a safety of navigation perspective.

MARA response:

MARA notes the observation from the CIL.

2. Observations summary – Geological Survey of Ireland
Observations were received from the GSI which recommended the use of various GSI datasets in conducting EIAR, SEA, planning and scoping processes for developments, plans and policies.

MARA response:

MARA notes the observations of the GSI and the availability of datasets.

3. Observations summary – Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport
The MSO submission referred to MUL230026 which is a dredging application.

MARA Response:

MARA notes the observations of the MSO. A condition requiring the issuing of a marine notice will be included in any licence issued.

4. Observations summary – Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)
A submission was received from the Marine Divisions of DAFM with additional observations provided by the Marine Institute (MI). The submission refers to MARAs obligations under the NMPF, the importance of fisheries and provides a summary of the MIs submission.

MARA response:

MARA notes the submission from DAFM and discusses the separate agency submissions under their own headings below. As regards fishing grounds, there is limited predicted overlap. Additionally, a condition requiring the issuing of a marine notice will be included in any licence issued.

5. Observations summary – Marine Institute (MI)
Observations were received from the Marine Institute who stated their opinion that overall, they would not expect any notable impacts from the proposed operations on sea fisheries

or aquaculture. The MI states that the shallower regions (approx. <400m) of the proposed Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel operations are coincidental with fishing activities and the areas overlap hake, horse mackerel, mackerel, megrim and monkfish nursery and spawning grounds. Considering the short nature of the proposed operations, they should not interfere with fishing activities or impact on fish biology or ecology, assuming any necessary Marine Notices are made, and exact location of the moorings are published after deployment.

MARA response:

MARA notes the submission of the MI. A condition requiring the issuing of a marine notice will be included in any licence issued.

6. Observations summary – Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)

Observations were received from the SFPA, who found no foreseeable impacts on wild fisheries, shellfish or seafood safety.

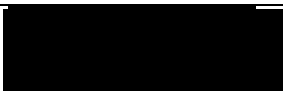
MARA response: MARA notes the response of the SFPA

7. Public consultation

A public consultation was undertaken between 04/06/2026 and 06/07/2026 under Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and under section 117(6)(b) of the MAP Act. No submissions were received.

8. Recommendation

Having considered the information submitted in support of the application, and the criteria specified in the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, as amended, I recommend that a Maritime Usage Licence in accordance with Section 119 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021, as amended, be granted to the National Oceanography Centre, Waterfront Campus, European Way, Southampton, Hampshire, UK. for the purposes of *Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of scientific discovery or research* subject to the conditions in the Proposed Licence, and for a duration of two years:

Signed:	
Prepared by:	Dr Ciar O'Toole Senior Marine Advisor
<u>Date:</u>	<u>06/07/2026</u>

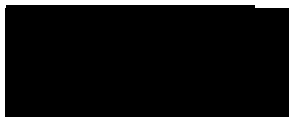
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9. Appropriate Assessment Determination

Having considered:

- the application information submitted by the applicant.
- observations received further to public body consultation and
- this *Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report*,

together with my own assessment, it can be concluded, and I determine, for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Regulation 42(11) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations) 2011 that the proposal to ***Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of scientific discovery or research*** in the Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel, off the South West coast of Ireland (MUL250021) (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 the mitigation measures specified in the foregoing **Section 3.8 – Appropriate Assessment**. These mitigation measures are included in the Proposed Licence and must be incorporated into any consent that may be granted in respect of the respective maritime usage licence application.

Signed:	
Appropriate Assessment Determination by:	John Evans Director of Maritime Usage Licensing
Date:	07/07/2026

Appendix 1

European sites and qualifying interests which were screened in for appropriate assessment along with potential source of impact and site-specific conservation objectives.

European site & site code	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Potential Source of Impact	Site-specific conservation objectives
Slyne Head Islands SAC [Site code IE000328]	300 km approx.	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Slyne Head Islands SAC 000328. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Slyne Head Peninsula SAC [Site code IE002074]	300 km approx.	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Slyne Head Peninsula SAC 002074. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
West Connacht Coast SAC [Site Code IE002998]	300 km approx.	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	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 [Site code IE000495]	380 km approx.	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Duvillaun Islands SAC 000495. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Belgica Mound	70 km approx.	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Possible underwater noise disturbance	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Belgica Mound Province SAC 002327. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife

Province SAC [Site code: IE002327]		<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	from proposed activities	Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Porcupine Bank Canyon SAC [Site code:IE003001]	270 km approx.	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Porcupine Bank Canyon SAC 003001. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
South-west Porcupine Bank SAC [Site code:IE002329]	250 km approx.	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: South-west Porcupine Bank SAC 002329. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Southern Canyons SAC [Site code: IE002278]	Overlaps	Reefs [1170]	Possible physical habitat disturbance or destruction	NPWS (2026) Conservation Objectives: Southern Canyons SAC 002278. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Mers Celtiques – Talus du golfe de Gascogne [Site code FR5302015]		<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	No CO available – similar Irish CO used instead: NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: West Connacht Coast SAC 002998. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Récifs du talus du golfe de Gascogne [Site code FR5302016]		<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	No CO available – similar Irish CO used instead: NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: West Connacht Coast SAC 002998. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
SPAs				

Inishmore SPA [Site code: 0004152]	250 km approx.	Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Inishmore SPA 004152. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Cliffs of Moher SPA [Site code: 0004005]	250 km approx.	Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	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 [Site code: IE0004119]	200 km approx.	Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Loop Head SPA 004119. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Kerry Head SPA [Site code: IE004189]	190 km approx.	Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Kerry Head SPA 004189. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Dingle Peninsula SPA [Site code: IE004153]	150 km approx.	Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Dingle Peninsula SPA 004153. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Blasket Islands SPA [Site code: IE004008]	140 km approx.	Storm Petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>) [A014] Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>) [A183] Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188] Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>) [A204] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Manx Shearwater (<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>) [A013]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Blasket Islands SPA 004008. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Puffin Island SPA [004003]	120 km approx.	Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Manx Shearwater (<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>) [A013] Storm Petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>) [A014] Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>) [A204]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Puffin Island SPA 004003. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Iveragh Peninsula SPA [Site code: IE004154]	120 km approx.	Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Iveragh Peninsula SPA 004154. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Skelligs SPA [Site code: IE004007]	110 km approx.	Storm Petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>) [A014] Gannet (<i>Morus bassanus</i>) [A016] Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188] Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>) [A204] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Manx Shearwater (<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>) [A013]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Skelligs SPA 004007. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Deenish Island and Scariff Island SPA [Site code: IE004175]	110 km approx.	Storm Petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>) [A014] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Manx Shearwater (<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>) [A013]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Deenish Island and Scariff Island SPA 004175. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Beara Peninsula SPA [Site code: IE004155]	100 km approx.	Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Beara Peninsula SPA 004155. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
The Bull and the Cow Rocks SPA [Site code: 004066]	100 km approx.	Storm Petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>) [A014] Gannet (<i>Morus bassanus</i>) [A016] Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>) [A204]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: The Bull and The Cow Rocks SPA 004066. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Cruagh Island SPA [Site code: IE004170]	320 km approx.	Manx Shearwater (<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>) [A013]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Cruagh Island SPA 004170. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
High Island, Inishark and Davillaun SPA [Site code: IE004144]	320 km approx.	Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: High Island, Inishark and Davillaun SPA 004144. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Clare Island SPA [Site code: IE004136]	350 km approx.	Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Clare Island SPA 004136. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Duvillaun Islands SPA [Site code: IE004111]	320 km approx.	Storm Petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>) [A014] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009]	Possible underwater noise disturbance from proposed activities	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Duvillaun Islands SPA 004111. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.