Maritime Usage Licence and Planning Advisory Directorate

Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	John Evans, Director	**From:**	Ross Fitzgerald, Marine Analyst
Date:	10/11/2026	**Maritime Usage Licence Application No:**	MUL260058
MUL Applicant Name:		Cork City Council	
MUL Applicant Registered Address:		City Hall, 1-2 Anglesea Street, Cork, T12 T997	
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:		River Lee, Cork City	
Licence application received:		07/08/2026	

1. Background

Cork City Council (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 activities are required to inform the planning, environmental assessment and engineering design of the Cork Docklands South Quays public realm project and structural survey works associated with the Cork North Quays area at Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin, and North Deep-Water Quay.

2. Description of maritime usage and local site characteristics

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

The proposed maritime usage area is located within the River Lee between Custom House Quay to the west and the Jack Lynch tunnel to the east (Figure 1) and covers a total area of 1.14km^2.

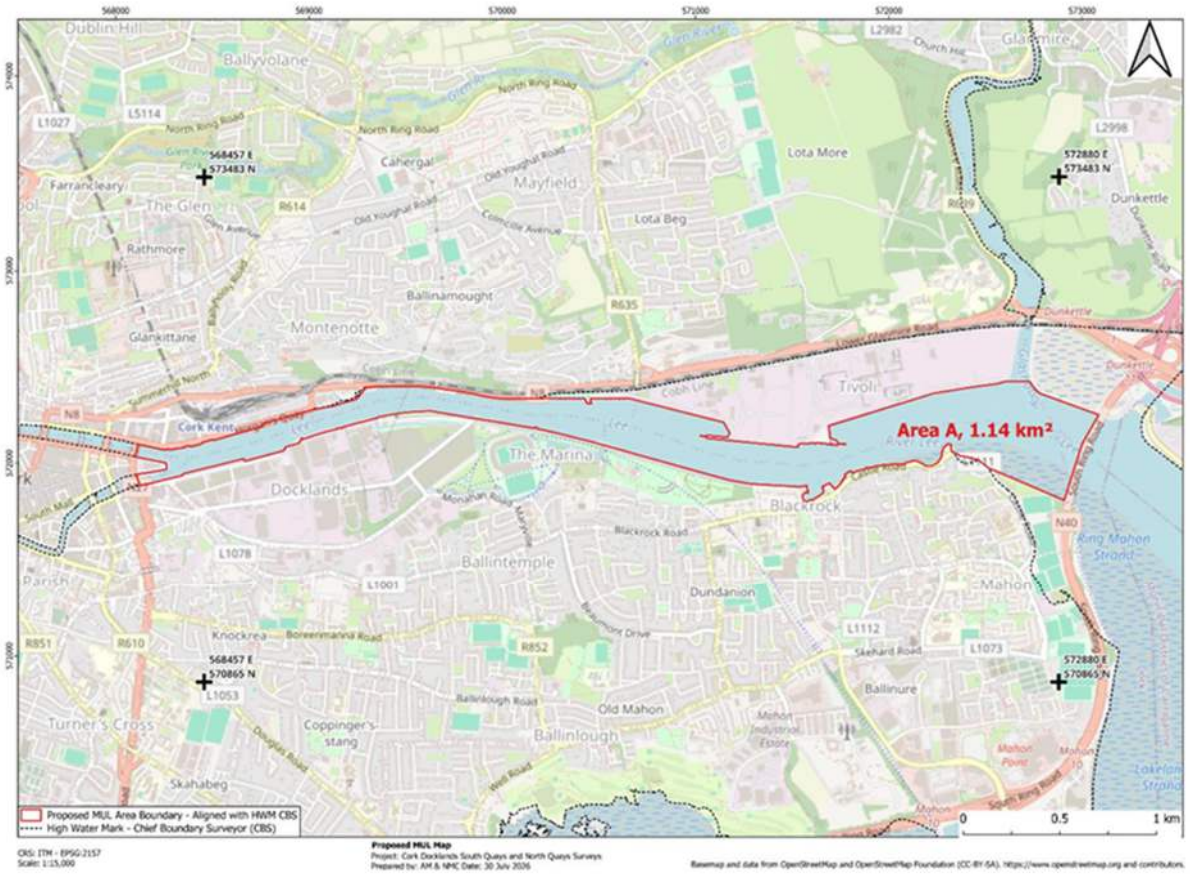


Figure 1 – Location of the proposed Maritime Usage Licence area (applicants map)

The proposed programme of site investigations to be undertaken is summarised below[1]. The applicant has applied for a one-year licence.

2.1.1 Structural Surveys

South Quays (between Albert Quay and Blackrock Pier)

- Boat based structural concrete and steel investigations - to assess the condition and structural properties of existing quay walls and jetties
- Boat-based grab samples, water samples and flow measurements
- Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) Underwater Camera Survey - to capture high-resolution video and still imagery of submerged quay walls, jetties, under-jetty areas, associated structures and the adjacent riverbed within the survey area
- Localised ROV geophysical survey (Single Beam Echosounder (SBES), Multibeam Echosounder (MBES), magnetometer) and boat-based LiDAR survey - to collect data on the riverbed, quay walls, jetties and associated structures within the survey area
- A wider bathymetric Survey (including Chirp sub-bottom profiler) - to map the riverbed morphology and provide accurate depth measurements across the proposed MUL area
- The proposed elements above are expected to take 5-10 days each to carry out

North Quays (at Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin, and North Deep-Water Quay)

- Boat based inspections and investigations of suspended or overhanging quay wall sections and the underside of suspended slabs
- Diver-led, vessel supported, underwater structural survey
- Underwater photography and video recording of quay and jetty structures
- Ground penetrating radar to map quay reinforcement layout, voids behind the quay wall face and quay wall thickness
- SBES/MBES where required to assess riverbed profile and scour at the wall toe
- The proposed elements above are expected to take 5-10 days each to carry out

2.1.2 Archaeological Surveys (South Quays only, between Albert Quay and Blackrock Pier)

- Intertidal Archaeology survey (5-10 days)
    - Boat-based visual inspection of exposed intertidal riverbed areas, quay walls and associated maritime infrastructure
    - Archaeological metal detecting, walkover and/or wade surveys (at low tide)
    - Archaeological dive survey

[1] The application supporting documents also included some additional activities not within the maritime area as defined in the MAP Act (visual inspections of quay structures and aerial LiDAR, structural inspection and archaeological surveys). These activities have been withdrawn by the applicant and are not considered as part of this MUL application.

- Localised archaeological geophysical survey (5-10 days)
    - To identify potential archaeological features, deposits or objects located on or beneath the riverbed
    - Side-scan sonar, magnetometer survey, SBES, MBES, sub-bottom profiling

2.1.3 Ecological Surveys (5-10 days each)

- Phase I intertidal survey
    - Along north and south banks of the River Lee throughout the proposed MUL area
    - Walkover or boat based to characterise intertidal habitats

- Phase II intertidal survey
    - 4x intertidal transects will be surveyed, located towards the eastern end of the study area
    - Boat-based grab samples to be taken at upper, middle and lower shore at each transect
    - ROV will be deployed along each transect to document middle and lower shore intertidal habitats

2.1.4 Subtidal survey

- To characterise subtidal sediments and benthic fauna at the South Quays sites only
- 10x sampling stations at 400m intervals
- Duplicate grabs samples at each station

2.1.5 Otter Survey (2-3 days)

- Boat-based visual inspection of quay walls, river margins and associated structures within the entirety of the MUL area
- Identification and recording of evidence of otter presence, including holts, couches, spraints and feeding remains

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The proposed MUL area comprises tidal sections of the urbanised main river channel of the River Lee and upper Cork Harbour with littoral and infralittoral sand and mud flats at the eastern extent around Lough Mahon.

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 a 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 1 have been considered for appropriate assessment, given the nature, scale and Zone of Influence of the maritime usage, the conservation objectives of the European sites and using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.

Table 1 - Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests 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 Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site Screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Great Island Channel SAC [001058]	3.5	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Atlantic salt meadows *(Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimiae) [1330]*	No	No	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Great Island Channel SAC [001058]. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Cork Harbour SPA [004030]	Overlap	**Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]** **Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) [A005]** **Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]** **Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) [A028]** **Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048]**	Yes – possible above water noise and visual disturbance	Yes	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA [004030]. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department

		Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052] **Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) [A053]** **Pintail (*Anas acuta*) [A054]** **Red-breasted Merganser *(Mergus serrator*) [A069]** **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]** **Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) [A164]** **Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179]** **Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]**			of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183] **Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]** **Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855]** **Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) [A857]** **Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]**			

4. Assessment of likely significant effects

Table 2 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.)
Above water noise and visual disturbance	Potential for survey activities generating noise, vibration and increased human presence or vessel activity to be at an intensity and duration that would cause significant disturbance to bird populations.
Disturbance from underwater noise	Underwater noise from the proposed site investigations is not likely to have a significant effect on European Sites due to the location of the proposed activities and the sound frequencies of the proposed survey equipment which do not overlap with those of birds, otter, and most marine mammals.
Physical habitat disturbance	The potential habitat disturbance as a result of the deployment and recovery of grabs on the seabed is not likely to cause significant effects on European Sites due to the location of the proposed activity and the small areas potentially disturbed.
Effects on water quality	The potential effect on water quality as a result of the proposed maritime usage is not likely to cause significant effects on protected habitats or species due to location of the proposed activities, the small areas potentially disturbed and the limited level of vessel use proposed.

In-combination effects

The potential impacts of the proposed maritime usage 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 extent of the proposed maritime usage area, plus a 650m buffer around it. This is based on the maximum potential disturbance distance for Curlew, which is most sensitive to above water noise and visual disturbance[2]. The temporal scope of the in-combination assessment is based on the period over which the activities are proposed. The applicant has applied for a one-year licence and thus the temporal scope is one year.

[2] https://www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-research-report-1283-disturbance-distances-review-updated-literature-review-disturbance#Main+findings

A search of relevant databases (including MARA MUL and Maritime Area Consent (MAC) applications, Cork City and County Council planning applications, Environmental Protection Agency Dumping at Sea Permits, An Coimisiún Pleanála planning applications, Department of Agriculture, Food and The Marine *Aquamis* viewer, Foreshore consents), was undertaken on 09/11/2026. Table 3 below outlines those activities which are considered to have the potential to act in-combination with the proposed maritime usage.

Table 3: 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
26/44745	Planning Application: Construction of a tunnel pipe beneath the River Lee	overlap	Applied
26/44589	Planning Application: Tivoli Access Infrastructure Project	< 1	Applied
FS007126	Foreshore Licence: Port of Cork Company - Maintenance Dredging	Overlap	Granted
FS005070	Foreshore Licence: Port of Cork Company – Disposal of dredging material	<1	Granted
S0013-03	Dumping at Sea Permit – Port of Cork Company	Overlap	Permitted

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

- The Climate Action Plan 2025,
- River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022-2027,
- Port of Cork Masterplan 2050,
- Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028,
- Cork County Development Plan, 2022-2028.

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 cannot be excluded at this stage. This is due to the potential for spatial and temporal overlap, which may result in additive visual and above water noise disturbance.

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?
No

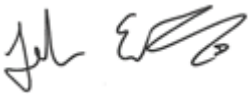
5. Screening Determination Statement

The assessment of significant effects:

Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, the information on file, and having regard to:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development,
- The distance to the nearest European sites,
- Possible above water noise and visual disturbance,
- The potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects,

it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by Cork City Council, City Hall, 1-2 Anglesea Street, Cork, T12 T997, 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, in the River Lee, Cork City (MUL260058) 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	 Ross Fitzgerald Marine Analyst	Date: 10/11/2026
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	 John Evans Director	Date: 12/11/2026