Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate

Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	Dr Ciar O'Toole, Senior Marine Advisor	**From:**	Tom Manning, Marine Analyst
Date:	10/07/2026	**Maritime Usage Licence Application No:**	MUL260036
Applicant:		Port of Cork Company, Tivoli Terminal Building, Tivoli Dock and Industrial Estate, Tivoli, Cork, T23 YNT9.	
Type of maritime usage activity 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.	
Licence application received:		21/04/2026	

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 site investigation is necessary to inform the design and development of marine infrastructure at Ringaskiddy at the Port of Cork. The geotechnical and environmental information gathered during the proposed site investigations will be in support of the CORE 1 (Cork Offshore Renewable Energy 1) as part of the Cork Masterplan 2050, for completion of the multi-purpose berth and heavy-load quay for future offshore wind projects planned for the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea.

2. Description of maritime usage and local site characteristics

2.1 Brief description of the proposed maritime usage

Table 1: Proposed maritime usage activities and quantities

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. 0.1m² 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. A 3-year maritime usage license period is requested to enable the phasing of proposed site investigations and to allow flexibility for site investigation scheduling contingencies.

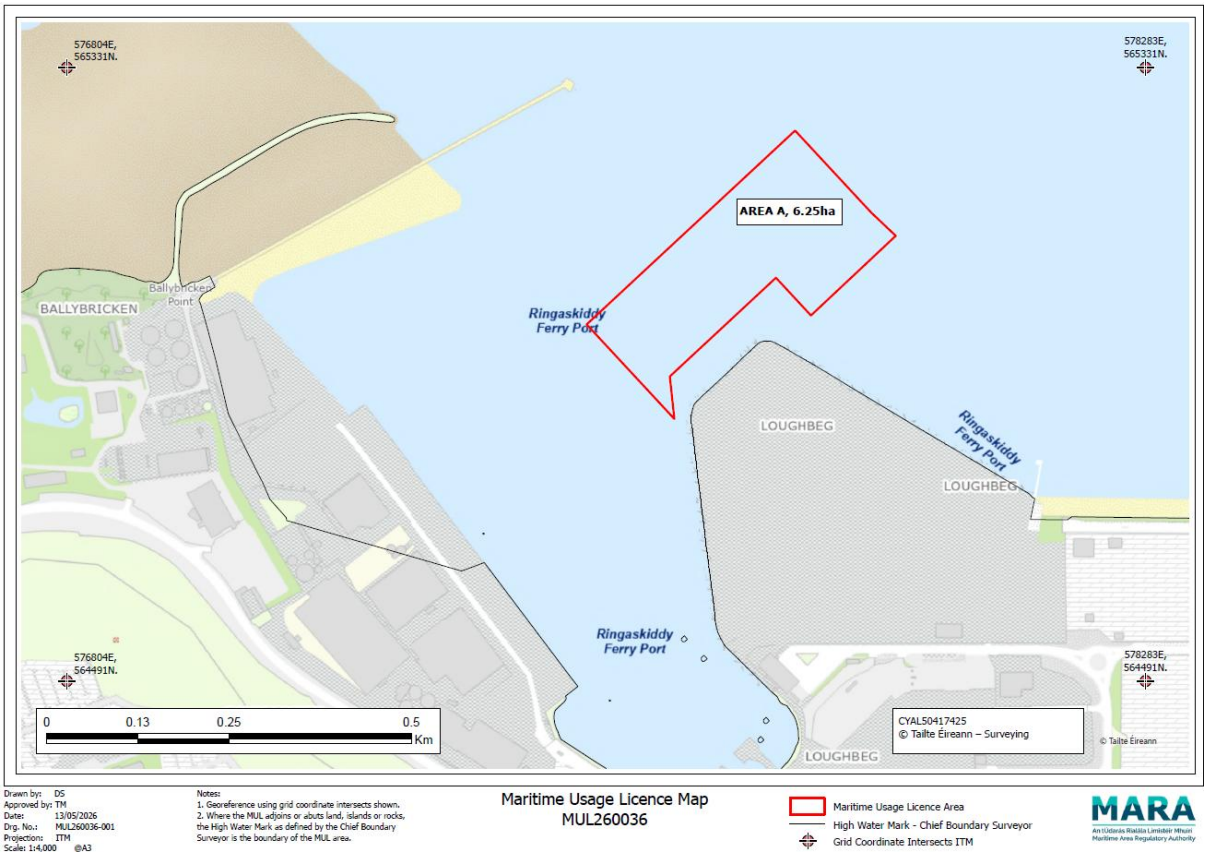

Figure 1: Site Location Map showing the proposed maritime usage area outlined in red.

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The subject site is located within Cork Harbour at the Port of Cork container terminal at Ringaskiddy and adjacent to the Deep Water Berth and Ferry Port. 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 situated approximately 400m southeast of the Cork Harbour SPA.

The subtidal habitats present in the proposed MUL application area are the sandy muds of the main navigation channel. 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 other 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.

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 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 proposed maritime usage, the conservation objectives of the European sites and using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.

Table 2 - Identification of relevant European sites, their Species of Conservation Interest and site-specific conservation objectives. Those Qualifying Interests marked in bold have been screened in for Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

European site & site code	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	List of Species of Conservation Interest	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site Screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Cork Harbour SPA [004030]	<1	**Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]**	Yes The proposed site investigation has the potential to cause visual and above water noise disturbance effects.	Yes	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA 004030. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
		Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004] Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) [A005] Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017] Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) [A028] Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048] Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) [A050] Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052] Pintail (*Anas acuta*) [A054] Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056] Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) [A069]	No The noise generated from the proposed site investigation will not cause significant visual and above water noise disturbance effects.		

		Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141] Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142] Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149] Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156] Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157] Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160] Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179] Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull *(Larus fuscus*) [A183] Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855] Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) [A857] Wetlands [A99			

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	There would be no likely significant effect on Species of Conservation Interest of 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.
Water quality changes	The proposed site investigation would not have a significant effect on the Conservation Objectives of any European sites due to water quality changes given the nature and location of the activities.
Habitat Loss and/or physical habitat disturbance	The proposed site investigation would not have a likely significant effect on the Conservation Objectives of any European sites due to habitat loss or physical habitat disturbance given the nature and location of the activities.
Disturbance from underwater noise	The proposed site investigation would not have a likely significant effect on the Conservation Objectives of any European sites due to underwater noise disturbance given the nature and location of the activities.

In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed site investigations must be considered individually and 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 for the proposed site investigation is 300m based on the potential disturbance distance to birds from visual approach and above

water noise[1] (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 ie. the period over which the activities are proposed.

A search of relevant databases undertaken on the 10/07/2026. Table 4 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in-combination with the proposed maritime usage. Relevant projects within the CESS and the CETS were considered. The projects shown in Table 4 below 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
An Coimisiún Pleanála ref. OA04.321875 for Marine Strategic Infrastructure Development (N.B. this grant of permission includes Capital dredging MAC230004 also listed below)	The completion of the redevelopment of existing port facilities at Ringaskiddy previously permitted under An Coimisiun Pleanala ref. 04.PA0035, as altered by An Coimisiun Pleanala ref. 04.PM0010, 04.304437 and 04.310847-21.	Activity overlaps with site investigation area	Permitted
MUL250024	Port of Cork marine environmental surveys for the purpose of site investigation.	Activity overlaps with proposed site investigation area.	Application received
MAC230004 & EPA DAS ref. S0021-03	Capital dredging of berths at Ringaskiddy East & West.	Activity overlaps with the proposed site investigation area	Permitted
S0013-03	EPA Dumping at Sea permit – Port of Cork maintenance dredging works	Activity overlaps with the proposed site investigation area	Permitted

[1] 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.

S0039-01	EPA Dumping at Sea permit – Port of Cork maintenance dredging works	Activity <1km the proposed site investigation area	Applied
MAC260011	Capital dredging project at Ringaskiddy Port.	Activity overlaps with the proposed site investigation area	Applied
MUL230029 & EPA DaS ref. S0005-03	Department of Department of Defence maintenance dredging at Haulbowline in Cork Harbour.	Activity <5km from proposed site investigation area.	Permitted
FS006408	Harbour Development Works at Ringaskiddy Port, Cork Harbour; 7 locations.	Activity 0.1 – 0.2km from proposed site investigation area.	Consented

The following plans, related to the development of the maritime environment were also considered:

- Port of Cork Masterplan 2050
- River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022-2027,
- The Cork County Development Plan 2022 - 2028, and
- South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan.

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 cannot be excluded at this stage due to the following:

MUL250024 is an overlapping project of similar nature (geotechnical surveys including borehole drilling) and thus there is potential for in-combination impacts in the absence of mitigation.

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?

No

5. Screening Determination Statement

The assessment of significant effects: Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, and on the basis of the information on file, and having regard to: • The nature and scale of the proposed development; • The Qualifying Interests and Conservation Objectives of the European sites assessed; • The distance to the nearest European sites; • The location of ex-situ breeding Common Tern pontoons and the potential for visual and above water noise disturbance, and • The potential in-combination effects with other plans and projects, it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by the Port of Cork Company, Tivoli Terminal Building, Tivoli Dock and Industrial Estate, Tivoli, Cork, T23 YNT9 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 Ringaskiddy (MUL260036) will require Stage 2 appropriate assessment. It cannot 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.		
Signature and Date of Recommending Officer	[redacted] Tom Manning Marine Analyst	Date: 10/07/2026
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	[redacted] Dr Ciar O'Toole Senior Marine Advisor	Date: 14/07/2026