



**Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland**

MARINE LICENCE VETTING COMMITTEE:

RE: MUL260023 - MARA – Maritime Usage Licence on behalf of Donegal County Council for proposed maintenance dredging of Buncrana Harbour, Buncrana, Co. Donegal - Observation Request.

Request for observations from Leeanne Doyle dated 28/04/2026.

Overview:

Donegal 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 for the purpose of retaining navigable depth in the navigation channel and the RNLI berth at Buncrana Harbour, Co Donegal.

IFI Comment:

From the perspective of IFI, the Swilly River and Lough Swilly are of significant importance, as is the Crana River. The Crana is the main river that flows through Buncrana into Lough Swilly near the town's harbour. The smaller, Mill River, also flows into Lough Swilly just south of Buncrana harbour.

The proposed dredging works are therefore located within the Lough Swilly SAC and c. 2km from the Lough Swilly SPA. These are an EU-designated special area of conservation (SAC) and a special protection area (SPA) respectively and stand to be affected under source-pathway-receptor protocols.

The Crana River is known as a game fishery and has good numbers of Atlantic salmon and sea trout. This river has been particularly notable for grilse in the summer months along with wild and stocked brown trout. The critically endangered European eel has been recorded in the Crana and the nearby Mill River.

Generally, coastal waters receive discharge from multiple rivers, many of which introduce important and often migratory species into these waters which then act as migratory pathways.



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It is important for the State, through IFI, to protect these species and their habitats. Many of the above fish species are migratory, spending part of the life cycle in freshwater and part at sea. Unimpeded passage through the estuarine Crana and the greater Lough Swilly area and out to sea is imperative. The proposed dredging works process must take account of this in method statements and seasonal timing of works.

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 Department, Citywest).
11/05/2026

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>).