

Attachment 3.3

Supporting Information for MARA's Screening for Appropriate Assessment of a Proposed Material Amendment

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Revision History				
Revision	Date	Description	Originator	Reviewers
01	21/05/20 26	Draft for internal review	AE, ND, RF	SD, LK, MHC
02	26/05/20 26	Finalisation	AE, ND	SD, DMcC, RF

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1 Introduction

This attachment intends to provide MARA with best available scientific information to inform their Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) of a proposed Material Amendment to MUL240036.

The proposed Material Amendment seeks to (only) amend Specific Condition 32 (relating to in-combination underwater noise effects). Specifically, the proposed Material Amendment seeks to amend Condition 32 as follows:

- Refine the coordination distance applied under Condition 32 (from 10km to 6km) for specified marine survey activities.

The proposed amendment does not involve any change to:

- the nature or extent of the permitted maritime usage,
- the survey methodologies or equipment,
- the location or duration of activities, or,
- the project description previously considered within the existing assessment framework for MUL240036.

The amendment relates to the spatial trigger for coordination under Condition 32.

1.1 Legal Context - Appropriate Assessment Screening

Section 117 (4) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 as amended prescribes MARA's role as competent authority for the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening of the Material Amendment.

117 (4) The MARA shall, as soon as is practicable after it receives a licence application and if it considers it necessary to do so in its capacity as the competent authority referred to in section 112, carry out screening for appropriate assessment in respect of the proposed maritime usage the subject of the application.

The specific requirements for screening for appropriate assessment are set out in Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Bird and Natural Habitat) Regulations 2011, as amended, including:

42. (1) A screening for Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project for which an application for consent is received, and which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site, shall be carried out by the public authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site, if that plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the European site.

The information in this document provides MARA with information to inform their AA Screening determination of the proposed Material Amendment.

For the avoidance of doubt, it is EirGrid's position, based on the best available scientific information in this supplemental SISAA, that the Material Amendment will not have likely significant effects on any European sites, either alone, or in combination with other plans or projects.

1.2 Statement of Authority

The technical competence of the authors is outlined below:

- **Aoife Edgely** is an Associate Marine Scientist in the Environmental Services Business Unit in Tetra Tech. She has over 14 years' experience in the marine science field and is a Chartered Environmentalist and Full Member of the *Institute of Environmental Sciences (IES)*. Aoife holds an Honours Degree in Environmental Science from Trinity College Dublin and a Master's degree in Marine Environmental Protection from Bangor University, Wales. She has delivered environmental assessments for a wide range of marine and coastal projects, including Environmental Impact Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, and Annex IV species assessments.
- **Niru Dorrian** is a Senior Marine Ecologist at EirGrid with 20 years' experience in marine science and offshore ecology. He is a Chartered Scientist through the *Science Council*, a Chartered Marine Scientist and Fellow of the *Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST)*, and a Fellow of the *British Ecological Society (BES)*. Niru holds an Honours Degree in Marine Biology from the University of Stirling and a postgraduate qualification in Environmental Clerk of Works from the University of the West of Scotland. He has supported, delivered, and managed a wide range of marine and coastal projects across the UK, Ireland, and internationally, including Appropriate Assessment, Natura Impact Statements, Annex IV Risk Assessments, wildlife licensing, and offshore ecological monitoring programmes.
- **Robert Fennelly** is Lead Senior Ecologist and Environment and Coordinator at EirGrid with 20 years' professional ecological experience including coastal and marine ecology. He is a Chartered Ecologist with and Full Member of the Chartered *Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)*. Robert holds an Honours Degree in Botany from Trinity College Dublin, and A Masters in Biodiversity and Conservation from the University of Exeter. He has supported, delivered, and managed a wide range of marine and coastal projects across Ireland and the UK. With specific regard to Appropriate Assessment, Robert has authored several papers on the topic, provided professional training on AA-related matters on behalf of CIEEM and lectured on AA at third level, and with Greentech Skillnet.

This report has been prepared with reference to the Supporting Information for Screening for Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) prepared by RPS on behalf of EirGrid in support of Maritime Usage Licence Application MUL240036.

2 Condition 32

Condition 32 is currently set out in the Licence as follows:

32. *In-combination effects*

- Prior to the commencement of the Permitted Maritime Usage, the Holder shall coordinate with other authorisation holders carrying out geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities within a 10 km radius of the Licensed Area.*
- Where a vessel to vessel distance of greater than 10 km cannot be maintained with respect to geophysical, seismic and geotechnical activities, the Holder shall co-ordinate with other authorisation holders to prevent temporal overlap of the activities. Where the Holder can submit evidence that there is a vessel to vessel distance of greater than 10 km, no temporal co-ordination of activities is required.*

- (iii) *Where the Holder becomes aware of temporal overlap that cannot be resolved within the prescribed distance, the Holder shall notify the Grantor who shall determine the timing of activities.*
- (iv) *Records of all engagements held and agreements reached, if any, shall be maintained by the Holder and made available to the Grantor if requested.*

This condition therefore applies a uniform 10 km vessel-to-vessel restriction with other operators across all survey activities.

2.1 Updated Scientific Guidance Since MUL240036 Application

Since MARA's determination of the MUL240036 application, updated guidance has been published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) on Effective Deterrence Ranges (EDRs) for assessing underwater noise disturbance against harbour porpoise SAC conservation objectives:

- JNCC (2025)¹ Updated Effective Deterrence Ranges (EDRs) for assessing the significance of noise disturbance in harbour porpoise Special Areas of Conservations, JNCC Report 803; and,
- Majewska et al. (2025)² Evidence review of harbour porpoise disturbance ranges in the context of the assessment and management of impulsive noise in Special Areas of Conservation: unexploded ordnance clearance, explosives for decommissioning, seismic (airgun) survey, sub-bottom profilers, ultra-short baseline acoustic positioning, acoustic deterrent devices, multi-bean echosounders, and military sonar, JNCC Report 798.

JNCC, 2025 (JNCC Report 803), supported by evidence reviews (Majewska et al., 2025; JNCC Reports 798) now provides revised EDRs for a number of impulsive noise sources relevant to offshore geophysical survey activities. The values include the following of relevance to this Material Amendment:

- Sub-bottom profilers: 3 km,
- Ultra short baseline systems: 3 km,
- Multibeam and single beam echosounders: 3 km in water depths ≤ 200 m.

These values provide an updated evidence base for considering the likely spatial extent of behavioural disturbance associated with relevant geophysical survey activities. These values are lower than the precautionary 5 km EDR applied in the assessment submitted with the MUL240036 application and substantially lower than the 10 km vessel-to-vessel coordination distance currently specified in Condition 32.

The updated guidance does not remove the need to consider in-combination effects. Rather, it supports a refined and proportionate approach to defining the spatial trigger for coordination between operators.

The proposed 6 km coordination distance remains precautionary in the context of the updated EDRs. The 6 km exceeds the 3 km EDR now identified for several relevant geophysical sources and remains greater than the 5 km EDR applied in EirGrid's assessment for behavioural disturbance, included as part of the MUL240036 application.

The proposed Material Amendment would therefore retain a precautionary approach to in-combination effects while aligning Condition 32 more closely with current best available scientific evidence.

¹ [JNCC Report 803. Updated Effective Deterrent Ranges \(EDRs\) for assessing the significance of noise disturbance in harbour porpoise Special Areas of Conservation \(SACs\) \(England, Wales & Northern Ireland\)](#)

² [JNCC Report 798. Evidence review of harbour porpoise disturbance ranges in the context of the assessment and management of impulsive noise in Special Areas of Conservation: unexploded ordnance clearance, explosives for decommissioning, seismic \(airgun\) survey, sub-bottom profilers, ultra-short baseline acoustic positioning, acoustic deterrent devices, multi-beam echosounders, and military sonar](#)

3 In-combination Effects Assessment

The following sections summarise:

- EirGrid’s underwater noise assessment supporting the MUL240036 application (Section 3.1)
- The in-combination assessments carried out by EirGrid and MARA (Section 3.2)

3.1 Assessment of underwater noise effects in MUL Application

On behalf of EirGrid, RPS undertook underwater noise modelling to support the MUL application, as presented in the [Subsea Noise Technical Report](#)³. These results informed the [Annex IV Risk Assessment](#)⁴, [SISAA](#)⁵ and the [Natura Impact Statement](#)⁶.

The modelling in RPS’ Subsea Noise Technical Report considered the acoustic propagation related to different equipment and vessel scenarios. Results were presented in the form of impact ranges for auditory injury and temporary threshold shift (TTS) and were weighted for marine mammal hearing frequency groupings (i.e. very high frequency cetaceans, high frequency cetaceans, low frequency cetaceans and seals).

Specifically the MUL documents demonstrated that:

- **Auditory injury effects are localised** (i.e. close to the source), typically within metres to hundreds of metres,
- **TTS extends further but remains limited**, with the largest ranges associated with very high frequency cetaceans, and,
- Behavioural disturbance ranges represent precautionary modelling outputs.

As reported in the MUL, it is relevant to note that with application of soft-start procedures as mitigation (DAHG, 2014), risks of auditory injury are reduced to within 390m of the acoustic sources for all hearing groups across all survey scenarios.

The assessment concluded that auditory injury and TTS effects were spatially limited and reduced through the implementation of standard mitigation measures. Behavioural disturbance represented the principal pathway relevant to consideration for in combination underwater noise effects associated with specified marine survey activities.

In relation to the in-combination behavioural disturbance effects the SISAA and NIS accompanying EirGrid’s MUL240036 application adopted a 5km Effective Deterrence Range (EDR) as the Cumulative Effects Spatial Scope (CESS), i.e. the range within which cumulative effects can be considered. This was based on the best available scientific evidence at that time (i.e. [JNCC, 2020](#)⁷). As stated previously, JNCC have now published updated EDRs, with 3km recommended for the relevant acoustic survey equipment (JNCC, 2025). -

3.2 Assessment of In-combination effects in MUL Application

3.2.1 EirGrid Assessment

³ Report Ref: IE001220-RPS-RP-XX-RP-EN-0005.

⁴ Report Ref: IE001220-RPS-RP-XX-RP-EN-0004.

⁵ Report Ref: IE001220-RPS-RP-XXRP-EN-0006.

⁶ Report Ref: IE001220-RPS-RP-XXRP-EN-0007

⁷JNCC (2020). Guidance for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of harbour porpoise SACs (England, Wales & Northern Ireland). JNCC Report No. 654, JNCC, Peterborough, ISSN 0963-8091

EirGrid's SISAA and NIS supporting MUL240036 considered the potential for in-combination effects arising from underwater noise generated by the proposed site investigation (SI) activities in combination with other plans and projects.

Underwater noise was identified as the impact pathway with the greatest potential spatial extent. EirGrid's SISAA and NIS supporting MUL240036 considered the acoustic impact pathways associated with the proposed activities, including auditory injury, temporary threshold shift (TTS) and behavioural disturbance. The underwater noise modelling undertaken in support of the MUL240036 application demonstrated that auditory injury effects are localised close to the source, while TTS effects extend further but remain limited. Behavioural disturbance ranges were identified as precautionary modelling outputs.

EirGrid's SISAA and NIS supporting MUL240036 also referred to the relevant JNCC guidance available at that time (JNCC Report 654, 2020), under which an Effective Deterrence Range (EDR) of approximately 5 km was applied for relevant geophysical survey activities.

EirGrid's NIS supporting MUL240036 identified the potential for in-combination effects where noise-producing activities occur in proximity and overlap temporally. It proposed coordination with other licence holders where geophysical survey activities are to take place within 5 km and at the same time as other licensed activities. This included avoidance of temporal and spatial overlap between marine geophysical activities and management of spatial overlap with other relevant activities.

3.2.2 MARA Screening Determination and Appropriate Assessment

Following review of EirGrid's SISAA supporting MUL240036, MARA published a Screening for Appropriate Assessment Determination for MUL240036 and concluded that Appropriate Assessment (AA) was required in relation to potential impacts associated with the proposed SI activities.

MARA's AA method adopted a precautionary Cumulative Effects Spatial Scope (CESS) of 10 km at screening stage for potential in-combination underwater noise effects.

Following completion of the AA process, Condition 32 was attached to MUL240036, applying a 10 km coordination and vessel separation requirement.

4 Conclusion

This Supporting Information has considered the proposed amendment to Condition 32 of Maritime Usage Licence MUL240036.

The proposed amendment relates solely to:

- refinement of the coordination distance applied under Condition 32 for specified marine survey activities from 10 km to 6 km; and,

The assessment included in the MUL application identified behavioural disturbance as the principal pathway relevant to potential in-combination underwater noise effects and applied a precautionary EDR of approximately 5 km in accordance with the JNCC guidance (JNCC Report 654, 2020) available at that time. MARA's Appropriate Assessment applied a precautionary 10 km CESS at screening stage and Condition 32 subsequently imposed a 10 km operational coordination distance.

Updated JNCC guidance published in 2025 (JNCC Report 803), supported by the associated evidence review (JNCC Report 798), now provides revised EDRs for geophysical survey equipment relevant to the proposed activities, with disturbance ranges generally between 3 km depending on equipment type and water depth. This updated evidence supports refinement of the coordination distance while maintaining a precautionary approach.

The proposed amendment would retain the requirement for coordination between survey operators and management of temporal overlap, while refining the coordination distance from 10 km to 6 km.

The proposed amendment does not introduce any new impact pathway, does not materially alter the conclusions of the existing Appropriate Assessment, and does not give rise to new or materially different

likely significant effects on any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in view of the conservation objectives of those sites.

On this basis, it is submitted that MARA may determine that Appropriate Assessment is not required for the proposed amendment to Condition 32.