

MARA

An tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuiri
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority

Addressing Barriers To Delivery Of Critical Infrastructure MARA Action Plan

March 2026



INTRODUCTION

The [Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan](#), published by Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, identifies twelve barriers to effective delivery of critical infrastructure in Ireland. The barriers are as follows:

- 1) Public Acceptance
- 2) Increased Regulatory Burden
- 3) Risk Aversion
- 4) Increasing Judicial Reviews
- 5) Consequences of Judicial reviews
- 6) Insufficiently Co-ordinated Approvals
- 7) Slow Processes
- 8) Inconsistent Planning Decisions and Timelines
- 9) Prioritisation and Co-ordination of Infrastructure
- 10) Procurement Challenges
- 11) Uncertainty of Funding and Project Pipeline
- 12) Construction Sector Capacity and Productivity

MARA has a key role in addressing four of these barriers – Increased Regulatory Burden, Insufficiently Co-ordinated Approvals, Slow Processes and Prioritisation and Co-ordination of Infrastructure. The information below sets out how MARA has already implemented measures to address the barriers, where work is underway and future measures that can be taken to address the barriers.

The measures below are presented with the corresponding actions in the Accelerating Infrastructure Task Force and Action Plan, which should be referred to at all times for full details of each action.

Increased Regulatory Burden

Multiple, distinct and often overlapping regulatory processes increase complexity without necessarily improving outcomes.

Actions completed by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan ¹
Applied DCEE circulars to identify activities that did not require a MUL or a MAC from MARA for minimal activities, emergency works, ORE developments outside DMAP areas. Returned applications on hand that were for activities not considered maritime usages, in light of the circular, reducing the number of applications in the queue for assessment.	9
Section 90 declarations of local authorities and Uisce Éireann fit and proper persons for the purposes of MAC assessment – reduces application burden for applicants and MARA assessment timelines.	9
Revised application guidance for MACs and MULs to assist applicants preparing applications - Reduces the number of Requests for Additional Information required, and associated processing timelines.	11
Revised Financial Capability Assessment Guidance and associated application forms for MACs.	11
Completed a detailed review of the template for Maritime Area Consents.	9
Developed an internal system to standardise proportionate conditions for both MACs and MULs. A standard bank of conditions has been established for both types of authorisations, further improving consistency, and speed of issuing MACs and MULs.	11
Publication of MARA Map / Maritime Area Database (building block behind the map). It provides a visual of the locations of all MARA authorisations, i.e. MACs and MULs, which facilitates applicants developing applications and additionally improves transparency in MARAs authorisation processes.	9, 26
Consultation with the State Claims Agency in relation to standard insurance conditions.	9

¹ Refer to Appendix 1 and [Accelerating Infrastructure Task Force Report and Action Plan](#)

Actions underway by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Complete Section 90 fit and proper person assessments for state agencies, e.g. Irish Rail, Eirgrid, Gas Networks Ireland and ESB Networks. This will reduce processing times for these MAC applications by 30% and reduce the regulatory burden on applicants.	9
Identified substantial amendments to the MAP Act which will enable MARA to fulfil our statutory functions, enable MARA to provide applicants with more clarity and improve processing timelines – including exempted activities for MULs, ability to differentiate between material and non-material amendments, treatment of emergency works.	2, 9
Phase 2 of the Maritime Area Viewer to be delivered Q1 2026 which will integrate user feedback and additional layers requested including the admiralty charts. Maritime Area Viewer to be shared with ACP and coastal planning authorities to support cross agency consistency of decision making, with regard to spatial awareness of existing development and applications.	11, 26
In preparation for transfer of EPA Dumping at Sea function, assess consistency and overlap with existing MARAs authorisations for dredging.	4, 11
Updating internal decision-making processes to take into account the main principles arising from the Supreme Court judgment in the Coolglass case [2026 IESC 27] as they apply to the work of MARA	6
Co-operation agreements for Marine Institute and An Coimisiún Pleanála are currently being prepared.	9
Engagement with An Coimisiún Pleanála to align strategic priorities of MARA with those of the An Coimisiún Pleanála preparing development consents.	8, 11

Future actions	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Work with DCEE to identify and implement high priority regulations (as facilitated by the MAP Act) to reduce regulatory burden – e.g., exempted activities, notifiable activities, material and non-material amendments to MULs and MACs, activities that are exempt from requiring a MAC.	2, 9
Streamline the regulatory process and remove the need for separate dredging and dumping authorisations (relevant for marine transport and ORE developments). The streamlining of authorisations required to fulfil both the requirements of the MAP Act and the Dumping at Sea Act will be crucial to reduce the administrative burden associated with regulating both capital and maintenance dredging. Both forms of dredging are essential components of offshore renewable energy and marine transport (port maintenance).	2, 4, 9
MARA will engage consultants to undertake an independent review of our Appropriate Assessment process.	4, 9

Insufficiently Co-ordinated Approvals

Limited coordination on licences, consents and permissions leads to duplication of effort and sequential processes that could be conducted in parallel, saving time/money.

Actions completed by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Established the Maritime Regulators Liaison Group which is focussed on fostering co-operation between regulators and identifying common issues across all regulatory agencies operating in the maritime space.	9, 11
Engaged external consultants in 2025 to support organisational optimisation and workforce planning. The work involved analysis of the organisation design, future personnel needs and business processes.	9
MARA established its Stakeholder Forum in January 2026 to facilitate engagement with our stakeholders, feedback on MARA activities and a forum to implement improved engagement.	9
MARA has signed co-operation agreements with Southeast Technological University and Commissioner for Irish Lights in 2025.	9

Actions underway by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Carry out MARA's role as a prescribed body under Planning and Development Acts and is notified under specific pieces of legislation (e.g. wastewater discharge authorisations, dumping at sea, industrial emissions, etc). MARA prepares submissions in response to these notifications to strengthen decision making processes.	8

Future actions	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Make the Maritime Area Viewer available to other relevant consenting bodies to improve coordination of decisions, An Coimisiún Pleanála and the Coastal Planning Authorities.	11, 26
Move the statutory public consultation required for MULs to earlier in the assessment process would significantly reduce timelines for licence assessment, as well as enabling the consultation to inform the decision-making process in a more meaningful manner.	11
Introduce public body consultation for MACs to facilitate decision making, and coordination with other decision-making agencies impacted by MARA decisions.	11

Slow Processes

Unclear that current procedures on project assessment add value that is commensurate with the time burden imposed.

Actions completed by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Established a cross-unit task force to undertake an end-to-end process review of main decision-making activities (MAC and MUL assessment) to identify opportunities for efficiencies.	9,11
Established dedicated MAC and MUL processing teams to enhance operating efficiencies.	9, 11
Development of standard operating procedures and standardised templates for correspondence, assessment reports and authorisations which has increased efficiency significantly.	9
Streamlined assessment and reporting activities around the processing both types of authorisations (MACs and MULs), e.g. reducing the number of reports supporting assessment decision making, to reduce processing times.	4, 11
Non-statutory public body consultation in respect of MULs at the beginning of the application assessment process – better informed decisions and reduced timelines between close of public consultation and minded-to decision.	11
Building capacity in staff – targeted training on appropriate assessment.	11
Developed and implemented internally a Maritime Area Viewer. The viewer is being used as part of the assessment processes for MACs and MULs, and removes manual steps out of the process, improving assessment.	9, 11, 26
Streamlined pre-application meetings which have resulted in a reduction in waiting times by an estimated 50%. Improvements have also reduced associated resource inputs.	9
Applied administrative timelines for applicants to submit responses to Requests for Additional Information and commencement of public consultation.	9

Actions underway by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
MARA is in the final stages of completing a digital transformation roadmap that will develop our ICT architecture and prioritise core regulatory systems including MAC and MUL workflow management.	11, 26
Phase 2 of the Maritime Area Viewer is due to be delivered Q1 2026 which will integrate user feedback and additional layers requested including the admiralty charts.	11, 26

Future actions	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Communicate the improvements to our authorisation processes that have been established to applicants and broader stakeholders to instil confidence in our stakeholders of MARAs ability to meet definitive timelines.	11
Implementation of identified data and ICT systems to support regulatory functions, including support for Planning Register.	9, 26

Prioritisation and Co-ordination of Infrastructure

Semi-state companies and regulatory agencies are often limited in their ability to prioritise and to consider wider societal aims in decision making.

Actions completed by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
MARA has developed a dynamic and structured system for the prioritisation of all MAC and MUL applications to provide for effective decision making and to ensure that applications of national strategic importance are prioritised and delivered in a timely manner. Details of the prioritisation system are published on the MARA website.	9
Regular meetings with Uisce Éireann to ensure MARA is informed of their priority projects relating to critical infrastructure or changes to priorities as a result of other external factors.	11

Actions underway by MARA	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Actively working to incorporate the <i>Accelerating Infrastructure</i> requirements into our work planning processes.	9

Future actions	Corresponding Action in Accelerating Infrastructure Action Plan
Facilitate regular meetings with other relevant state bodies to ensure MARA is informed of key projects that enable delivery of critical infrastructure under their statutory functions e.g. ESB Networks, Irish Rail, EirGrid.	11

Glossary

ACP	An Coimisiún Pleanála
DCEE	Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment
DMAP	Designated maritime Area Plan
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
MARA	Maritime Area Regulatory Authority
MAC	Maritime Area Consent
MUL	Maritime Usage Licence
ORE	Offshore Renewable Energy

Appendix 1

Relevant actions from the Accelerating Infrastructure Task Force Report and Action Plan

Action	Details
Action 2	Enact Legislation to Accelerate Critical Infrastructure and Provide for Emergency Powers.
Action 4:	Progress Domestic Reform to Environmental Assessment in Parallel with EU Simplification Agenda.
Action 6	Respond Rapidly to Precedent
Action 8	Develop and Publish National Planning Statement(s) for Critical Infrastructure.
Action 9	Establish a Regulatory Simplification Unit.
Action 11	Reform processes Applied to Critical Infrastructure within Agencies/Regulators.
Action 26	Apply AI and Digital Tools to Support Infrastructure Rollout.