

## Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate

### Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

<b>To:</b>	Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor	<b>From:</b>	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Marine Analyst
<b>Date:</b>	14/05/2026	<b>Maritime Usage Licence Application No:</b>	MUL260007
<b>Applicant:</b>	Uisce Éireann, Colvill House, 24-26 Talbot Street, Mountjoy, Dublin, D01 NP86		
<b>Type of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:</b>	3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.		
<b>Location of proposed maritime usage:</b>	Soldiers Point on the southern side of the Castletown Estuary in County Louth.		
<b>Licence application received:</b>	20/04/2026		

## **1. Background**

Uisce Éireann (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 site investigation, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act). The marine usage is required to characterise existing ecological conditions, establish a robust environmental baseline, and support Appropriate Assessment screening and impact evaluation for Dundalk Bay Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area, Ramsar site, and proposed Natural Heritage Area, for the Dundalk WWTP Capacity Upgrade Project.

## **2. Description of maritime usage and local site characteristics**

### **2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage**

The proposed MUL overlaps the Castletown, Ballymascanlan and Inner Dundalk Bay estuaries, County Louth. The MUL area is directly adjacent to the high-water mark.

The proposed maritime usage is limited to ecological and benthic surveys within the receiving environment surrounding the existing treated effluent outfall at the mouth of the Castletown Estuary. The SI works are required to characterise existing marine and intertidal habitats, sediments, and benthic communities within the survey area.

The proposed maritime usage will comprise a combination of intertidal and subtidal ecological investigations undertaken using both on-foot and vessel-based sampling methods, broken into Phase I and Phase II.

Phase I will comprise intertidal walkover inspections to identify and map broad intertidal habitat types, record key species and features of conservation interest, and grab samples for sediment characterisation (Table 1). Intertidal habitat and biotope mapping will be completed during mean low water spring tide conditions, with habitat boundaries, ecological features, and sampling locations recorded using handheld GPS, supported by photographic records and field notes. Intertidal surveys will be undertaken on foot where safe access conditions allow. In areas where soft sediment conditions or tidal constraints present a safety risk, surveys and sampling may be undertaken from a shallow draft vessel or RIB (length  $\leq 12\text{m}$ ) during high water conditions.

Phase II surveys will involve quantitative ecological sampling along defined transects using quadrats and standard ecological recording methods to classify and map intertidal biotopes. Quantitative sampling will include quadrat assessments, macrofaunal analysis, and sediment characterisation.

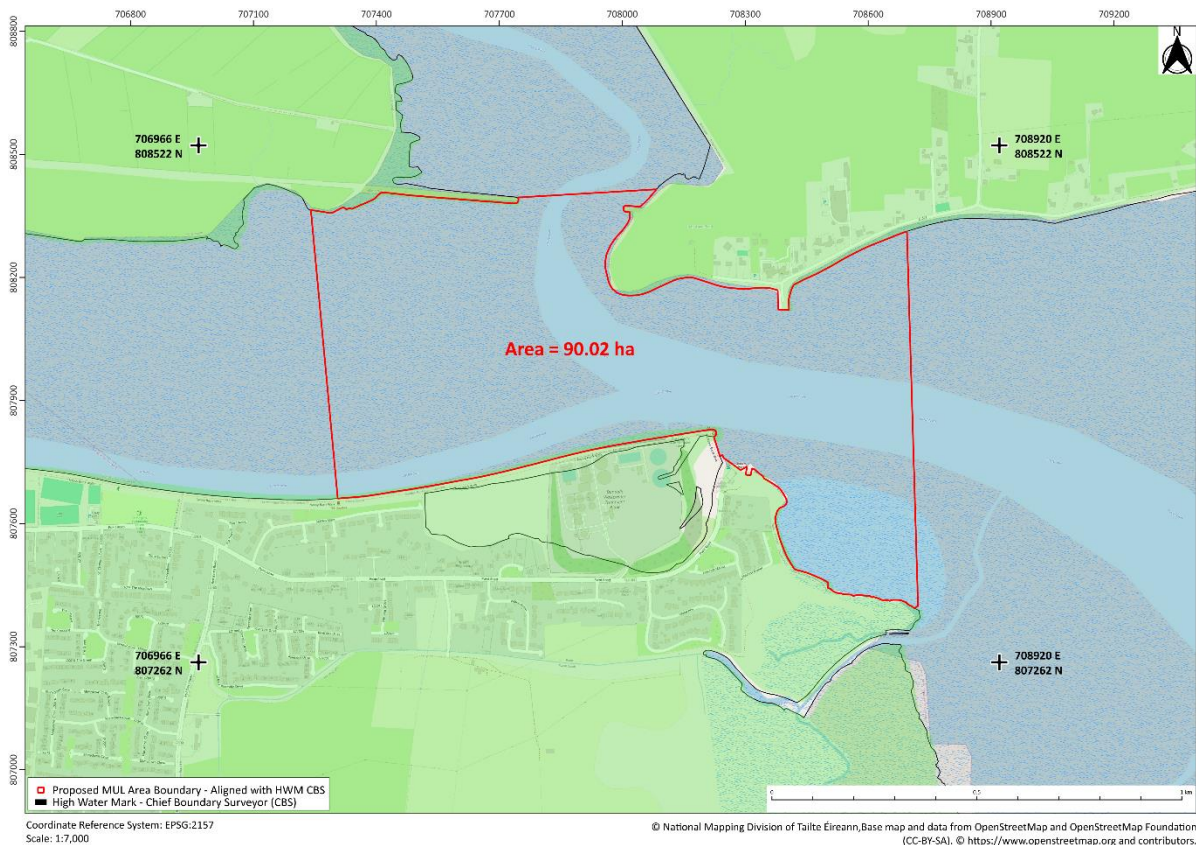
Subtidal surveys will involve targeted benthic grab sampling and sediment cores at a limited number of predefined stations within the survey area. Sampling will be undertaken using a vessel deployed Van Veen grab sampler (Table 1).

All survey data will be processed and digitised using GIS to produce detailed habitat and benthic mapping outputs.

The marine usage field survey is expected to be completed within approximately one week. The proposed MUL duration is one year to provide sufficient flexibility for completion of the maritime usage and to accommodate unforeseen weather and tidal constraints. MARA assessed the proposed maritime usage over a 12-month period to ensure all potential impacts were included in the assessment

**Table 1:** Summary of proposed Phase I and Phase II survey methodologies and timescales within the proposed MUL area.

Survey Phase	Activity	Description	Timescale
<b>Phase 1</b>	Intertidal Walkover Survey	Intertidal walkover surveys along four separate shoreline sections (approx. 500m each) during MLWS tidal conditions. Habitat types, biotopes, and ecological features will be mapped using GPS, photographs, and fieldnotes, with outputs digitised in GIS.	One week
<b>Phase II</b>	Quantitative Intertidal Survey	Four intertidal transects will be surveyed. Van Veen grab samples (0.025m <sup>2</sup> ) will be collected from upper, middle, and lower shore stations for macrofaunal analysis, particle size analysis and total organic carbon assessment. Quadrat surveys and digovers will also be undertaken to assess species abundance and sediment characteristics.	
<b>Phase I + II</b>	Data Recording and QA	Sampling locations and ecological features will be georeferenced using handheld GPS. Photographic records and field notes will support habitat characterisation and reporting.	



**Figure 1:** The proposed Maritime Usage Licence area.

## 2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The proposed MUL area covers 90.02ha and directly adjoins the townlands of Bellurgan to the north-east, Marsh North to the north-west, and Point to the south. The coastal environment is characterised as an estuarine and muddy wetland, including extensive tidal flats and saltmarsh (1310 *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand and 1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*) habitats. The site consists of intertidal and nearshore waters with average water depths ranging from 0-5m. The seascape character and type are Northeastern Irish Sea Islands and Beaches and Broad Estuarine Bays and Complex Low Plateau and Cliff Coastline. Sea surface visibility from adjacent land is estimated at 31-40%. Sediments within the MUL area are dominated by muddy fine sands and fine sand community complexes, reflecting the sheltered estuarine conditions of the Inner Dundalk Bay, Castletown and Ballymascanlan Estuaries.

### **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 sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)) listed on Table 2 have 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 mode

**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
Dundalk Bay SAC [000455]	Overlaps	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i> ) [1330] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Mediterranean salt meadows ( <i>Juncetalia maritimi</i> ) [1410]	No significant S-P-R	No.	<a href="#">NPWS (2011)</a> Conservation Objectives: Dundalk Bay SAC 000455. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Carlingford Shore SAC [002306]	~13km	Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]	No significant S-P-R	No	<a href="#">NPWS (2013)</a> Conservation Objectives: Carlingford Shore SAC 002306. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Carlingford Mountain SAC [000453]	~2km	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe) [6230] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140] Alkaline fens [7230] Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels ( <i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i> ) [8110] Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210] Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]	No significant S-P-R	No	<u>NPWS (2021)</u> Conservation Objectives: Carlingford Mountain SAC 000453. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Clogher Head SAC [001459]	~25km	Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] European dry heaths [4030]	No significant S-P-R	No	<u>NPWS (2017)</u> Conservation Objectives: Carlingford Mountain SAC 000453. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC [001957]	~30km	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]	No significant S-P-R	No	<u>NPWS (2012)</u> Conservation Objectives: Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC 001957. Version 1.0. National Parks and

		<p><i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritima</i>) [1330] Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes) [2120] Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]</p>			Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC [002299]	~30km	<p>Alkaline fens [7230] Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0] <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]</p>	No significant S-P-R	No	<p><a href="#">NPWS (2021)</a> Conservation Objectives: River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC 002299. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.</p>
Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC [003000]	~48km	<p><i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] Reefs [1170]</p>	No significant S-P-R	No.	<p><a href="#">NPWS (2013)</a> Conservation Objectives: Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC 003000. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.</p>
Dundalk Bay SPA [004026]	Overlaps	<p>Great Crested Grebe (<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>) [A005] Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>) [A043] Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) [A046]</p>	No significant S-P-R	No.	<p><a href="#">NPWS (2011)</a> Conservation Objectives: Dundalk Bay SPA 004026. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife</p>

		Shelduck ( <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> ) [A048] Teal ( <i>Anas crecca</i> ) [A052] Mallard ( <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> ) [A053] Pintail ( <i>Anas acuta</i> ) [A054] Common Scoter ( <i>Melanitta nigra</i> ) [A065] Red-breasted Merganser ( <i>Mergus serrator</i> ) [A069] Oystercatcher ( <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> ) [A130] Ringed Plover ( <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> ) [A137] Golden Plover ( <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> ) [A140] Grey Plover ( <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> ) [A141] Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> ) [A142] Knot ( <i>Calidris canutus</i> ) [A143] 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] Common Gull ( <i>Larus canus</i> ) [A182] Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]			Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Carlingford Lough SPA [004078]	~12km	Light-bellied Brent Goose ( <i>Branta bernicla hrota</i> ) [A046] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	No significant S-P-R	No	<a href="#">NPWS (2013)</a> Conservation Objectives: Carlingford Lough SPA 004078.

					Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Stabannan-Braganstown SPA [004091]	~14km	Greylag Goose ( <i>Anser anser</i> ) [A043]	No significant S-P-R	No	<a href="#">NPWS (2022)</a> Conservation Objectives: Stabannan-Braganstown SPA 004091. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
North-West Irish Sea SPA [004236]	~18km	Red-throated Diver ( <i>Gavia stellata</i> ) [A001] Great Northern Diver ( <i>Gavia immer</i> ) [A003] Fulmar ( <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> ) [A009] Manx Shearwater ( <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> ) [A013] Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> ) [A017] Shag ( <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> ) [A018] Common Scoter ( <i>Melanitta nigra</i> ) [A065] Black-headed Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> ) [A179] Common Gull ( <i>Larus canus</i> ) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull ( <i>Larus fuscus</i> ) [A183] Herring Gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> ) [A184] Great Black-backed Gull ( <i>Larus marinus</i> ) [A187]	No significant S-P-R	No	<a href="#">NPWS (2023)</a> Conservation Objectives: North-West Irish Sea SPA 004236. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> ) [A188] Roseate Tern ( <i>Sterna dougallii</i> ) [A192] Common Tern ( <i>Sterna hirundo</i> ) [A193] Arctic Tern ( <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> ) [A194] Guillemot ( <i>Uria aalge</i> ) [A199] Razorbill ( <i>Alca torda</i> ) [A200] Puffin ( <i>Fratercula arctica</i> ) [A204] Little Gull ( <i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i> ) [A862] Little Tern ( <i>Sternula albifrons</i> ) [A885]			
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#### 4. Assessment of likely significant effects

**Table 3:** Identification of 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 from vessel use on bird species	Not significant – short duration and limited usage.
Physical disturbance from intertidal and subtidal grab samples	Not significant due to limited footprint on fine sand and mud habitat.
Sediment disturbance impacting saltmarsh habitats	Not significant - highly localised, temporary and reversible.
Water quality alteration	Not significant - temporary and highly localised sediment disturbance.
Habitat modification	Not significant - no permanent habitat modification or loss.
Alteration of foraging or roosting habitats	Not significant – short duration.

#### 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.

The spatial scope of the in-combination assessment is the red line boundary. The temporal scope of the in-combination assessment is based on the period over which the marine usage is proposed. e.g. the temporal scope is one year.

A search of relevant databases, including MARA, Foreshore, planning, and EPA authorisation databases, was undertaken on 14/05/26. 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 to have potential in-combination impacts on European sites.

Application Ref.	Project description	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	Project Status
FS004510	Uisce Eireann Outfall pipes	overlap	Consented
FS004505	Improvements in Dundalk Harbour, extending from the railway bridge opposite to the premises of the Dundalk, Newry and Greenore Railway Company	< 2	Consented

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,
- Draft Dundalk Local Area Plan 2024-2030
- Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027


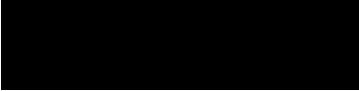

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application and the plans listed above and projects listed on Table 4 on the conservation objectives of the European sites considered in this report can be excluded at this stage. The proposed maritime usage is temporary, small-scale and non-intrusive, comprising intertidal site walkovers, and benthic grab samples from a small, low-speed vessel. The projects listed in Table 4 highlight existing operational infrastructure, with no likelihood of significant in-combination impacts.

Due to the limited spatial and temporal scope of the proposed maritime usage, coupled with the lack of potential in-combination effects from those projects listed in Table 4, likely significant impacts on the conservation objectives of European sites can be excluded.

**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, the information on file, and having regard to the potential for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual and above water noise disturbance from vessel use on bird species</li> <li>• Physical disturbance from intertidal and subtidal grab samples</li> <li>• Sediment disturbance impacting saltmarsh habitats</li> <li>• Water quality alteration</li> <li>• Habitat modification</li> <li>• Alteration of foraging or roosting habitats</li> </ul> <p>it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by Uisce Éireann, Colvill House, 24-26 Talbot Street, Mountjoy, Dublin, D01 NP86 to carry out Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000 at Castletown Estuary, County Louth (MUL260007) will not require Stage 2 appropriate assessment.</p> <p>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>		
<p>Signature and Date of Recommending Officer</p>	 <p>Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail          Marine Analyst</p>	<p>14/05/2026</p>
<p>Signature and Date of Decision Maker</p>	 <p>Senior Marine Advisor </p>	<p>15/05/2026</p>