

Maritime Usage Licensing and Planning Advisory Directorate Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report			
To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Marine Analyst
Date:	10/06/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL260007
MUL Applicant Name:		Uisce Éireann	
MUL Applicant Registered Address:		Colvill House, 24-26 Talbot Street, Mountjoy, Dublin, D01 NP86	
Licence application received:		20/04/2026	
Types of maritime usage activities in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:		3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.	
Location of proposed maritime usages:		Soldiers Point on the southern side of the Castletown Estuary in County Louth.	
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening		EIA not required (EIA Screening Form dated 15/05/2026)	
1st request for additional information (RAI) issued:		28/05/2026	Response to 1 st RAI received 02/06/2026
Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening		15/05/2026	
Notice requesting Natura Impact Statement (NIS) issued:		Not applicable	NIS received: Not applicable
Public body consultation:		23/04/2026 – 22/05/2026	Observations from public bodies received: Six
Public consultation:		Not applicable	Submissions from the public received: Not applicable

Contents

1.	Background.....	2
2.	Location and Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage	3
2.1	Brief description of the site characteristics	5
3.	Assessment.....	5
3.1	National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)	5
3.2	Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2014/52/EU) (EIA Directive).....	7
3.3	National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)	7
3.4	Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended.....	7
3.5	Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC).....	8
3.6	Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)	9
3.7	Annex IV species	10
3.8	Appropriate Assessment Screening	11
4.	Consideration of other maritime users	11
4.1	Commercial Vessels	11
4.2	Commercial Fisheries	11
4.3	Recreational Users	11
5.	Site visit	12
6.	Public body consultation	12
7.	Recommendation.....	15

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 purpose of site investigations, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 as amended (the MAP Act). The proposed maritime usage is required to characterise existing ecological conditions, establish a robust environmental baseline, and inform Appropriate Assessment screening and impact assessment for Dundalk Bay SAC, Dundalk Bay SPA, Dundalk Bay Ramsar Site, and Dundalk Bay pNHA, in support of the Dundalk Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) Capacity Upgrade Project.

2. Location and Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage

The proposed marine usage comprises site investigations (SI) associated with the proposed upgrade and expansion of the existing Dundalk WWTP, located at the convergence of the Castletown, Ballymascanlan, and Inner Dundalk Bay estuaries, County Louth (Figure 1). The proposed marine usage is required to characterise existing marine and intertidal habitats, sediments, and benthic communities within the receiving environment surrounding the existing treated effluent outfall at the mouth of the Castletown Estuary.

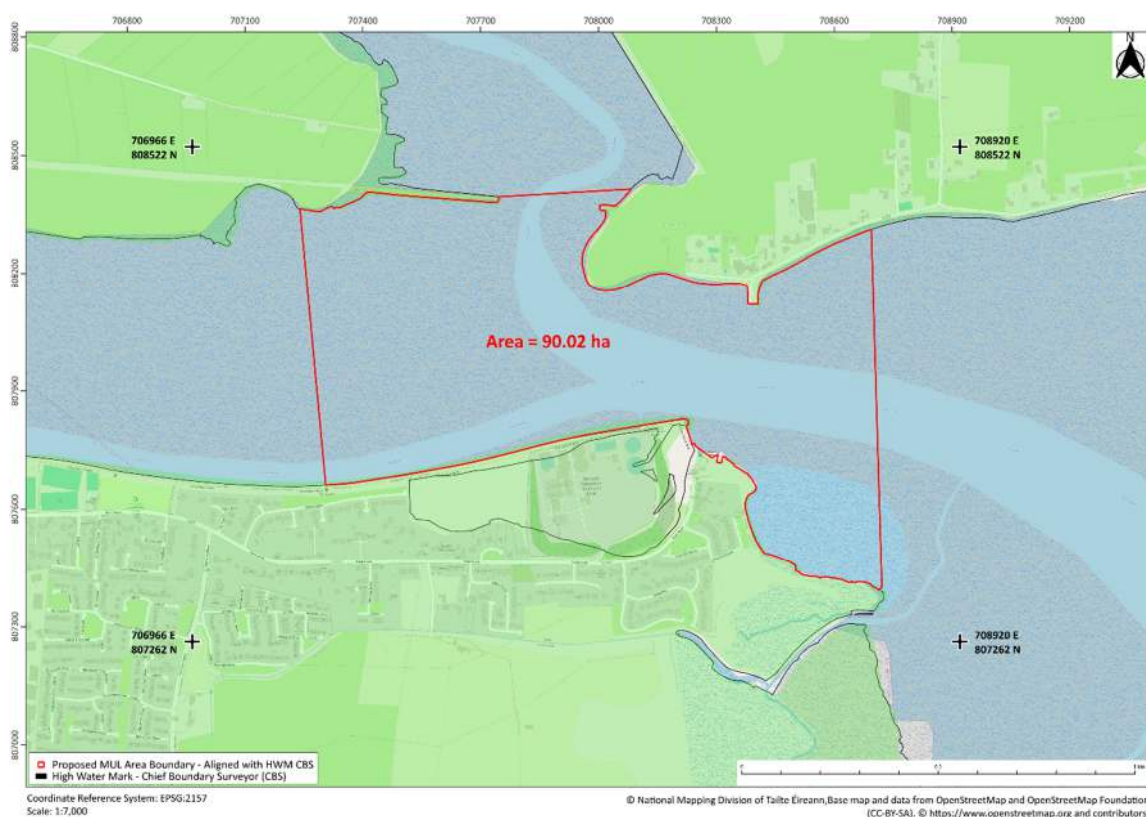


Figure 1: Proposed Maritime Usage Licence area.

The proposed maritime usage consists of ecological and benthic surveys undertaken using a combination of standard shore-based and vessel-based sampling methods. Surveys will comprise intertidal habitat mapping via walkover surveys, together with targeted quantitative intertidal and subtidal benthic sampling.

Intertidal surveys (Phase I) will comprise walkover inspections. Habitat and biotope mapping will be undertaken by the Applicant during suitable low spring tide conditions, generally on foot where safe access allows. A shallow-draft vessel or rigid inflatable boat (RIB) may be used where shore access is not possible.

Quantitative intertidal surveys (Phase II) will comprise quadrat surveys, macrofaunal analysis, and sediment characterisation through intertidal grab sampling.

Subtidal surveys will comprise targeted benthic grab sampling and sediment coring at a limited number of stations within the proposed MUL area (Table 1).

A total of 12 intertidal sampling stations will be surveyed within the Muddy Fine Sand Community, resulting in 48 grab samples. Additionally, five subtidal sampling stations will be surveyed within the Fine Sand Community Complex, resulting in 15 grab samples. Table 1 outlines the proposed survey activity, timescale, and sampling effort.

Field survey works are expected to be completed within approximately one week for both Phase I and Phase II surveys. For the purpose of MARA's assessment, the proposed maritime usage has been assessed over a 12-month period to account for seasonal variability.

Table 1: Summary of proposed marine usage, timescale, and sampling effort.

Survey Phase	Activity	Timescale	Sampling Effort
Phase I Intertidal Walkover Survey	Intertidal habitat walkover survey.	Field surveys to be completed over approximately one week (weather permitting).	Four shoreline sections (approximately 500 m each).
Phase II Intertidal Survey	Quantitative intertidal benthic survey.		Four grab deployments per shore level across four transects, resulting in 48 grab samples.
Subtidal Benthic Survey	Targeted subtidal benthic and sediment survey.		Five stations with 3 grab samples per station, resulting in 15 grab samples.

2.1 Brief description of the site characteristics

The proposed MUL area covers 90.02 ha and lies adjacent to the townlands of Bellurgan to the north-east, Marsh North to the northwest, and Point to the south.

The surrounding coastal environment is characterised by estuarine and muddy wetland habitats, including extensive tidal flats and saltmarsh communities, notably *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] and Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*) [1330].

The proposed MUL area is located within the Northeastern Irish Sea Islands and Beaches Seascape Character Type and forms part of the Broad Estuarine Bays and Complex Low Plateau and Cliff Coastline Seascape Character Area. Nearshore waters depths range from approximately 0-5 m.

Sediments within the proposed MUL area are dominated by Muddy Fine Sand Community and Fine Sand Community Complex habitats, reflecting the sheltered estuarine conditions of the Inner Dundalk Bay, Castletown, and Ballymascanlan estuaries.

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 the management of the country's maritime area. MARA must 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.

A number of environmental policies and legislative frameworks referenced within the NMPF are addressed elsewhere in this report (Sections 3.3 – 3.6), including the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP), the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

The proposed maritime usage is considered consistent with several relevant sectoral policies of the NMPF, being most closely aligned with Chapter 24 – Wastewater Treatment and Disposal. The objectives of this chapter are to bring and maintain public water and wastewater services to acceptable international benchmarks and to support communities and sustainable development in coastal areas through the provision of resilient water services and infrastructure. The proposed maritime usage by Uisce Éireann will inform the design, assessment, and delivery of wastewater infrastructure associated with the Dundalk WWTP

Capacity Upgrade Project, which is intended to support future social economic development while contributing to the protection of the receiving environment.

Notwithstanding, the proposed maritime usage is also consistent with the following NMPF policies;

Environmental – Ocean Health: The NMPF requires that proposals protect and, where possible, enhance marine ecosystem health. The proposed maritime usage is temporary and non-intrusive in nature and not expected to result in significant impacts on marine habitats and species.

Environmental – Water Quality: The NMPF water quality policies seek to prevent deterioration in water quality, including waters of designated shellfish areas. The proposed maritime usage is not expected to result in discharges or disturbance that would significantly affect water quality.

Economic – Thriving Maritime Economy: The NMPF supports the provision of infrastructure that helps sustainable economic development in coastal areas. The proposed maritime usage would inform the design and delivery of wastewater infrastructure essential in supporting the future development of coastal communities.

Social – Co-existence: The NMPF supports the sustainable coexistence of multiple marine activities and seeks to minimise conflicts between users of the maritime area. The proposed maritime usage is temporary and is not expected to adversely affect other marine users or restrict access to the maritime area.

Underwater Cultural Heritage

The NMPF Heritage Assets Policy 1 supports the conservation of the historic environment and heritage assets both along the coast and in the underwater environment. The policy seeks to ensure that proposals in the marine environment do not adversely affect marine and coastal heritage assets. The policy further states that proposals not directly contributing to the enhancement of cultural heritage assets must demonstrate that they avoid, minimise or mitigate against harm to heritage assets.

Two recorded wrecks (W00274 and W00275, wreck names unknown) are located within the proposed MUL area. The nearest survey activity (Transect 2) is located approximately 46 m from these recorded wreck sites.

Given the presence of recorded underwater cultural heritage assets within the proposed MUL area, it is recommended that a condition be included in any licence granted requiring the

licence holder to consult with the National Monuments Service (NMS) and the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage prior to the commencement of the proposed maritime usage. Any requirements relating to underwater cultural heritage should be complied with.

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

MARA carried out a screening for EIA of the proposed maritime usage having considered Schedules 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. An EIA Screening Form was issued by MARA on 15/05/2026 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, if granted, to address the potential risks from invasive alien species as a result of the marine usage.

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.

The Louth County Council Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 and Climate Action Plan 2025 were reviewed in the context of the proposed maritime usage. These plans set out objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support climate change adaptation, and facilitate the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient county.

Only minor emissions associated with shallow-draft vessel use for subtidal sampling is anticipated. Considering the temporary and small-scale nature of the proposed maritime usage, no significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions is expected to arise from the proposed activities.

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 and to achieve at least Good Ecological Status (GES) in inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters, and groundwater by 2027, at the latest.

The proposed SI works, comprising intertidal walkover surveys as well as intertidal and subtidal grab sampling, will take place within two transitional water bodies, namely Inner Dundalk Bay (IE_NB_040_0100) and the Castletown Estuary (IE_NB_040_0200). The proposed MUL area also extends into the Ballymascanlan Estuary (IE_NB_040_0300); however, no SI works are proposed within this water body.

The principal pressures associated with these water bodies are nutrient enrichment and organic pollution. Ecological status is based on the assessment of biological quality elements (phytoplankton, benthic invertebrates, macroalgae, angiosperms), as well as supporting chemical (specific pollutants), physico-chemical (e.g. temperature, salinity, nutrients) and hydromorphological quality elements. The current ecological status and risk classification of these transitional water bodies are presented in Table 2.

A number of conditions are recommended for inclusion in any licence granted to prevent any possible deterioration in water quality due to the proposed MUL activities. These include requirements for the Applicant to maintain an Oil Pollution Emergency Plan and to ensure that all vessels used during the proposed maritime usage comply with Irish certification standards, as required by the Marine Survey Office.

Considering the short-term, localised, and low-intensity nature of the proposed marine usage activity, coupled with the limited disturbance footprint and the conditions recommended for inclusion in the proposed licence, the proposed maritime usage is not expected to result in deterioration of the ecological status of the identified WFD transitional water bodies (Table 2), or compromise the achievement of WFD objectives.

Table 2: Water Framework Directive water bodies in relation to MUL application areas from the reporting period 2019–2024, including status, risk, and significant pressures for the at-risk waterbodies¹.

Waterbody name & code	Waterbody type	Ecological status & Risk*	WFD significant pressures	Proposed activities within waterbody
Inner Dundalk Bay (IE_NB_040_0100)	Transitional	Poor & At risk	Nutrient Pollution Impact & Organic Pollution Impact	Phase I intertidal walkover Survey 2 + 3; Phase II Intertidal Transects 2 + 3; Two grab samples
Castletown Estuary (IE_NB_040_0200)	Transitional	Bad & At risk		Phase I intertidal walkover Survey 1, 3 + 4; Phase II Intertidal Transects 1 + 4; Three grab samples
Ballymascanlan Estuary (IE_NB_040_0300)	Transitional	Moderate & Under review		The MUL area overlaps this waterbody; however, no SI works are proposed in the estuary

*At risk means at risk of not achieving good status by 2027; not at risk means no risk in maintaining current status.

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 assessment under Article 8 of the MFSD sets out the status of the 11 qualitative descriptors that describe the state of the marine environment.

The proposed MUL area is located entirely within transitional waters, namely the Inner Dundalk Bay, Castletown, and Ballymascanlan estuaries, therefore lying outside the spatial extent of Ireland's MFSD assessment area. Accordingly, assessment against MFSD descriptors is not applicable to the proposed maritime usage.

¹ From www.catchments.ie

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.

An Annex IV Risk Assessment was submitted by the Applicant and considered the scope of the proposed maritime usage, the relevant Annex IV species (in this instance otters, cetaceans, bats, and marine turtles), and the potential impacts associated with the proposed SI works.

The proposed marine usage will involve short-term (maximum duration of one week), localised, and non-intrusive SI works. No excavating, drilling, or dredging is proposed. Vessel use will be limited to low-speed operations associated with subtidal and potentially intertidal sampling, with vessel noise restricted to low-level sampling activities. The risk of collision associated with vessel movements is considered low.

Recent National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) and National Parks Wildlife Service (NPWS) records confirm the presence of otter within the wider Dundalk Bay and Castletown Estuary area. No otter holts, couches, or breeding/resting sites have been identified within or adjacent to the proposed MUL area. Otter use of the area is likely limited to shoreline foraging and commuting between freshwater and coastal habitats. Therefore, injury or disturbance to otter breeding or resting sites are not considered likely.

The shallow, highly tidal, and predominantly intertidal nature of Inner Dundalk Bay provides unsuitable habitat for bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), particularly for feeding or regular use. Recent NBDC data indicate no records within Inner Dundalk Bay, with the nearest sightings recorded ~ 9 km from the proposed MUL area. While occasional use of the proposed MUL area cannot be excluded, regular occurrence is considered unlikely.

Although harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is widespread in Irish waters, the shallow and extensive drying nature of Inner Dundalk Bay limits habitat suitability for this species, and regular occurrence within the proposed MUL area is considered unlikely.

Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and bats are not expected to occur within the proposed MUL area given the scale and duration of the proposed SI works.

As Annex IV species are unlikely to occur within the proposed MUL area, and the proposed surveys are not expected to cause disturbance at a level which would affect these species, significant disturbance of Annex IV species is not considered likely.

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 not required for the proposed maritime usage.

3.8 Appropriate Assessment Screening

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 15/05/2026 which concluded that the proposed maritime usage will not require Stage 2 AA as it could 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.

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. Although the proposed maritime usage activity is short term and temporary in nature, specific conditions will be included in any maritime usage licence granted to cover the consideration of other users of the licenced area, particularly regarding the publication of Marine Notices and navigation safety. In addition, the users below were considered in more detail.

4.1 Commercial Vessels

The proposed MUL area supports relatively low levels of commercial vessel traffic. While significant levels of commercial vessel use occur within the wider Irish Sea, particularly in Carlingford Lough to the north, vessel activity within the proposed MUL area itself is limited. Recorded vessel traffic comprises low levels of cargo service vessel traffic (approximately two hours per km² per month), with no significant tanker, passenger, tug, towing, fishing, dredging, sailing, pleasure craft, or high-speed vessel activity recorded.

The proposed MUL area lies within the Dundalk Port Company Pilotage Limit and adjacent to Dundalk Port, a National Ferry Trade Port. However, given the temporary and limited nature of the proposed maritime usage, no impacts on commercial navigation or port operations are anticipated.

It is recommended that a condition be included in any licence granted requiring the Holder to avoid damage to, or interference with, third-party property, infrastructure, or fishing gear.

4.2 Commercial Fisheries

The proposed MUL area does not overlap with any commercial inshore fishing grounds or licensed aquaculture sites. No significant Irish or international fishing effort, including

trawling, dredging, netting, lining, or pot fishing, has been identified within the proposed MUL area.

Commercial fisheries of relevance within the wider Irish Sea include razor clam, seed mussel, and scallop dredge fisheries; however, these occur more than 17 km south-east of the proposed MUL area and are not expected to be impacted by the proposed maritime usage. The nearest licensed aquaculture sites are located approximately 10 km north in Carlingford Lough.

The proposed MUL area overlaps with cod and whiting spawning grounds and cod, haddock, horse mackerel, and mackerel nursery grounds. No overlap occurs with other identified nursery or spawning grounds, including herring, blue whiting, hake, megrim, monkfish, or Nephrops.

Given the small spatial footprint, short duration of the proposed activities and limited predicted ecological effects, significant impacts on commercial fisheries, spawning grounds, or nursery areas are not anticipated. No fisheries-specific licence conditions are considered necessary.

4.3 Recreational Users

Recreational use of the proposed MUL area is limited, with no significant beach-based recreation and only low levels of maritime activity. The nearest bathing waters are located at Templetown, approximately 14 km from the proposed MUL area.

The limited extent and duration of the proposed survey activities are not expected to affect recreational beach use, fishing, or sailing. The presence of a single survey vessel is unlikely to interfere with other recreational marine users.

Overall, no significant impacts on recreational users are anticipated.

5. Site visit

No site visit was undertaken due to limited potential for significant impacts to the site.

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. Six responses 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 – Marine Survey Office (MSO)
The Marine Survey Office (MSO) has no objection to the proposed survey activity from a navigational safety perspective. The MSO outline requirements relating to the publication of a Marine Notice via the Port of Dundalk Harbour Master, compliance with Irish licencing and certification standards for vessels, and the provision of relevant data to the UK Hydrographic Office and INFOMAR. The MSO also emphasise the importance of maintaining navigational safety and advise that any marking or lighting required for moored instruments should be undertaken in consultation with the MSO and the Commissioners of Irish Lights.

MARA Response:

MARA notes the issues raised by the MSO. A condition relating to the publication of a Marine Notice and compliance with Irish vessel licensing and certification requirements will be included in any licence issued. In addition, all MULs include standard conditions stating that the licence does not negate the Holder's statutory obligations or requirements under any other enactment or legal requirement.

2. Observations summary – Commissioners of Irish Lights
The Commissioners of Irish Lights have no objection to the proposed survey activity.

MARA response:

MARA notes the response from the Commissioners of Irish Lights.

3. Observations summary – Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) emphasise that the sea fishing and aquaculture sectors should be recognised when assessing the proposed surveys. DAFM also note that the assessment of potential impacts on commercial fishing activities should be considered in the context of the NMPF.

MARA response:

MARA notes the comments raised by Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine regarding the commercial sea fishing and aquaculture sectors and the requirements of the NMPF. The proposed MUL area supports only low levels of commercial fishing activity (see Section 4.2 Commercial Fisheries), and no licenced aquaculture sites occur within or adjacent to the proposed MUL area. The proposed maritime usage is considered consistent with the relevant policies of the NMPF (See Section 3.1).

4. Observations summary – Geological Survey Ireland

Geological Survey Ireland is the national earth science agency and is a division of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications who provide independent geological information, interpretation and collation of various data. Recommendations were provided on various data sets available from GSI when conducting assessments.

MARA response:

MARA notes the submission from the Geological Survey Ireland and is cognisant of the valuable data developed and maintained by the GSI.

5. Observations summary – Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services (FEAS) Marine Institute

The Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services (FEAS) of the Marine Institute advised that the proposed SI works are unlikely to result in significant impacts on fish stocks, fisheries, or aquaculture sites, including the razor clam and cockle fisheries within the wider Dundalk Bay area. Given the limited spatial extent and short duration of the proposed operations, no significant interactions with fish ecology or fishing activity is anticipated.

MARA response:

MARA notes the response by Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services of the Marine Institute.

6. Observations summary – Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)

Inland Fisheries Ireland is satisfied with the documentation submitted by the applicant. IFI note that several migratory fish, elasmobranch, eel, and sea trout occur in adjacent SACs to the Irish Sea and recommend including mitigation measures to any Licence granted to avoid sensitive migration periods and to limit the sampling duration of the proposed SI works.

MARA response:

MARA notes the submission by IFI. The proposed MUL area overlaps with several nursery and spawning grounds (See Section 4.2). Migratory fish species, including River lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*) and Salmon (*Salmo salar*) are QIs of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC, located ~30 km from the proposed MUL area. No salmonid rivers occur adjacent to the proposed MUL area. The nearest salmonid waters are located south of Clogher Head, ~32 km south of the proposed MUL area. Given the lack of hydrological connection, limited spatial extent, and short duration of the proposed maritime usage, significant effects on migratory fish are not anticipated.

7. Recommendation

Having considered the information submitted in support of the application, I recommend that a Maritime Usage Licence in accordance with Section 119 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021, as amended, be granted to Uisce Éireann, Colvill House, 24-26 Talbot Street, Mountjoy, Dublin, for the purposes of Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000, subject to the conditions in the Proposed Licence and for a duration of 1 year.

Signed:	
Prepared by:	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Marine Analyst
Date:	10/06/2026