

Maritime Usage Licensing and Planning Advisory Directorate			
Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report			
To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Tom Manning Marine Analyst
Date:	03/09/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application Reference No:	MUL260036
MUL Applicant Name:	Port of Cork Company		
MUL Applicant Registered Address:	Tivoli Terminal Building, Tivoli Dock and Industrial Estate, Tivoli, Cork, T23 YNT9.		
Licence application received:	21/04/2026		
Type 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 usage:	Ringaskiddy, Cork Harbour, Co. Cork.		
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening	EIA not required (EIA Screening Form dated 14/07/2026)		
1st request for additional information (RAI) issued:	14/05/2026	Response to 1 st RAI received	02/06/2026
2nd RAI issued:	15/06/2026	Response to 2 nd RAI received	25/06/2026
Notice requesting Natura Impact Statement (NIS) issued:	n/a	NIS received:	21/04/2026
Public body consultation:	23/04/2026 – 25/05/2026	Observations from public bodies received:	Nine
Public consultation:	30/07/2026 - 31/08/2026	Submissions from the public received:	None

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1. Background

The Port of Cork Company (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 proposed maritime usage is required for a geotechnical investigation of ground conditions and to provide environmental data to inform the design and development of infrastructure at the Port of Cork, Ringaskiddy. The enhancement of the port facilities will be in support of the Offshore Renewable Energy industry in Ireland by providing facilities for the storage, marshalling and assembly of wind turbine components.

The applicant holds a marine development permission for the redevelopment of the port facilities at Ringaskiddy (An Coimisiún Pleanála ref. ABP321875-25) and a Dumping at Sea permit for capital dredging of the berths (Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ref. S0021-03). The applicant has been granted a MUL (ref. MUL250024) for site investigations in Ringaskiddy and has applied for an additional Dumping at Sea permit (EPA ref. S0039-01) associated with capital dredging.

2. Location and Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage

The proposed MUL area is located within Cork Harbour at the Port of Cork container terminal at Ringaskiddy and adjacent to the Deep Water Berth and Ferry Port as shown in Figure 1. The details of the proposed activities are shown on Table 1.



Figure 1: Site Location Map showing the proposed maritime usage area outlined in red.

Table 1: Proposed maritime usage activities, quantities and details

Proposed maritime usage activities	Quantities
Structural Boreholes	15 no. structural boreholes for geotechnical assessment of seabed and sub-seabed conditions. These are proposed as cable percussive boreholes to refusal depths from 0.4m to 12.5m below seabed followed by rotary core drilling to a maximum depth of 25m below the seabed with a casing diameter of 200mm with max. above water noise outputs of 65 dBA at 10m and underwater noise levels of 142–155 dB re 1µPa @ 1m at approx. 30 Hz–2 kHz. A jack up barge will be used as a platform for the proposed geotechnical boreholes and the duration of each individual borehole drilling event will depend on seabed conditions.
Sediment Testing Borehole	11 no. ‘vibrocores’ using 106mm steel casing from vessel platform drilled 6m below the existing seabed for collection of sediment cores with underwater noise levels of 150–165 dB re 1µPa @ 1m at approx. 20 Hz–2 kHz (dominant low-frequency vibration). The samples taken will be of short duration measured in minutes.

Drop-Down Video surveys	2 no. drop down video transects for benthic community assessment.
Benthic Grab Sampling	2 no. 0.1m ² subtidal grab samples by Van Veen, Day or Hamon grabs and core samples. 7 no. surface grab (Van Veen) samples underwater noise levels <140 dB re 1μPa @ 1m.
Radiological Testing	1.5kg sediment sample for laboratory analysis.

The proposed site investigations will have an expected duration of 15 weeks. The applicant has requested a three-year MUL to enable the phasing of the proposed site investigations and to allow flexibility for site investigation scheduling contingencies.

2.1 Brief description of the site characteristics

The site is characterised by maritime transport, heavy-load quay, bulk storage, industrial and commercial facilities associated with Cork Harbour and comprises 6.25 ha of intertidal and subtidal zones located approximately 400 m southeast of the Cork Harbour SPA.

The intertidal areas of mud and muddy sands have characteristic species such as *Mytilus edulis*, *Cerastoderma edule*, *Abra nitida*, *Spisula subtruncata* and *Nephtys hombergii*. There are intertidal biotopes identified as yellow and grey lichens on supralittoral rock and *Fucus spiralis* and *Ascophyllum nodosum* on sheltered upper full salinity mid-eulittoral rock. Subtidal areas within the proposed MUL area have sandy mud substrates likely to include the habitat type *Mixed sediment to sandy mud with polychaetes and oligochaetes community complex*. Water depths within the proposed MUL area are 0–5 m.

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 NMPF, which sets the framework for implementing the forward planning component of our marine planning system as set out in the MPPS. In accordance with the MAP Act, MARA must have regard to the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) which also outlines the Government's overarching vision, policies, and principles for managing the country's maritime area.

The proposed MUL is in line with key sectoral policy 13 of the NMPF on *Energy – Offshore Renewable* and is also consistent with sectoral policy 18 on Ports, Harbours and Shipping,

which support the development of Ireland's ports sector and Offshore Renewable Energy projects in Ireland in line with national and EU Policies.

Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The NMPF includes a policy on Heritage Assets, which supports the conservation of the historic environment and heritage assets both along the coast and in the underwater environment. As there is potential for underwater archaeological features to be present in the proposed MUL area, it is recommended that a condition requiring the holder to consult with the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage prior to the commencement of the proposed site investigation and to comply with their requirements, be included in the licence, if granted.

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

MARA carried out a screening for EIA of the proposed site investigation, having considered Schedules 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. An EIA Screening Form was issued by MARA on 14/07/2026 and it was concluded that the proposed site investigation does 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 proposed site investigation where vessels and equipment are being used. Sections 3.5–3.7 of this report also address the Habitats and Birds Directives, WFD, and MSFD, and recommend conditions to minimise impacts on biodiversity from the proposed site investigation.

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 insofar as practicable in a manner consistent with the governance framework set out therein.

The Climate Action Plan 2025 notes the Future Framework of Offshore Renewable Energy policy document which sets out key actions for the delivery of offshore wind by 2050. Within the Future Framework document, the development of port infrastructure is identified as a key component to support and facilitate ORE deployment. This application aligns with the Climate Action Plan in supporting potential ORE facilities in the port. The carbon emissions arising from the proposed site investigations are not expected to be significant.

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 to achieve at least good ecological status in inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater by 2027, at the latest. The ecological status of coastal waterbodies 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 proposed MUL area is located within the Cork Harbour coastal water body (IE_SW_060_0000), which lies within the Lee, Cork Harbour and Youghal Bay WFD catchment. The proposed site investigation will result in temporary and localised disturbance to the seabed habitat within the proposed MUL area. The benthic habitats within the proposed MUL area are characterised predominantly by muddy and sandy substrates. These habitats are naturally dynamic and are expected to recover rapidly given the small-scale and temporary duration of disturbance from the proposed benthic sampling, structural and sediment testing boreholes.

Conditions are recommended in the proposed licence to prevent any deterioration in water quality due to the proposed site investigation, including an Oil Pollution Emergency Plan and to ensure that all vessels used comply with Irish Certification Standards, as required by the Marine Survey Office (MSO). In addition, a condition is recommended for inclusion in the licence, if granted, to ensure the proposed site investigation is carried out in accordance with the plans and particulars submitted with the application, which provide details in relation to refuelling and waste handling measures, as well as onboard containment of oils and lubricants.

Table 2: Water Framework Directive waterbodies 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
Cork Harbour (IE_SW_060_0000)	Coastal	Good & Not at Risk	Nutrients & agriculture	The proposed site investigations will take place within this waterbody.

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

¹ From www.catchments.ie

Given the recommended conditions as detailed in the Proposed Licence, there is not expected to be a deterioration in the ecological status of any WFD waterbody as a result of the proposed site investigation.

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 assessment² under Article 8 of the MSFD sets out the status of the 11 qualitative descriptors that describe the state of the marine environment. Table 3 sets out the status of the relevant descriptors and assesses the potential impacts of the proposed site investigation.

Table 3: Assessment of impact of proposed activities on MSFD descriptors.

MFSD Descriptor	Good Environmental Status achieved	Assessment
Biological diversity	Partially achieved	MARA has undertaken an AA in respect to the proposed site investigations (see Section 3.8). Mitigation measures have been identified, which address potential impacts on biological diversity. It is recommended to include these in any licence granted to mitigate impacts on biological diversity.
Non-indigenous species	Yes	To ensure that the proposed site investigation will not result in the unintended introduction of non-indigenous species, a condition is recommended in the Proposed Licence relating to the control of invasive species.
Population of commercial fish/shellfish	Partially achieved	This assessment of GES is based on whether stocks are being fished at or below the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and whether spawning stock biomass is above the level that can produce MSY. The proposed MUL application area is within whiting (<i>Merlangius merlangus</i>) spawning and nursery grounds and nursery grounds for herring (<i>Clupea harengus</i>), cod (<i>Gadus morhua</i>), horse mackerel (<i>Trachurus trachurus</i>), mackerel (<i>Scomber scombrus</i>). The

² [Ireland's Marine Strategy Part 1: Article 8, 9 and 10 report 2024.](#)

		proposed site investigation is temporary and small scale and will be undertaken on a phased basis over a three-year period and is not expected to result in significant disturbance to the identified spawning and nursery grounds. Therefore, due to the location, type and duration of the proposed site investigation in relation to the scale of the mapped spawning and nursery areas for the above fish species, there is not expected to be an impact on this descriptor from the proposed activities. In addition, licensed aquaculture sites are not at risk from the proposed site investigation due to the scale, location and nature of the activities (see also Section 7 Public Body Consultation of this report for public body responses regarding fish and shellfish).
Marine food webs	Unclear	The balance and diversity in marine food webs are not expected to be impacted as a result of the proposed site investigation. Impacts on habitats and associated benthic communities and water quality have been assessed in Section 3.5 of this report in relation to WFD and impacts on marine mammals and birds have been assessed in Sections 3.7 and 3.8.
Eutrophication	Yes	The proposed site investigation does not involve the addition of nutrients to the marine environment and as such, will not impact this descriptor achieving GES.
Sea-floor integrity	Partially achieved	The proposed site investigation will result in temporary and localised disturbance to the seabed habitat within the proposed MUL area. The benthic habitats within the proposed MUL area are characterised predominantly by muddy sand substrates. These habitats are naturally dynamic and are expected to recover rapidly, particularly given the small-scale of disturbance. It is not expected that the proposed site investigation will negatively impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Alteration of hydrographical conditions	Yes	The proposed site investigation will not alter the hydrographical conditions (e.g. changes in wave action, salinity, temperature) in the MUL application area. There will be some short-term increases in

		turbidity as a result of drilling and grab sampling activities and the localised suspension of fine sediments is expected to occur within the immediate area. The applicant has provided measures to reduce these potential impacts, including bringing drill cuttings to surface level in a casing to prevent contact with seawater, as well as taking sediment off site to be disposed of at a suitable facility. This is recommended as a condition of the licence, if granted. Accordingly, there will be no impact on the GES status of this descriptor.
Concentrations of contaminants	Yes	The proposed site investigations are not expected to introduce contaminants into the receiving waters of Cork Harbour. Any potential risk from concentrations of contaminants relates to accidental pollution spills, such as hydrocarbon spills from the survey or auxiliary vessels. The applicant has outlined measures to reduce these potential impacts, including a commitment that no refuelling or maintenance of vessels or equipment will be carried out on-site, and the implementation of a Project Environmental Management Plan (PEMP). The MUL, if granted, shall be carried out in accordance with those plans and particulars. To further mitigate this risk, it is recommended that the licence, if granted, includes conditions requiring the holder to ensure that an oil pollution emergency plan is in place, and that all vessels engaged in this permitted maritime usage conform to Irish Certification Standards for vessels
Contaminants in fish/seafood for human consumption	Yes	The proposed site investigation will not introduce contaminants in fish or seafood. There are no licenced aquaculture sites in the vicinity of the proposed site investigations. There will be no impact on the achievement of GES status of this descriptor.
Marine Litter	No	The proposed maritime usage will not result in the introduction of marine litter to the marine environment and thus will not impact on the achievement of GES status of this descriptor. The Proposed Licence includes a general condition

		requiring the holder to remove all plant and equipment associated with the activities and to restore the licenced area to its original condition.
Introduction of energy including underwater noise	Yes	The source noise levels proposed from Vibrocore and borehole drilling is non-impulsive to intermittent, with the exception of Sediment Testing Boreholes, which may include short impulsive events. The proposed estimated noise source levels during drilling activity is 150–165 dB re 1µPa @ 1m and will be limited to the temporary duration of the geotechnical works. The estimated noise level is unlikely to exceed typical underwater noise levels generated within the proposed MUL area, which is proximal to an important centre for largescale shipping movements and cargo operations at Ringaskiddy. Given the temporary and localised nature of the proposed site investigation, it is not anticipated that significant underwater noise will be introduced into the environment. However, given the known records of cetaceans in Cork harbour, the engagement of a Marine Mammal Observer has been recommended to be included as a condition of the licence, if granted as a precautionary measure (see Section 3.7). In order to inform the data collected as part of MSFD requirements, a condition is recommended requiring the holder to provide details of all geotechnical surveys to the Marine Environment Division of the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment in the reporting format of the OSPAR Impulsive Noise Registry (see Proposed Licence).

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 in Annex IV of the Directive. National guidance on the management of the risk to marine mammals from underwater noise requires a risk assessment of the potential impacts of man-made sound sources. The applicant submitted an Annex IV Risk Assessment in support of the application.

The assessment considered the relevant Annex IV species occurring within or adjacent to the proposed MUL area, and the potential impacts associated with the proposed site investigation.

Annex IV species such as otter, bats, and marine turtle are unlikely to be impacted by the proposed site investigation. While otters are likely to forage in the vicinity of the proposed MUL area at Ringaskiddy, there are no known holts, couches, or breeding/resting sites within or adjacent to the proposed MUL area. The Celtic Sea to the south supports a range of cetacean species and harbour porpoise, common dolphin and bottlenose dolphin are frequently recorded in Cork Harbour. Notwithstanding that, Cork Harbour is an active commercial port with existing high levels of marine traffic and marine mammals may exhibit some habituation to underwater noise disturbance. Due to the presence of cetaceans within this part of Cork Harbour it is recommended that any licence granted includes a condition requiring a Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) during geotechnical activities, in accordance with current national guidance for the protection of marine mammals during noise-producing activities.

No likely significant impacts to the Annex IV species discussed as a result of the proposed site investigation is anticipated, subject to this condition. 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 site investigations.

3.8 Appropriate Assessment

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 AA Screening Determination on 14/07/2026, which concluded that the proposed site investigation requires Stage 2 AA as it could not 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.

One European site, Cork Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA), was screened in for AA by MARA. The Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) for Cork Harbour SPA, together with the likely or potential sources of impact arising from the proposed site investigation, are set out in Appendix 1, while Table 4 provides a summary of the potential impacts identified during the screening stage. The applicant submitted a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) in support of the application dated 14/04/2026.

Table 4: Potential direct and indirect impacts on the Qualifying Interests of European sites identified at screening stage and possible significance of those impacts.

Potential Impacts	Possible significance of Potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)
Visual and above water noise disturbance	There is unlikely to be a significant effect on breeding Common Tern within the Cork Harbour SPA due to the distance of the proposed site investigation from the designated site boundary. However, the proposed site investigation could have an impact on ex-situ Common Tern breeding pontoons. The applicant has stated that the position of these breeding pontoons is moved each year and uncertainty exists in relation to the location of the pontoons during the proposed site investigation.

3.8.1 Assessment of Likely/Potential Impacts on European Sites

The potential likely significant effects identified are from above water noise and visual disturbance. This section discusses this impact further below. Any mitigation measures recommended on foot of the assessment in this section are included in the Proposed Licence.

Visual and above-water noise disturbance

Common Terns are summer visitors to Ireland, typically occurring between March and October around all Irish coasts. Two pontoons supporting breeding Common Terns are deployed in Cork Harbour at Ringaskiddy as part of a collaboration between the University College Cork, Cork County Council, the NPWS and the Port of Cork Company. While these ex-situ breeding sites are located on artificial structures, the pontoons contribute to the Conservation Objectives of Cork Harbour SPA for Common Tern breeding population abundance and productivity rate and have been identified as the most productive breeding sites in Cork Harbour in recent years.

Potential sources of visual and above-water noise disturbance from the proposed site investigation include structural borehole drilling, sediment testing boreholes, drop-down video surveys, benthic grab sampling and the associated vessel and jack-up barge movements. These activities have potential to cause temporary behavioural responses, including short-term displacement, increased vigilance, and reduced foraging efficiency. However, Common Terns within Cork Harbour are likely to be habituated to high levels of vessel traffic and other maritime activities within Cork Harbour. This level of habituation is supported by the increasing numbers of breeding pairs in Cork Harbour and the success of the artificial pontoons.

It is likely that the current separation distance between the proposed site investigation and the breeding tern pontoons would not result in significant visual and above-water noise disturbance. However, given that the artificial breeding pontoons are non-stationary, uncertainty exists in relation to their potential location over the duration of the proposed MUL period. Accordingly, in the absence of certainty regarding the future location of the pontoons, and in order to ensure the protection of the breeding Common Tern population, it is recommended that the licence, if granted, includes a condition requiring the holder to maintain an appropriate buffer (200 m) around breeding tern pontoons during the peak breeding season (1st May – 1st August annually).

3.8.2 Assessment of In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed site investigations must be considered individually and in combination with other plans or projects. All 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. Table 5 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in-combination with the proposed maritime usage.

The spatial scope of the in-combination assessment for the proposed site investigation is 300m based on the potential disturbance distance to birds from visual approach and above water noise³ (SPL 60-65 dB at 10m). The applicant has applied for a 3-year licence, and the temporal scope of the in-combination assessment is therefore 3 years i.e., the period over which the activities are proposed.

Table 5: Potential sources of impact that could act in-combination with the application.

Potential Impacts	Potential Cumulative Pathway
Visual and above water noise disturbance	Disturbance pathway caused by visual/physical approach, light or sound travelling through air with impacts possible where there is spatial and temporal overlap with other visual and above water noise producing projects.

Prediction:

There is the potential for increased visual and above-water noise disturbance to Common Terns if other sound generating projects were to spatially and temporarily overlap. However, due to the temporary nature of the works, the habituation of the Common Terns and the

³ Cutts N, Hemingway K and Spencer J (2013). The Waterbird Disturbance Mitigation Toolkit Informing Estuarine Planning and Construction Projects. Produced by the Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies (IECS). Version 3.2.

proposed separation distances of the proposed site investigation from the Common Tern pontoons, in-combination effects from above-water noise and visual disturbance are not anticipated, subject to the implementation of mitigation measures (see Section 3.8.3 below).

Identification of Plans or Projects that could act in combination

A search was carried out on 20/08/2026 of relevant databases including EPA, An Coimisiún Pleanála, Foreshore Unit, MARA, and Cork County Council for other plans and projects with characteristics that may cause in-combination effects with the proposed site investigations, on the SCIs of the European site identified in Appendix 1. The projects shown in Table 6 are within the spatial and temporal scope of the proposed site investigations.

Table 6: Projects identified with the potential to have in-combination effects given the nature and location of the activities.

Application Ref.	Project description	Approx. distance from MUL application area (km)	Project Status
An Coimisiún Pleanála ref. OA04.321875	Marine Strategic Infrastructure Development including redevelopment of port facilities and capital dredging of berths MAC230004	Overlapping	Permitted
MUL250024	Marine environmental surveys for the purpose of site investigation.	Overlapping	Consented
EPA DAS application S0039-01	Capital Dredging is required to create the required berth and safe approaches to the berth.	Overlapping	Applied
EPA DAS application S0021-03	EPA Dumping at Sea permit – Port of Cork maintenance dredging works.	Overlapping	Permitted
FS007126	Maintenance dredging to facilitate the maintenance of the port berth, basins and approach channels into Port of Cork; 3 sites.	Overlapping	Consented

The following plans were identified as having the potential to result in in-combination effects:

- Port of Cork Masterplan 2050;
- River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022–2027;
- The Cork County Development Plan 2022–2028;
- South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan;
- The National Development Plan 2021–2030, and
- The Climate Action Plan 2025.

In-Combination Effects Assessment conclusion

Table 6 has identified a number of projects that overlap with the proposed MUL area or fall within the spatial scope of the in-combination assessment including port development activity, dredging and site investigations (MUL250024), which are in close proximity to the proposed MUL application area. Subject to the mitigation measure shown below in Section 3.8.3, which ensures that there will be no geotechnical surveys within 200 m of the pontoons, there is no requirement for additional specific in-combination mitigation.

3.8.3 Mitigation measures

Mitigation measures for the impacts identified in Section 3.8.1 and 3.8.2 are detailed below and must be included as a condition of the proposed licence.

Above-water noise and visual disturbance and in-combination effects

The holder shall not undertake the Permitted Maritime Usage as follows:

- iii) Within 200 m of the artificial tern pontoons located in Cork Harbour, during the period 1st May to August 1st annually.

In order to minimise the level and intensity of survey activities the holder of the licence, if granted, should consider the use of existing data where feasible to do so. It is also recommended that any licence granted should include the following condition:

The holder shall consider any publicly available survey data, and usage of same where appropriate and feasible to do so, in order to avoid duplication of survey activity in the licensed area.

3.8.4 Residual effects

This assessment has identified potential significant effects on European sites and their conservation interests and recommends mitigation measures as conditions in the Proposed Licence. It is considered that the mitigation measures described and their implementation

through licence conditions will remove, or reduce to imperceptible levels, all negative impacts and that residual effects will not arise.

3.8.5 Assessment of Transboundary effects

The mitigation measures proposed as part of this appropriate assessment will mitigate against any transboundary effects on other European sites.

3.8.6 Appropriate assessment conclusion

The appropriate assessment screening process identified likely/potential significant impacts due to visual and above-water noise disturbance. Likely significant impacts from the proposed site investigation could not be ruled out, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, without mitigation. Mitigation measures were identified to ensure that impacts on Cork Harbour SPA and its SCIs do not occur. Therefore, with adherence to the mitigation measures specified in Section 3.8.3 and in view of best scientific knowledge, and of the sites' conservation objectives, the project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have adverse effects on European sites.

The appropriate assessment determination is detailed in Section 9.

4.0 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. Conditions are recommended for inclusion in the Proposed Licence, if granted, to ensure minimal disruption to other users of Cork Harbour, publication of a Local Notice to Mariners, and ensuring no interference with any third party's property.

4.1 Commercial Shipping

The proposed MUL area is located adjacent to an important commercial shipping route for container traffic and passenger ferries at Ringaskiddy. The navigation and port facilities at Ringaskiddy are managed by the Port of Cork Company, who is the applicant. The Port of Cork company has responsibility for the management of commercial shipping activity and the proposed site investigation. A condition is recommended for inclusion requiring that any potential disruption to port operations is managed.

4.2 Commercial Fisheries

The proposed MUL area does not overlap with any identified commercial inshore fishing grounds. The nearest recorded fishing activity is inshore pot fishing for shrimp which occurs more than 2 km east of the proposed MUL area. Commercial lobster and crab fisheries are

located at a greater distance (> 8km) from the proposed MUL area. There would be no impacts on commercial fisheries given the temporary nature of the site investigation and spatial separation between the site investigation and the inshore fishing grounds.

There are licenced aquaculture sites and Shellfish Water Directive areas to the east and north of Great Island. The nearest licenced shellfish aquaculture site (T05-002OFO; blue mussel) is located approximately 4 km from the proposed MUL area, while the nearest designated shellfish water area is located approximately 7 km away. On the basis of the separation distance from the proposed site investigation, it has been assessed that there would be no impacts on aquaculture operations or shellfish waters.

4.3 Recreational Users

There is watercraft and sailing activity occurring within the area, however significant impacts to recreational users are not anticipated as a result of the proposed site investigation. In addition, no designated bathing waters are located in the vicinity of the proposed MUL area.

5. Site visit

No site visit was undertaken. Previous site visits have been undertaken by MARA in Ringaskiddy which have informed this assessment.

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. Nine responses were received. The following tables summarise the observations from public bodies with MARA's response provided below each submission summary. The MARA website should be consulted to view the full details of the observations received.

1. Observations summary – Development Applications Unit (DAU) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
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Observations were received on 26/05/2026 from the DAU. The DAU notes that the proposed MUL area is located in proximity to a number of wrecks. Archaeological recommendations are submitted in relation to the underwater cultural heritage, including the appointment of a Project Archaeologist, preparation of an Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment (Geotechnical Works), Archaeological Assessment Geotechnical Works, post-survey review and agreement of a Protocol for Archaeological Discoveries.
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MARA response:

MARA acknowledges the submission from the DAU of the DHLGH. Section 3.1 of this report addresses underwater cultural heritage. A specific condition is recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, that the applicant shall consult with the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage, National Monuments Service prior to the commencement of the activities and comply with all applicable requirements set forth by the Unit, to ensure protection of maritime heritage.

2. Observations summary – The Marine Divisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)

Observations were received on 25/05/2026 from the Marine Divisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). DAFM considered that the proposed site investigation will not have any impacts on the commercial fishing and aquaculture sectors. DAFM emphasised the importance of co-existence and avoiding, minimising, or mitigating impacts on access to existing activities within the context of the NMPP.

MARA response:

MARA notes the observations of DAFM and that the proposed site investigation will not have any impacts on the commercial fishing and aquaculture sectors due to the type, extent and duration of the proposed site investigation and the separation distance from existing aquaculture sites or known commercial fishing activity.

A specific condition requiring the applicant to issue a Local Notice to Mariners is recommended to be included in the licence, if granted to ensure any vessels operating in the area are made aware of the activities.

3. Observations summary – Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services (FEAS) of the Marine Institute

Observations were received on 25/05/2026 from FEAS in relation to the Seafood sector. FEAS consider that the proposed site investigation works activities will have minimal to no impact any fish stocks, fisheries or aquaculture sites or interfere with fishing activities, fish ecology/biology or aquaculture.

MARA response:

MARA acknowledges the submission from the Marine Institute and concurs that there would be no impacts on fisheries or aquaculture sites due to the proposed site investigation.

4. Observations summary – Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)

Observations were received on 25/05/2026 from BIM, which confirms that there is no aquaculture activity intersecting with the proposed MUL boundary. BIM noted existing aquaculture activities East of Haulbowline Island, including a blue mussel fishery order and an aquaculture site located in Rostellan shellfish waters. BIM recommended timely notification procedures to aquaculture producers and fishers.

MARA response:

MARA acknowledges the submission from BIM. It is the opinion of MARA that due to the type, extent and duration of the proposed site investigation and the separation distance from existing aquaculture sites, there would be no potential impacts on the aquaculture sector or commercial fishing activity.

A specific condition requiring the applicant to issue a Local Notice to Mariners is recommended to be included in the licence, if granted, which will ensure aquaculture producers and fishers are notified of the activities prior to commencement.

5. Observations summary – the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)

Observations were received on 25/05/2026 from the SFPA stating that the proposed site investigation would have no impact of wild fisheries or seafood production safety.

MARA response:

MARA acknowledges the submission from the SFPA and also concludes that there would be no impacts on wild fisheries or seafood production safety due to the proposed site investigation.

6. Observations summary – Inland Fisheries Ireland

Observations were received on 20/05/2026 from IFI recommending the use of soft-start and ramp-up procedures for any sound-generating works undertaken to be included as a condition of the proposed licence to reduce impact on fish species.

MARA response:

The recommendation for soft-start and ramp-up procedures is provided for under the condition recommended regarding appointment of a Marine Mammal Observer and implementation of national guidance for underwater noise. It is noted that this condition seeks to satisfy the requirements of the most up to date national guidance with regard to marine mammal protection, which includes reference to the use of soft-start and ramp-up procedures for geotechnical site investigation works. The implementation of the procedures

within this guidance satisfy the recommendation of the IFI regarding soft-start and ramp-up procedures for any sound-generating works that could potentially impact on fish species.

7. Observations summary – Commissioner for Irish Lights

An observation from CIL was received on 19/05/2026, which stated no objection to the proposed site investigation.

MARA response:

MARA acknowledges the submission from CIL.

8. Observations summary – Marine Survey Office (MSO)

Observations were received on 01/05/2026 from the MSO. The MSO stated they have no objection to the proposed site investigation from a navigational safety perspective. The MSO proposed that the Applicant i) issue a Local Notice to Mariners through the Port of Cork, ii) provide a local notice to mariners and survey details to the UKHO, iii) that appropriate measures taken to ensure navigational safety, iv) any moored instruments have suitable markings and lighting, v) vessels conform to Irish Certification standards, vi) inform UKHO of activities that may impact the safety of navigation and, vii) all bathymetry data to be shared with the UKHO.

MARA response:

MARA acknowledges the submission from the MSO. Specific conditions have been recommended to be included in any licence granted requiring the holder to arrange for the publication of a Local Notice to Mariners with the Port of Cork (the applicant) as well as ensuring conformity with Irish Certification Standards. MARA notes from the proposed Maritime Usage application description that no bathymetrical survey data will be collected as part of the site investigation. It is also noted that no usage of moored instruments is proposed as part of this Maritime Usage application.

9. Observations summary – Geological Survey Ireland (GSI)

Observations were received on 13/05/2026 from the Geological Survey Ireland (GSI). GSI recommended that MARA consider the use of a range of independent geological datasets when conducting the EIAR, SEA, planning and scoping processes for developments, plans and policies.

MARA response:

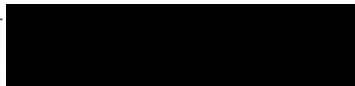
MARA acknowledges the submission from GSI and notes the availability of datasets.

7. Public consultation

A public consultation was undertaken between 30/07/2026 - 31/08/2026 under Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and under section 117(6)(b) of the MAP Act. No submissions were received.

8. Recommendation

Having considered the information submitted in support of the application and the criteria specified in the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, as amended, I recommend that a Maritime Usage Licence in accordance with Section 119 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, as amended, be granted to the Port of Cork Company, Tivoli Terminal Building, Tivoli Dock and Industrial Estate, Cork, for marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, subject to the conditions in the Proposed Licence and for a duration of 3 years.

Signed:	
Prepared by:	Tom Manning Marine Analyst
Date:	03/09/2026

9.0 Approval and AA Determination

Having considered this report, the documents submitted by the applicant the observations received on foot of the public body consultation on the application, along with my own assessment, it can be concluded, and I determine, for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 42(11) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations, that the proposal to undertake to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation (MUL260036), falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (either individually or in combination with any other plans or projects), will not adversely affect the integrity of any European sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives, subject to the implementation of the mitigation measures specified in Section 3.8 – Appropriate Assessment, which have been included in the Proposed Licence which must be incorporated into any consent that may be granted in respect of the respective maritime usage licence application.

Signed:	
Approved and determined by:	John Evans Director of Maritime Usage Licensing
Date:	04/09/2026

Appendix 1

European sites and qualifying interests which were screened in for appropriate assessment along with potential source of impact and site-specific conservation objectives.

European Site & site code	Approx. distance from MUL application area (km)	Qualifying Interests	Potential source of impact	Site-specific conservation objectives
Cork Harbour SPA [004030]	0.5 km	Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193]	The proposed site investigation has the potential to cause visual and above water noise disturbance effects.	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA 004030. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.