

Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate

Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	23/04/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL260002
Applicant:	University College Cork, MaREI Centre, Sustainability Institute, Beaufort Building, Ringaskiddy, Cork, P43C573.		
Type of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:	<i>Schedule 7(2). Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of scientific discovery or research</i>		
Location of proposed maritime usage:	Cork Harbour		
Licence application received:	12/01/2026		

1. Background

University College Cork (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 proposed maritime usage will enable the UCC research project titled CABLES: Capturing elasmobranch Behaviour in eLElectromagnetic fieldS. The project will investigate the effect of an electromagnetic field (EMF) from an existing buried high voltage cable on a sensitive elasmobranch species; the lesser spotted catshark.

2. Description of maritime usage and local site characteristics

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

Table 1: Description of proposed maritime usage

Details of the enclosure	Research activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 No. nylon mesh enclosures each 50 m x 15 m x 5 m (40 mm mesh size) • mooring system composed of 4 x 200 kg of scrape chain with 12 mm polysteel rope • Four lighted navigation buoys • 6 No. acoustic receivers (hydrophones) moored on plastic pole embedded in an ~80 kg concrete block outside the perimeter of the enclosure • Total MUL area is 52,400 m² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement and behaviour of lesser spotted catshark will be tracked within the monitored enclosure under EMF exposed (i.e., treatment) and non-EMF exposed (i.e., control) conditions • EMF exposed enclosure will lie on top of an existing buried high voltage AC cable, and the control enclosure will be removed from the cable and EMF. • Catshark tagged with acoustic transmitter (180 kHz) and fish transmitters and receiver sync tags emit coded pulses at 143 decibels • 7 metre rigid inflatable boat will be used to monitor the enclosure daily.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A charter vessel with a HIAB crane and hauler will be used for all deployment and recovery activity* • Structure and moorings will be completely removed after the study* 	<p>Proposed MUL duration is 2 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 months to deploy enclosures • 12 months to carry out tracking experiments • 9 months contingency in case of weather and/or other challenges • 1-2 days for removal

*The purpose of the application is marine environmental surveys for the purposes of research. The deposit and removal of the enclosure are ancillary usages, though their potential impacts are considered as part of this assessment.

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The proposed MUL area is in the northeast portion of Cork Harbour (see Figure 1). The seabed of the proposed MUL area is composed of coarse soft sediments with a depth range of 2.5 m – 6 m depending on the tidal cycle.



Figure 1: Proposed MUL area, shown in red (applicant’s map)

3. Identification of relevant European sites

The MUL application is subject to screening for appropriate assessment in accordance with Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended, to determine if it alone, or in-combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European sites, in view of best scientific knowledge and the conservation objectives of the sites. The applicant submitted a Supporting Information for Screening of Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report in support of the application which was referred to during this assessment.

The proposed maritime usage is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s). The European site listed on Table 2 has been considered for appropriate assessment, given the nature, scale and Zone of Influence of the maritime usage, the conservation objectives of the European sites and using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.

Table 2 - Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests and site-specific conservation objectives.

European site & site code	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site Screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Cork Harbour SPA [004030]	1	<p>Little Grebe (<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>) [A004] Great Crested Grebe (<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>) [A005] Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) [A017] Grey Heron (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>) [A028] Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>) [A048] Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) [A052] Pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>) [A054] Red-breasted Merganser (<i>Mergus serrator</i>) [A069] Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) [A130] Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>) [A141] Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>) [A149] Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156] Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>) [A157] Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>) [A160] Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>) [A162] Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179]</p>	<p>Yes from visual disturbance, above and below water noise disturbance – however it will not be significant (see Table 3)</p>	No	<p>NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA 004030. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht</p>

			<p>Common Gull (<i>Larus canus</i>) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>) [A183] Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193] Wigeon (<i>Mareca penelope</i>) [A855] Shoveler (<i>Spatula clypeata</i>) [A857] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</p>		
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4. Assessment of likely significant effects

Table 3 Potential direct and indirect impacts that may have an effect on the conservation objectives of European sites, taking into account the nature and scale of the proposed maritime usage.

Potential Impacts	Possible significance of Potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)
Visual and above water noise disturbance	The MUL application area is within a busy harbour and port area. The minimal additional vessel activity associated with the application is unlikely to cause significant visual and noise disturbance to birds.
Disturbance from underwater noise	The fish transmitter (180 kHz) will emit a coded pulse every 2 seconds. The receivers emit coded pulses every 25-330 seconds at 143 dB. The sound produced is above the hearing range of diving birds as well as fish, invertebrates, and most marine mammals. Harbour porpoise are capable of hearing the sound but it is at the highest end of their hearing range and the intensity is below that which would induce threshold shifts. Thus underwater noise is unlikely to have a significant impact.
Habitat disturbance or loss	The mesh enclosure will result in very minimal habitat disturbance. Potential impacts on habitats are restricted to the immediate area of the anchor and moorings. There will be no impact on Annex I habitats.
Deterioration in water quality	The activities and standard protocols in place onboard vessels will not have any impact on water quality.

In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed maritime usage must be considered individually and 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.

The spatial scope of the in-combination assessment is Cork Harbour, as projects within this area have the potential to result in in-combination impacts and the temporal scope is based on the 2-year period over which the activities are proposed. A search of relevant databases (including for instance MARA, EPA and planning authority websites) was undertaken on the

22/04/2026. Table 4 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in-combination with the proposed maritime usage.

Table 4: List of projects which were considered for potential in-combination impacts on European sites

Application Ref.	Project description	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	Project Status
MUL230029 Department of Defence	MUL for dredging at Haulbowline naval base	3.5	Licensed
MUL240048 Uisce Éireann	MUL for site investigations (ADCP deployment for modelling study)	overlap	Licensed
MUL240035 Gas Networks Ireland	MUL for site investigations (SAM and ADCP deployment for modelling study)	0.6	Licensed
MUL240042 Port of Cork Company	MUL for site investigations including geophysical and geotechnical surveys	2	Licensed
MUL250008 Port of Cork Company	MUL for site investigations including geotechnical surveys	4	Applied
S0013-03 Port of Cork Company	EPA Dumping at Sea permit – Port of Cork maintenance dredging works	0.6	Permitted
An Coimisiún Pleanála reference: OA04.321875	Proposed redevelopment of port facilities including dredging activities	5	Granted
MUL240036 EirGrid	MUL for site investigations	6	Granted

The following plans, related to the development of the maritime environment were also considered:

- The Climate Action Plan 2025,
- River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022–2027,
- Port of Cork Masterplan 2050,
- Cork Development Plan 2022–2028, and
- South-Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan.

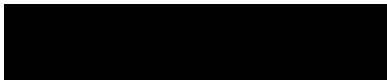
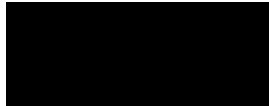
The potential impacts from the proposed maritime usage have been considered in-combination with those projects listed on Table 4. The underwater noise produced from the proposed maritime usage will be above the hearing range of sensitive species or at an intensity that would not combine with other projects to result in significant underwater noise impacts. Similarly, any habitat disturbance will be very minimal. Any in-combination disturbance due to additional vessels operating as a result of the proposed maritime usage will be very minor, in the context of the baseline environment. Water quality will not be negatively affected by this proposed maritime usage and standard preventative controls aboard vessels will be in place for this and for the other projects to prevent water quality impacts.

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application and the plans listed above and projects listed on Table 4 on the conservation objectives of the European sites considered in this report can be excluded at this stage.

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?

No

5. Screening Determination Statement

<p>The assessment of significant effects.</p> <p>Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, on the basis of the information on file, and having regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature and scale of the proposed development, • The distance to the nearest European sites, and • The absence of potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects, <p>it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by University College Cork, MaREI Centre, Sustainability Institute, Beaufort Building, Ringaskiddy, Cork, P43C573 to carry out Schedule 7(2) marine environmental surveys for the purposes of scientific discovery or research in Cork Harbour (MUL260002) will not require Stage 2 appropriate assessment. It can 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 a European site.</p>		
Signature and Date of Recommending Officer	 Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor	23/04/2026
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director of Assessment, Research and Data Unit	24/04/2026