

Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate
Material Amendment
Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Dr. Alison McCarthy, Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	18/06/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application No:	MUL240036MA Material Amendment
Applicant:	EirGrid plc., the Oval, 160 Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin, D04 FW28.		
Type of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:	<i>3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.</i>		
Location:	The south coast of Ireland and within the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan		
Material Amendment application received:	27/05/2026		

1. Background

EirGrid plc. (the applicant) has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Material Amendment to a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL), ref. MUL240036. The MUL was granted, with conditions, by MARA on 10/07/2025, in accordance with the provisions of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act). The MUL was granted for a Schedule 7(3) maritime usage; *Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000*, and for a duration of 5 years.

The purpose of that application was to inform the engineering design and environmental assessments for two proposed offshore substations (OSS) and potential offshore transmission cable corridors towards seven potential landfall zones in coastal areas in counties Cork, Waterford and Wexford. The site investigation activities are integral to the delivery of offshore renewable energy projects within the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan for Offshore Renewable Energy (SC-DMAP)¹ under EirGrid's Powering Up Offshore South Coast project.

EirGrid has now applied to MARA to Materially Amend MUL240036 in respect of one of the specific conditions (Condition 32) of the MUL.

2. Material amendment and local site characteristics

2.1 Description of the material amendment

Condition 32 of MUL240036 is as follows:

32. In-combination effects

(i) 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.

(ii) 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

¹ [The South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan for Offshore Renewable Energy \(SC-DMAP\).](#)

The applicant proposes to amend this condition in order to reduce the 10 km specified distance to 6 km. The applicant is not seeking any other amendment to the MUL and has confirmed that there will be no change in the nature or extent of the permitted maritime usage, the survey methodologies or equipment, the location or duration of the activities, or the project description as submitted as part of the original MUL application. The applicant proposes to reduce the specified distance in the in-combination condition to bring it in line with recently updated UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) guidance² on the Effective Deterrence Range³ for Harbour porpoise for the specific surveys they are undertaking.

For information, Table 1 provides a summary of the site investigation activities authorised under MUL240036 and Figure 1 shows the Licensed Area.

Table 1 Summary of site investigation activities authorised under MUL240036.

Summary of authorised site investigation activities	
Coastal geophysical surveys • Ground penetrating radar and/or seismic refraction • Topographical surveys including Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) devices	Marine geophysical surveys • Multi Beam Echosounder (MBES) • Sub-bottom profiler (SBP) including Ultra-High Resolution Seismic (UHRS) survey • Side Scan Sonar (SSS) • Magnetometer
Geotechnical surveys • Trial pit investigations • Subtidal grab sampling • Vibrocore testing • Borehole investigations (including downhole Cone Penetration Testing (CPT) • Shallow and Deep Drive CPT	Metocean and marine mammal acoustic device deployment • Metocean buoy • Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (ADCP) • Marine Mammal Static Acoustic Monitoring (SAM)
Coastal environmental surveys • Ecological walkover surveys (habitats, bat activity and roost assessment, mammal surveys including otter) • Ornithological vantage point surveys • Marine mammal vantage point surveys	Marine environmental surveys • Drop down video (DDV) and/or Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) surveys • Grab sampling • Ornithological surveys

² Updated Effective Deterrent Ranges (EDRs) for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of harbour porpoise Special Areas of Conservation (England, Wales & Northern Ireland) [JNCC, Report 803, 2025](#).

³ the radius of a circular area assumed to be disturbed

Intertidal core sampling (0.01m² core size)	- Marine mammal surveys including passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) - Water sampling
Other surveys: Archaeological surveys – intertidal, dive and wade surveys. Noise surveys. Shipping and navigation survey.	

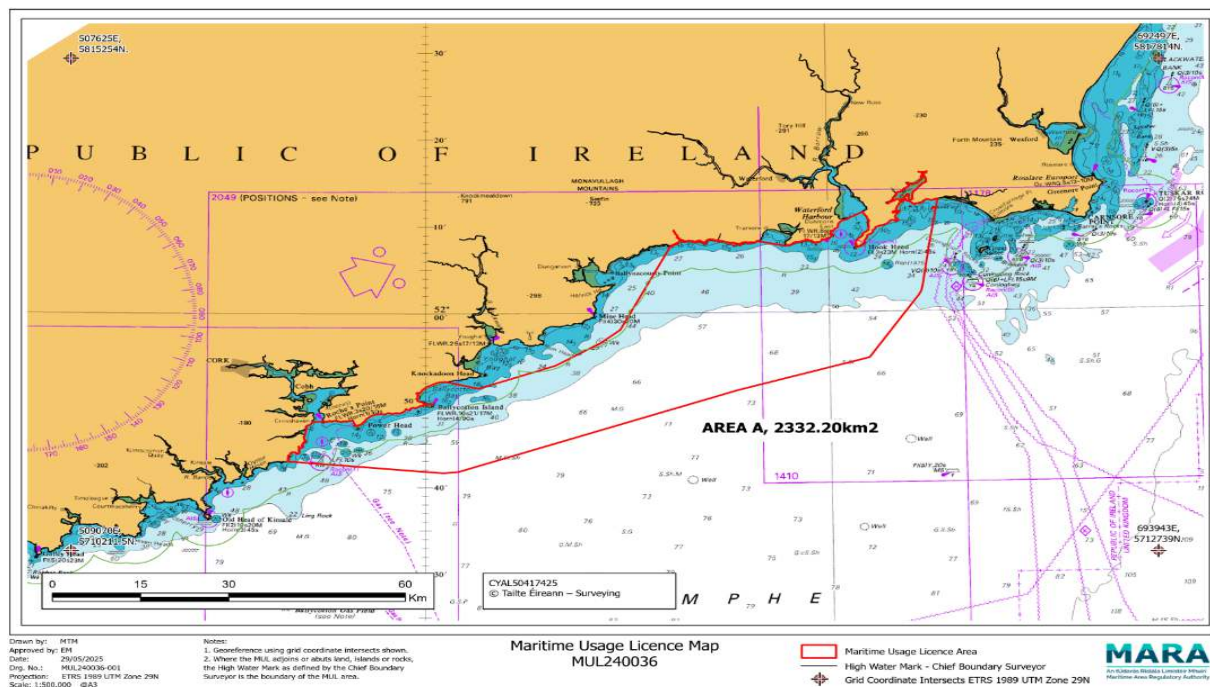


Figure 1 The Licensed Area, covering an area of 2,333 km².

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The Licensed Area is almost entirely within the SC-DMAP, though the surveys are being undertaken in a much smaller area, covering three potential OSS locations, the potential cable route corridors and the seven potential landfall zones. The average water depth range is 0–70 m. From the coast out to the 50 m depth contour, the broad benthic habitat types are described as generally moderate to high energy circalittoral rock, interspersed with pockets of moderate to high energy circalittoral coarse sediment and sand. Generally, beyond the 50 m depth contour the broad habitat types are a mosaic of deep circalittoral coarse sediment interspersed with deep circalittoral mud and sand in a moderate to high energy environment. The intertidal areas are generally comprised of sand, cobble and rock.

3. Identification of relevant European sites

The Material Amendment to Condition 32 of the MUL, proposed by the applicant, 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 a European site(s), 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 Material Amendment application which was referred to during this assessment

The proposed Material Amendment is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s). The European sites listed on Table 2 have been considered for appropriate assessment, given the nature, scale and Zone of Influence of the proposed Material Amendment, the conservation objectives of the European sites and using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model. Only those European sites with Harbour porpoise, Bottlenose dolphin, Harbour seal and Grey seal as Qualifying Interests (QI) were considered to be within the ZOI of the proposed Material Amendment, as Condition 32 is a specific condition of the MUL to mitigate cumulative impacts of underwater noise on those particular QI species.

Table 2 Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests and site-specific conservation objectives.

European Site & site code	Approx. distance from Licensed Area area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Hook Head SAC [000764]	SAC within Licensed Area	Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]	No See Section 4	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Hook Head SAC 000764. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Saltee Islands SAC [000707]	3 km	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330] <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364]	No See Section 4	No	NPWS (2011) Conservation Objectives: Saltee Islands SAC 000707 and Saltee Islands SPA 004002. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Slaney River Valley SAC [000781]	17	<i>Petromyzon marinus</i> (Sea Lamprey) [1095] <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i> (River Lamprey) [1099] <i>Alosa fallax fallax</i> (Twaite Shad) [1103] <i>Salmo salar</i> (Salmon) [1106] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355] <i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Harbour Seal) [1365]	No See Section 4	No	NPWS (2011) Conservation Objectives: Slaney River Valley SAC 000781. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife

					Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
Carnsore Point SAC [002269]	20 km	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Reefs [1170]	No See Section 4	No	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Carnsore Point SAC 002269. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Blackwater Bank SAC [002953]	37	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time [1110]	No See Section 4	No	NPWS (2024) Conservation Objectives: Blackwater Bank SAC 002953. Version 3. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC [000101]	80	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> (Grey Seal) [1364] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] European dry heaths [4030] Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330] <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]	No See Section 4	No	NPWS (2011) Conservation Objectives: Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC 000101. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

4. Assessment of likely significant effects

Condition 32 was identified as a mitigation measure as part of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) undertaken by MARA in respect of the original MUL application. The in-combination assessment of the AA noted that there was the potential for spatial and temporal overlap of the site investigation activities with other authorised site investigations. In order to address the potential for in-combination underwater noise disturbance on Harbour porpoise, Bottlenose dolphin, Grey seal and Harbour seal, the condition specifies that the holder must maintain a specified distance away from other survey vessels undertaking similar noise producing surveys, when operating at the same time. The specified distance in the condition was based on the recommended Effective Deterrence Range (EDR) for Harbour porpoise in 2020 UK JNCC guidance⁴. That guidance has subsequently been updated in 2025 based on more recent research and for the relevant geophysical surveys, the EDR has reduced from 5 km to 3 km. Hence a vessel-to-vessel distance of 6 km is appropriate, as proposed by the applicant, based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence.

The proposed Material Amendment will not result in any increased underwater noise disturbance or harm from the original MUL application. The reduced vessel-to-vessel distance from 10 km to 6 km will not result in any likely significant impacts to those QI marine mammal species in the European sites listed on Table 2, as it reflects the most up-to-date evidence and guidance.

In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed Material Amendment must be considered individually and also 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 is the Licensed Area and a 3 km buffer zone around it. It is based on the EDR of Harbour porpoise, which has a known sensitivity to underwater noise, and the relevant survey activity. The temporal scope of the in-combination assessment is four years, which is the remaining MUL duration. A search of relevant databases, including MARA, An Coimisiún Pleanála, EPA and local authority planning databases, was undertaken on the 17/06/2026. Table 3 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in-combination with the proposed Material Amendment.

⁴ Guidance for assessing the significance of noise disturbance against Conservation Objectives of harbour porpoise SACs (England, Wales & Northern Ireland), 2020. [JNCC Report No. 654](#)

Table 3: List of projects which were considered to have potential in-combination impacts on European sites.

Application Ref. & Applicant	Project description	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	Status
LIC230017. Microsoft Ireland Operations Ltd.	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	granted
MUL250019. Helvick Head Offshore Wind DAC	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	granted
MUL260021. Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	applied
MUL240026. Uisce Eireann	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	granted
MUL230015. Uisce Eireann	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	granted
MUL240042. Port of Cork Company	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	granted
MUL260003. Oceyon Ag	Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation	overlap	applied
FS007436. Voyage Offshore Array Ltd.	Foreshore licence application for site investigations	overlap	applied
FS007136. ESB Wind Development Ltd.	Foreshore licence application for site investigations	overlap	applied
FS006982. Energia	Foreshore licence for site investigations	overlap	granted
FS007318. RWE Renewables	Foreshore licence for site investigations	overlap	applied
FS007621. Pearla Offshore Wind Ltd.	Foreshore licence for site investigations	overlap	applied

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

- The Climate Action Plan 2025,
- National Marine Planning Framework,
- The National Development Plan 2021–2030,
- South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (SC-DMAP),
- The Port of Waterford Masterplan 2020–2040, and
- The Port of Cork Masterplan 2050.

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application and the plans listed above and projects listed on Table 3 on the conservation objectives of the European sites considered in this report can be excluded at this stage as the proposed Material Amendment to reduce the vessel-to-vessel distance is based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence and guidance and will not result in any increased underwater noise disturbance in-combination with those activities listed on Table 3.

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, the information on file, and having regard to:

- The nature of the proposed Material Amendment;
- The conservation objectives of the relevant European sites;
- The most up-to-date research, evidence and guidance, and
- The absence of potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects,

it was concluded that the proposed Material Amendment by EirGrid plc, the Oval, 160 Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin, D04 FW28 to MUL240036 which was granted in order to undertake *Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000* will not require Stage 2 appropriate assessment. It can be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the proposed Material Amendment, 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	 Dr. Alison McCarthy Senior Marine Advisor	18/06/2026
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director of Maritime Usage Licensing and Planning Advisory	23/06/2026