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N11/N25 Oilgate to Rosslare Harbour Scheme River Slaney MUL Application

**Attachment 4.7 - Environmental Impact
Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion**

June 2026

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Attachment 4.7 - Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

Mott MacDonald Ireland Limited have been appointed by the Wexford County Council, (the Applicant) to prepare a Maritime Usage Licence application for surveys ('the proposed surveys') within the maritime area to inform the design for the proposed River Slaney crossing as part of the N11/N25 Oilgate to Rosslare Harbour Road Scheme.

This Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion assesses the proposed surveys against the Directive (2011/92/EU) as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU (together, the "EIA Directive") and transposed national legislation, namely the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

This report will assist the Marine Area Regulatory Authority (as the competent authority), to undertake a screening determination and decision on whether the Applicant (Wexford County Council), is required to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and provide an EIA Report (EIAR) for the proposed surveys in the maritime area.

1.2 Project Overview

The N11/N25 Oilgate to Rosslare Harbour Road Scheme (hereafter referred to as 'the proposed scheme'), is approximately 31km in length. It will utilise a mix of both the existing road corridor, which will be upgraded, and a new corridor that will bypass significant constraints and deficiencies on sections of the existing road. The proposed scheme will include works in/near the crossing of the River Slaney. A new bridge crossing of the River Slaney is proposed as part of the proposed scheme.

In order to inform the design of the proposed scheme, specifically works in/near the crossing of the River Slaney, surveys as described in Attachment 3.1 Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage are required.

1.3 Statement of Competency

Mott MacDonald Ireland Limited is a multidisciplinary consultancy with over 20 years' experience of undertaking complex and challenging Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screenings and of writing environmental impact assessment reports for a wide range of projects. These include some of the Ireland's largest infrastructure, engineering and development projects.

Mott MacDonald is a corporate member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and hold its EIA Quality Mark. The Quality Mark Scheme allows organisations that lead the co-ordination of statutory EIAs in the UK and Ireland to make a commitment to excellence in their EIA activities and have this commitment independently reviewed. The EIA Quality Mark is a voluntary scheme, with organisations free to choose whether they are ready to operate to its seven EIA Commitments.

1.4 Legislation and Guidance

The requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has its origins in Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment. This Directive has been amended three times and was codified by Directive

2011/92/EU in 2011. Directive 2011/92/EU was then subsequently amended by Directive 2014/52/EU in 2014 (together, the “EIA Directive”).

As of 01 September 2018, the European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 296 of 2018) transposed the requirements of Directive (2011/92/EU), as amended, by Directive 2014/52/EU (together, the “EIA Directive”), into existing Irish planning consent procedures, i.e. the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

Alongside the EIA Directive and Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, the following guidance was reviewed and considered during the preparation of this EIA screening report:

- Environmental Effect Assessment (EIA) Guidance for Consent Authorities regarding Sub-Threshold Development (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2003)
- Guidance on EIA Screening (European Commission, 2017)
- Practice Note PN02 Environmental Impact Assessment Screening (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021)
- Transposition of 2014 EIA Directive (2014/52/EU) in the Land Use Planning and EPA Licencing Systems (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017).

2 Project Description

2.1 Survey Location

The site investigation surveys proposed by the Applicant, will be undertaken at the River Slaney, west of Wexford town, Co. Wexford. The MUL application area is approximately 2.49km², as shown in Figure 2.1.

The western extent of the MUL area is approximately 4.8km west of the existing Ferrycarrig bridge (along the river), near the townlands of Carigmannon and Newtown Lower. The eastern extent of the MUL area is approximately 3km east of the Ferrycarrig bridge (along the river), near the townlands of Park and Crosstown. The Ferrycarrig bridge carries the existing N11 over the River Slaney.

Figure 2.1: Proposed Maritime Usage Licence Area

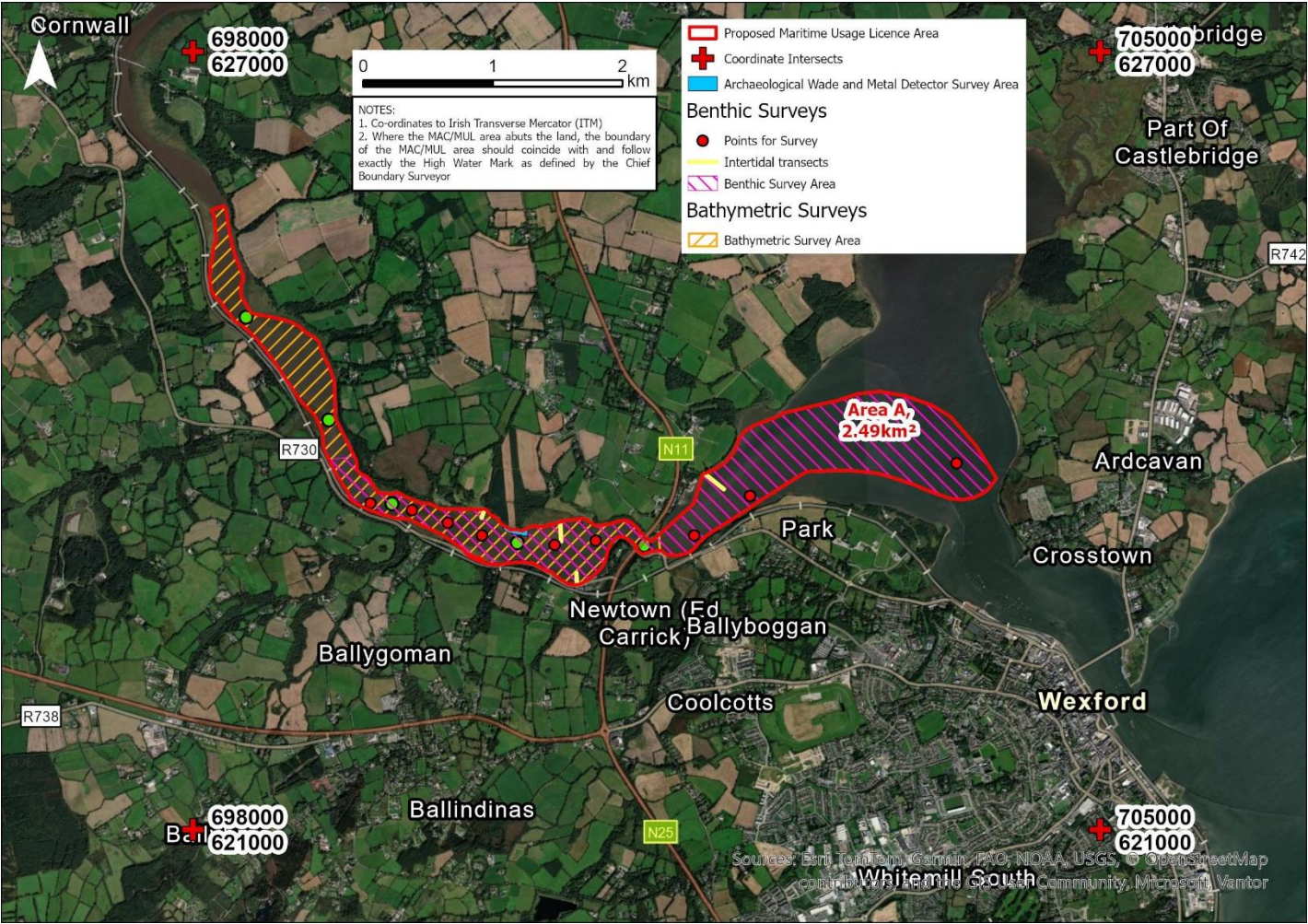


Source: Mott MacDonald, 2026

2.2 Survey Works Description

The proposed surveys are within the marine environment (below the high water mark (HWM)) as shown in Figure 2.2 and described in Sections 2.3 to 2.5 of this screening opinion.

Figure 2.2: Location of Proposed Surveys



Source: Mott MacDonald, 2026

2.3 Hydrographic Survey (Bathymetric Survey)

2.3.1 Survey Description

The hydrographic survey will map the physical features of the River Slaney, such as depth, tides, currents, and the profile of the riverbed. The extent of the survey area is outlined in Figure 2.2, the bathymetric survey area is shown in orange hatch, with indicative locations of current measurements shown in green.

Survey works will be undertaken from a dedicated survey vessel. The equipment will be deployed from either a boat or a Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV). In the case of a ROV, a support boat would still be required.

Sonar equipment (multi-beam sonar or a side-scan sonar) will be deployed to develop a bathymetric survey of the riverbed profile. A current meter will be used to measure river velocity at five locations within the survey area (as shown in Figure 2.2), and at up to 5m depth intervals. The riverbed material build-up will be mapped using a sub-bottom profiler. Measurements will be undertaken over several tidal conditions to ensure full coverage of the riverbed bathymetric survey area and record variance in current velocity between high and low tides. The hydrographic survey will be used to inform a hydraulic model of the River Slaney, specifically in the vicinity of the proposed bridge crossing.

2.3.2 Survey Timeline

The surveys will commence as soon as feasible following the grant of a MUL and appointment of a contractor. The exact mobilisation dates will not be known until the maritime usage licence has been obtained and the process of procuring a contractor is complete. It is estimated that the proposed surveys will take approximately four weeks to complete in the field.

2.4 Archaeological Wade and Metal Detector Survey

2.4.1 Survey Description

In October 2024, an intertidal walkover survey and geoarchaeological assessment of the Ground Investigations (GI) results was undertaken, investigating a c.190m stretch of the north bank of the River Slaney at spring low tide. Following this survey, as discussed with the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) Project Archaeologist and the Underwater Archaeology Unit (UAU) at the National Monuments Service (NMS), archaeological wade and metal detector surveys were recommended to further understand the archaeological potential of this area along the River Slaney and to fully interpret the impact of the proposed scheme.

The survey area for both the wade and the metal detector survey will be finalised in consultation with the TII Project Archaeologist and the NMS UAU but will likely cover the same area as the 2024 intertidal walkover survey. This indicative area is shown in Figure 2.2 in blue. The surveys will be performed within the area indicated. Allowances will be made for immovable obstacles or areas unsuitable for survey).

The survey area will be subject to a systematic wade survey and inspection at low tide to identify any evidence for archaeological remains (structures/ features/ deposits) and archaeological objects located in/ on/ adjacent to it. Any identified or potential archaeological remains, or objects, will be described, recorded, photographed and their location and extent surveyed. Their condition will also be recorded.

The metal detector survey is designed to record the location of ferrous and non-ferrous metal objects/ material contained on/ within sediments on the foreshore. The objective of the metal

detector survey is to provide a quantitative estimation of the amount of metal finds in the development area and to record their locations. The survey will be undertaken using a metal detector suitable for use in a foreshore environment.

The locations of all archaeological remains or objects identified will be recorded using EDM (Electronic Distance Measurement) and/ or DGPS (Differential Global Positioning System), as appropriate. All archaeological remains or objects identified will be photographed in-situ with a scale and north point. Any submerged remains/ objects observed will be photographed using a bathyscope or an underwater digital camera.

Any constraints encountered (e.g. immovable obstacles or areas unsuitable for survey etc.) which impede completion of the survey, will be recorded and described, and the locations shown on a drawing.

A full descriptive report of the survey will be produced following completion of the surveys. As the wade and metal detection survey will be carried out under a Detection Device Consent and Dive Licence issued by the NMS, a standalone report will need to be submitted to the Licensing Authorities, as part of their conditions.

The key aim of these surveys is to inform any further mitigatory works that will be carried out in advance of the commencement of construction of the proposed scheme. The surveys will also aid in describing the nature of the sediments present within the riverine environment of the study area and inform the Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the proposed scheme.

2.4.2 Survey Timeline

The surveys will commence following the grant of a MUL. The exact mobilisation dates will not be known until the marine usage licence has been obtained and will be dependent on weather and tidal conditions.

It is estimated that the proposed surveys will take approximately one day to complete in the field.

2.5 Subtidal and Intertidal Benthic Surveys

The benthic surveys are proposed to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date description of the species and habitats found within subtidal and intertidal areas of River Slaney, in vicinity of the proposed scheme. The extent of the benthic survey area is outlined in Figure 2.2, shown in pink hatch.

The benthic surveys will be carried out by AQUAFACT. AQUAFACT has in-house standard operational procedures for benthic sampling, and these will be followed for this project. Additionally, the NE Atlantic Marine Biological Analytical Quality Control (NMBAQC) "Guidelines for processing marine microbenthic invertebrate samples" (Worsfold, T. and Hall, D., 2010), will be adhered to.

2.5.1 Subtidal Survey Description

A stainless steel 0.025m² Van Veen grab sampler will be used to recover undisturbed sediment samples from the River Slaney riverbed at a total of ten (four upstream and six downstream of the proposed River Slaney bridge) faunal grab stations. The indicative locations of these are shown in Figure 2.2, in red. Triplicate samples will be collected at each station. An additional grab will also be collected for particle size analysis (PSA) and organic carbon at each station.

A Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) will be used to deploy the grab sampler. The Van Veen grab sampler comprises of a steel bucket with hinged access flaps, that is deployed in an open

position, which shuts when the sampler is in contact with the riverbed. In closing, sediment and biological material are retained inside the sampler. On arrival at each pre-selected survey station, the location will be recorded using DGPS. Additional information (such as date, site name, sample code, water depth at each replicate, type and specification of the sampler, anchorage, weather, quality of the sample, penetration depth, description of the sediment and mesh size), will be recorded, if possible. The samples will be sieved on a 1mm mesh sieve. Following a successful grab, photographs of the sample (including sample label), and notes on sediment type, texture, grain size, colour, odour (H₂S), residues, layering, volume, presence of fauna/tubes, algae, surface features etc, will be taken.

A sample of 500ml will be collected for PSA and organic carbon using a plastic scoop and labelled sediment sample will be stored in a cool box prior to PSA analysis in the laboratory. Each faunal sample will be stored and documented separately. All samples will be labelled and the information on the labels will be sufficient to identify the sample with certainty (e.g. date, location, station, job number, client, survey name etc). The labelling will be done on waterproof chemical resistant paper using a soft carbon pencil that will not fade in the fixing or alcohol solutions. These labels will be placed in the bucket with the sample, and the bucket will also be labelled on the outside using a waterproof marker.

2.5.2 Intertidal Survey Description

A survey of the intertidal zone upstream and downstream of the proposed Slaney River crossing will be undertaken. This will involve a Phase 1 Intertidal Walkover Survey and Phase II Intertidal Quantitative Transect Survey.

2.5.2.1 Phase I – Walkover Survey

Walkover surveys of the intertidal survey will be carried out prior to the Phase II quantitative transect surveys. The intertidal Phase I Walkover Survey will cover an approximate 1km stretch of the riverbank (north and south banks), dependent on access and local conditions. A Marine Nature Conservation Review (MNCR) Phase I intertidal survey will be completed within the intertidal areas during mean low water spring (MLWS) tidal conditions. The “Common Standards Monitoring Guidance” (Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), 2004) and “Common Standards Monitoring Guidance for Littoral Sediments Habitats” (JNCC, Version 4, August 2004) will be followed as guidance throughout surveys. Additional guidance including the “CCW Handbook for Marine Intertidal Phase I Survey And Mapping” (Wyn et al., 2000), the “Guidelines for the Conduct of Benthic Studies at Marine Aggregate Extraction Sites (2nd edition)” (Ware and Kenny, 2011), will be adhered to.

These surveys will take place around spring tide. During the walkover survey, any observations that appear to be related to ongoing change to the littoral habitats, will be recorded. These may include saltmarsh encroachment, invasive species, localised erosion and sediment accretion. The distribution of features will be recorded using photographs and GPS fixes. Habitat and biotope boundaries will be mapped using GPS trackers, and detailed notes on biotope (EUNIS and JNCC) and sediment character/taxa will be recorded in key habitats along the upper, mid and low shore.

This will be supplemented by occasional dig-overs of representative habitats (where required), which will entail digging over approximately 0.1m² of surface sediment and sieving through a 1mm sieve to provide a rapid in-situ assessment of benthic fauna. The survey will also include a record of sedimentary habitat, whereby sediment grain size is assessed in-situ using standardised Wentworth scale sediment comparison guides.

2.5.2.2 Phase II – Quantitative Transect Surveys

Following Phase 1 Walkover Surveys, Phase II Quantitative Intertidal Transect Surveys will be conducted within the benthic survey area as shown in Figure 2.2. The methodology will follow that set out within the *Marine Monitoring Handbook*; “Procedural Guideline No. 3-1 In situ intertidal biotope recording” (Wyn and Brazier, 2001) and “Procedural Guideline No. 3-6 Quantitative sampling of intertidal sediment species using cores” (Dalkin and Barnett, 2001). If rocky shore habitat is encountered, surveying will be adapted appropriately to use quadrats rather than core sampling. Photographic records during surveying will be taken, as appropriate, for recording and reporting purposes.

Four transects running perpendicular to the shoreline will be undertaken (two upstream and two downstream of the proposed River Slaney crossing). The indicative transects are shown in yellow in Figure 2.2. Along each transect, a 0.25m² quadrat will be used to survey at three stations (upper shore, mid shore and lower shore). Salient features will be noted as encountered along each transect and additional notes, supplemental photographs and level readings made, where appropriate. Rocks and stones will be overturned, and the algal canopy cover (if present) will be partially removed at each station (where applicable) to investigate for the presence of any faunal species.

Quadrats will also be used to calculate the abundance of lug worms (*Arenicola marina*). In situ dig-overs of each quadrat following initial analysis will be conducted. At each quadrat location, a 15cm diameter core sample (in triplicate) will be taken to a depth of 15cm and preserved in 4% buffered formalin in separate labelled (inside and out) sealed containers. An additional 15cm diameter core sample will be taken at each station for PSA and organic carbon analysis in labelled (inside and out) containers. The anoxic layer depth will be recorded for each sample.

Where any features of conservation interest are identified, the boundaries of these will be mapped using GPS in order to provide information on extent. Within each area of conservation, an agreed number of quadrats will also be sited to allow estimates of mean % cover to be calculated for each bed. Station locations will be recorded on a hand-held GPS unit (accuracy 3-5m) and recorded in the survey notebook. A photograph will be taken of each sampling station in order to help visually characterise the sediments and notes will be taken. Any evidence of anthropogenic disturbance or damage at any of the stations will be logged, measured (where relevant) and photographed. This includes activities such as bait digging, fishing activities and coastal defence works.

This methodology will result in 36 intertidal cores and 12 samples for the analysis of PSA and organic content. Due to the nature of the substrate in the intertidal zone of the estuary, it may not be feasible from a health and safety perspective to survey the intertidal area on foot. The soft mud in the vicinity of the proposed development may require sampling from a vessel instead. In this case AQUAFACT proposes to sample each transect (upper, mid, and lower shore) from a RIB at high water using a 0.025m² Van Veen grab sampler. Triplicate samples will be collected at each shore height, as well as an additional grab for sediment analysis, as outlined in the subtidal methods above.

2.5.3 Survey Timeline

The surveys will commence as soon as feasible following the grant of a MUL. The exact mobilisation dates will not be known until the maritime usage licence has been obtained. The subtidal survey and the intertidal survey will take approximately one day each.

3 Legislative Context

3.1 Requirements under the EIA Directive

The primary objective of the EIA Directive is to enable a high level of protection of the environment and human health. This is done through the establishment of minimum requirements for environmental impact assessment (EIA), prior to development consent being awarded, of public and private developments that are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Directive 2014/52/EU provides a definition of environmental impact assessment as being a process consisting of:

- The preparation of an environmental impact assessment report (EIAR).
- The carrying out of consultations required to inform the EIAR.
- The examination by the competent authority of the information presented in the EIAR and any supplementary information provided, where necessary, by the developer and relevant information received through consultations with the public, prescribed bodies and any affected Member States
- The reasoned conclusion by the competent authority on the significant effects of the project on the environment
- The integration of the competent authority's reasoned conclusion into any development consent decision

In determining the requirement for EIA, the EIA Directive differentiates between projects that always require EIA (mandatory), and those for which an EIA may be required. These projects are listed in Annex I and Annex II of the EIA Directive, respectively.

3.2 Requirements under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended

As noted above, in determining the requirement for EIA, the EIA Directive differentiates between projects that always require EIA and those for which an EIA may be required. These projects are listed in Schedule 5, Part 1 and Part 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (hereafter the P&D Regulations), as discussed below.

- **Schedule 5, Part 1 projects** are projects which are considered as having significant effects on the environment and require a mandatory EIA, if such development would equal or exceed, as the case may be, any relevant quantity, area or other limit specified in Part 1, or no quantity, area or other limit is specified in that Part in respect of the development concerned.
- **Schedule 5, Part 2 projects** are those not included in Part 1, but which may require EIA where the Proposed Development is of a class specified in Part 2 and equals or exceeds the relevant thresholds; or, where the Proposed Development would be of a class specified in Part 2, but does not equal or exceed a prescribed threshold in Part 2, yet it is concluded, determined or decided, that the Proposed Development is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

The initial step in screening for EIA is understanding the nature of the proposal and whether it comprises a project within the meaning of the EIA Directive. Where a proposal is not a project,

i.e. where a proposal is not of a development class listed in Annex I or II, as transposed into Schedule 5 of the P&D Regulations, then the EIA Directive is not relevant to the proposal.

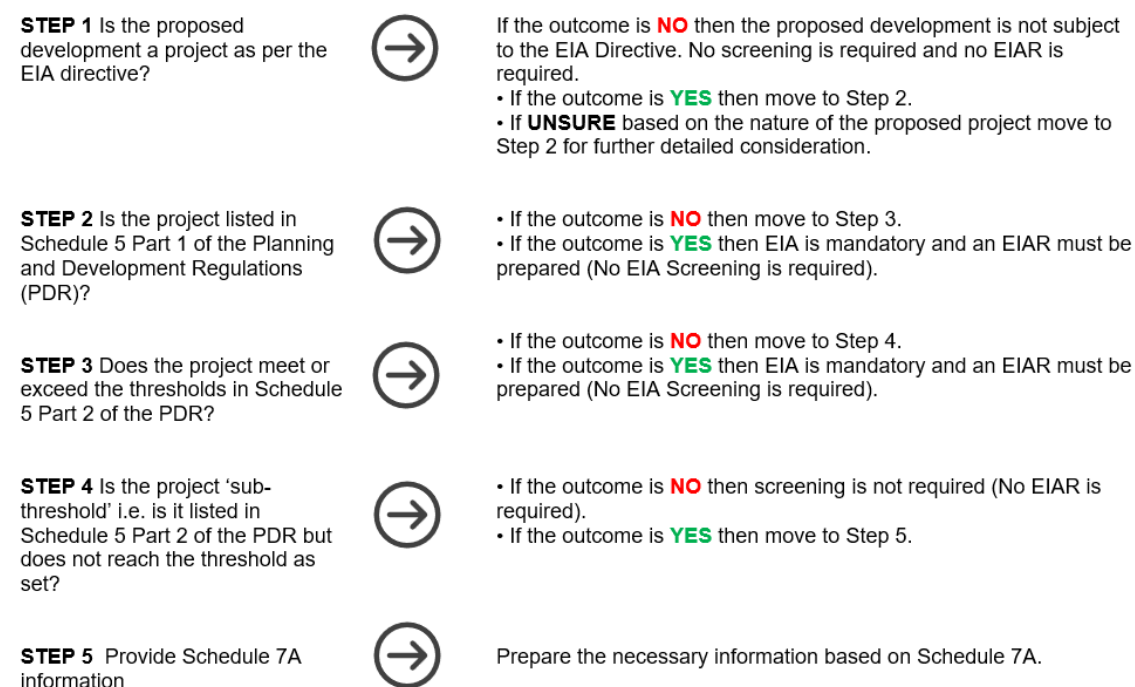
As stated above, where a project falls within a class of development in Schedule 5 Part 1, or where the thresholds of Part 2 are met or exceeded, an EIA is always mandatory.

Where a project can be defined as a type of development class listed under Schedule 5 Part 2, but does not meet or exceed the prescribed thresholds, then the project is categorised as a 'sub-threshold development' and must be screened for EIA.

Where the requirement to carry out EIA cannot be excluded, the information in Schedule 7A of the P&D Regulations must be provided for the project.

The steps in determining the requirement for EIA are illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Steps in EIA Screening process



Source: Mott MacDonald Ireland Limited

4 Determining EIA Requirements

4.1 Introduction

This section will determine whether or not EIA is applicable to the “proposed project” (the proposed surveys) as described in Section 2 of this EIA Screening Report, when reviewed against Schedule 5, Part 1 and 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

4.2 Determining the applicability of EIA

4.2.1 Step 1 – Is the Proposed Development a ‘Project’ in accordance with the EIA Directive?

The EIA Directive Annex I and Annex II does not include any development type which shares the same or similar characteristics (and associated impacts) as the “proposed project”. The “proposed project” is not considered a project type within the meaning/definitions of the EIA Directive.

The “proposed project” is therefore not a “project” and the EIA Directive does not apply.

4.2.2 Step 2 – Is the Project listed in Schedule 5, Part 1?

Following on from Section 4.2.1 above, the “proposed project” is not considered a project subject to the EIA Directive; correspondingly there is no reference in Schedule 5, Part 1 to a project type which describes the “proposed project”.

4.2.3 Step 3 & 4– Does the Project meet, exceed, or is below the thresholds in Schedule 5, Part 2?

Within Schedule 5, Part 2 there are no classes of development listed in Schedule 5, Part 2 which describe the activities of the “proposed project”.

5 Opinion on EIA Screening

Having regard to the definitions of a “project” within the EIA Directive it is considered the proposed surveys (hydrographic survey, archaeological wade and metal detection survey and sub-tidal benthic survey) do not comprise activities which are considered to be a “project” within the meaning of the EIA Directive.

In conclusion, the proposed surveys are not considered a “project” and the EIA Directive does not apply; no EIA sub-threshold screening or EIA report is therefore required to be prepared.

