

Marina Quarter Ltd

Marine Environmental Surveys for Haggardstown and Marshes Upper Large- scale Residential Development

Attachment 4.10 Consistency of the proposed Maritime Usage with
the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030

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List of Acronyms/Glossary

Abbreviation	Full term
AA	Appropriate assessment
DaS	Dumping at Sea
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
MUL	Maritime Usage Licence

1. Introduction

The Fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023–2030 sets out Ireland’s strategic framework for addressing biodiversity loss and supporting the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity. The Plan is structured around five strategic objectives:

- Adopt a Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach to Biodiversity
- Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs
- Secure Nature’s Contribution to People
- Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
- Strengthen Ireland’s Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives.

As part of the Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) application, the Proposed Maritime Usage has been considered against these five objectives.

The Proposed Maritime Usage comprises temporary marine ecological surveys within Castletown Estuary and Inner Dundalk Bay. The surveys are being undertaken to characterise existing marine ecological conditions and provide baseline information to inform environmental assessments associated with the proposed residential development at Haggardstown and Marshes Upper, Dundalk, County Louth.

The survey programme comprises intertidal habitat and biotope mapping, quantitative intertidal sampling, subtidal DDV and/or ROV survey, benthic faunal sampling and sediment characterisation. The Proposed Maritime Usage is strictly limited to these marine survey activities and does not include the construction of the proposed residential development or associated infrastructure.

The survey area occurs within a sensitive marine environment that includes Dundalk Bay SAC and Dundalk Bay SPA. The surveys will provide information on intertidal and subtidal habitats, benthic communities, sediment conditions and ecological features within the survey area, thereby supporting evidence-based environmental assessment and decision-making.

The consistency of the Proposed Maritime Usage with the five strategic objectives of the NBAP is considered below.

2. Adopt a Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach to Biodiversity

Objective 1 seeks to ensure that biodiversity considerations are integrated across government, society, business and decision-making.

The Proposed Maritime Usage is consistent with this objective by providing robust ecological information that can be considered by the applicant, environmental consultants, MARA and other relevant authorities when assessing the proposed activities and associated development. The survey design focuses on baseline characterisation of intertidal and subtidal habitats and benthic communities within the survey area, ensuring that biodiversity considerations are supported by site-specific ecological evidence.

The survey outputs will therefore support the integration of biodiversity considerations into relevant environmental assessment and decision-making processes.

3. Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs

Objective 2 focuses on the conservation and restoration of biodiversity, including protected habitats and species.

The Proposed Maritime Usage has been designed to avoid permanent habitat loss and minimise disturbance to the marine environment. Initial subtidal habitat characterisation will be undertaken using non-intrusive DDV and/or ROV techniques, with intrusive grab sampling undertaken only where seabed conditions are considered suitable. Sensitive habitats identified during the visual survey will be avoided through survey planning and station selection.

The intrusive component of the survey comprises 36 intertidal grab samples, consisting of 24 faunal samples and 12 sediment samples, together with 15 subtidal grab samples across five stations, consisting of 10 faunal samples and five sediment samples. Each grab will sample an area of approximately 0.025 m². The resulting seabed disturbance will therefore be spatially discrete and temporary, with no permanent habitat loss or material habitat-scale degradation anticipated.

The surveys will also provide baseline ecological information that can assist in identifying sensitive habitats and ecological features and support their appropriate consideration in subsequent environmental assessment and monitoring.

4. Secure Nature's Contribution to People

Objective 3 recognises the contribution that biodiversity and functioning ecosystems make to human well-being and society.

Inner Dundalk Bay and the Castletown Estuary provide a range of ecosystem services, including nutrient cycling, water quality regulation, coastal amenity and the maintenance of biodiversity and wider ecological functioning.

The Proposed Maritime Usage will not materially affect the continued provision of these ecosystem services. The surveys are temporary and localised and involve no permanent marine infrastructure. By improving understanding of ecological conditions within the survey area, the resulting baseline information will also support informed environmental decision-making and the appropriate consideration of marine biodiversity and ecosystem functioning.

The Proposed Maritime Usage is therefore consistent with the objective of securing nature's contribution to people.

5. Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity

Objective 4 seeks to strengthen the evidence base available to inform biodiversity conservation, monitoring, policy and decision-making.

The Proposed Maritime Usage directly supports this objective through the collection of site-specific marine ecological information. The survey programme will include intertidal habitat and biotope mapping, quantitative intertidal sampling, subtidal DDV and/or ROV observations, benthic faunal sampling, particle size analysis and organic carbon analysis.

Together, these surveys will characterise existing intertidal and subtidal habitats, benthic communities and sediment conditions within the survey area and identify sensitive habitats or other ecological features where present.

The resulting information will establish a baseline against which future ecological information can be considered and will provide a robust evidence base to inform environmental assessment and decision-making associated with the Proposed Development.

6. Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives

Objective 5 seeks to strengthen Ireland's contribution to international biodiversity initiatives and commitments.

The Proposed Maritime Usage is local and temporary in scale and will not influence the achievement of national or international biodiversity targets. However, its evidence-led approach is consistent with the implementation of Ireland's wider biodiversity commitments by supporting informed assessment and protection of marine habitats and species.

The surveys will provide ecological information relevant to the consideration of protected habitats and species and to environmental assessment under applicable national and EU environmental frameworks, including the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The Proposed Maritime Usage will not compromise Ireland's ability to meet its wider biodiversity commitments and is consistent with the evidence-based management and protection of biodiversity promoted by the NBAP.

7. Conclusion

The Proposed Maritime Usage comprises temporary and localised marine ecological surveys within Castletown Estuary and Inner Dundalk Bay. The surveys will provide baseline information on intertidal and subtidal habitats, benthic communities and sediment conditions to inform environmental assessments associated with the Proposed Development.

The survey methodology incorporates non-intrusive visual survey techniques and targeted, spatially discrete grab sampling to minimise disturbance, with no permanent marine infrastructure or permanent habitat loss proposed. The surveys will also strengthen the site-specific ecological evidence available to support subsequent environmental assessment and decision-making.

On this basis, the Proposed Maritime Usage is considered consistent with the five strategic objectives of the Fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030.