

MI Observations on MUL260049: Uisce Éireann – marine surveys, bathymetry and water quality sampling along the East Coast of Ireland

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Summary

The Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) requested MI observations on possible impacts that Marine Usage Licence ref: MUL260049 might have on the seafood sector, i.e. fish stocks, fisheries, aquaculture, or the environments on which they rely. The application submitted by Uisce Éireann in application for a maritime usage license to conduct marine survey work in support of a modelling study of water currents along the east coast of Ireland (from Carlingford Lough to Kilcoole). The proposed surveys are supporting the design and consenting of essential wastewater infrastructure to facilitate growth in communities, including provision of housing.

Necessary monitoring operations include:

- deployment of bottom- and vessel-mounted ADCPs,
- deployment of tide gauges,
- conductivity, temperature, and depth (CTD) monitors,
- bathymetric surveys using single beam & multibeam echosounders, and
- water quality sampling from the shoreline and from a vessel.

The application covers four coastal study areas, starting at Carlingford Lough in the North, and finishing at Kilcoole in the South, totalling 1095 km², and includes:

- Compliance with Objectives of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF),
- Supporting information for screening for Appropriate Assessment (SISAA),
- Annex IV Species Risk Assessment,
- Compliance with Objectives of the Water Framework Directive, and
- Compliance with Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Marine Institute response

Having reviewed the MUL application documents, the proposed survey areas coincide with several fishing operations, including bottom trawling, dredging, pelagic fishing and pots (the latter at the southern end of the survey area in Wicklow). Dublin Port hosts a range of ferry activities, and there are several other national ferry trade ports along the coastline. FEAS notes the sites overlap with 16 coastal Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), 13 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), the Skerries Islands Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and 4 shellfish water directive areas (see <https://atlas.marine.ie/> and <https://dafm-maps.marine.ie/aquaculture-viewer/>).

Independently the survey operations should not substantially interfere with fishing activities. It is assumed that necessary notices to mariners / fishing vessels will be made regarding the deployment of seafloor ADCPs and bathymetric mapping activities.

The indicated areas are coincidental with spawning and nursery grounds of a range of commercial fish species, including:

Cod nursery and spawning grounds; Haddock nursery and spawning grounds; herring nursery ground; Horse mackerel nursery ground; Mackerel nursery ground; Nephrops nursery and spawning grounds; Whiting nursery and spawning grounds.

There is potential for cumulative impacts between these and other survey activities that may be active in the vicinity and near timeframes.