



**Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland**

MARINE LICENCE VETTING COMMITTEE:

RE: MUL260022 - MARA – Maritime Usage Licence on behalf of Fingal County Council for proposed maintenance dredging of Balbriggan Harbour, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin.

Request for observations from Ms. LEEANNE DOYLE, dated 28/04/2026.

Overview:

Fingal County Council has submitted an application to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence under Section 117 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act) to undertake maintenance dredging in Balbriggan Harbour. The work is planned in order to remove sediment build-up and debris within the harbour, clean the basin, and maintain accessibility for fishing vessels at lower tidal levels.

IFI Comment:

From the perspective of IFI, the Bracken River discharges through Balbriggan Harbour. The river is not an EU-designated special area of conservation (SAC) or a special protection area (SPA). However, it does discharge into the North-West Irish Sea SPA (004236), which is an SPA of the Irish Sea. Coastal waters receive discharge from multiple rivers, many of which introduce important and often migratory species into these waters which act as migratory pathways.

The Bracken River has records of brown trout, sea trout, European Eel, stickleback and flounder. Nearby coastal fishing records have shown European Seabass, mackerel, Whiting, Codling and flatfish (plaice and dab).

The European eel is listed as “critically endangered” and European Seabass is listed as “near threatened” in ICUN status records.

It is important for the State, through IFI, to protect these species and their habitats. These fish species are migratory, spending part of the life cycle in freshwater and part at sea. Unimpeded passage through the estuarine Bracken and into the Irish Sea is important and the proposed dredging works process must take account of this in method statements and seasonal timing of works.



**Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland**

The timing of the proposed works should be carefully considered in order to reduce potential interference with the natural movements and migrations of salmon, sea trout, eel and lamprey in these coastal waters. The local IFI office should be contacted in relation to this.

Mitigation measures should aim to reduce the sound generated, in intensity and duration. The use of soft-start and ramp-up procedures for any sound-generating surveys undertaken – both on a day-to-day basis and on re-start after any stoppages within any day should be undertaken. This measure should be a condition of the maritime usage licence. The comments of IFI in this regard relate to fish species of conservation significance and of leisure angling significance all of which constitute part of IFI's brief.

Finally, IFI refers to its guidance in relation to construction works adjacent to water (<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/sites/default/files/migrated/docman/2016/Guidelines%20Report%202016.pdf>), (IFI, 2006) and would require that all relevant measures specified therein should be adhered to. The document covers a range of issues including management of materials hazardous to the aquatic environment such as cements, grouting, oils, fuels and other chemicals, along with management of suspended solids and excavated materials. IFI proposes that compliance with this document should be a condition of maritime usage licence permission.

Dr Robert Cruikshanks and Dr Ciara O'Leary (IFI, Research).
29/05/2026

References:

IFI (2006). Guidelines on protection of fisheries during construction work in and adjacent to waters. Inland Fisheries Ireland.
(<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/sites/default/files/migrated/docman/2016/Guidelines%20Report%202016.pdf>).