MUL Application Supporting Attachment 4.10 National Biodiversity Action Plan Compliance Details

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter			Page
1	**Consistency with 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030**		**3**
1.1	Relevance of the NBAP to the Proposed Maritime Usage		3
	1.1.1	Marine Protected Areas	4
	1.1.2	Achieving Good Environmental Status (MSFD) and High/Good Status (WFD)	4
	1.1.3	Sustainable Use of Marine Resources (Fish & Shellfish)	4
	1.1.4	Reduction of Pressures from Maritime Activities	4
	1.1.5	Restoration and Protection of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems	5
	1.1.6	Marine Biodiversity Data and Monitoring	5
1.2	Integration of Biodiversity into Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Planning		5
1.3	Conclusion		5

1 CONSISTENCY WITH 4TH NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2023 – 2030

The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023–2030 sets out Ireland's overarching policy framework for halting and reversing biodiversity decline across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine environments. The NBAP establishes legally informed actions for ecosystem protection, restoration, sustainable use, monitoring, and governance. This attachment evaluates the consistency of the proposed Maritime Usage with the relevant NBAP objectives, targets, and actions relating to the marine and coastal environment.

The five key objectives are summarised below:

Objective 1 – Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach

The proposed activity has been planned and assessed having regard to national biodiversity policy and applies a precautionary approach to biodiversity protection, consistent with the integration of biodiversity considerations into marine decision-making.

Objective 2 – Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs

The activity does not undermine conservation objectives for marine species or habitats and does not conflict with existing or proposed Marine Protected Areas or other conservation measures.

Objective 3 – Secure Nature's Contribution to People

The proposed Maritime Usage does not compromise ecosystem services, including fisheries productivity, water quality or biodiversity-related cultural values.

Objective 4 – Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity

While not a formal biodiversity monitoring programme, the activity is compatible with the NBAP's objective of improving marine environmental knowledge and does not prejudice future monitoring or assessment.

Objective 5 – International Biodiversity Commitments

The activity is consistent with Ireland's commitments under EU and international biodiversity frameworks through the avoidance of biodiversity pressures and the application of proportionate environmental safeguards.

1.1 RELEVANCE OF THE NBAP TO THE PROPOSED MARITIME USAGE

Ireland's marine environment supports internationally significant biodiversity, including cetaceans, seabirds, fish, shellfish, and cold-water coral habitats. The NBAP highlights that the seas surrounding Ireland "support vast colonies of seabirds, abundant fish and cold-water coral reefs, whales and dolphins" and therefore require robust protection.

The MUL application demonstrates alignment with NBAP policy commitments relating to:

- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)
- Good Environmental Status under the MSFD

- Water quality objectives under the WFD (Attachment 4.5)
- Sustainable use of marine resources
- Minimisation of underwater noise and disturbance (Attachment 4.4)
- Avoidance of pollution and habitat degradation
- Marine biodiversity data, monitoring, and reporting obligations

1.1.1 MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

The NBAP commits Ireland to new legislation and the expansion of a coherent MPA network, targeting protection of 30% of Ireland's marine area by 2030.

Consistency:

The proposed Maritime Usage will not impact the designation or management of MPAs. Activities are temporary, reversible, and do not involve seabed modification beyond small sampling points. The project includes a full AA Screening (Attachment 4.3), ensuring that MPA conservation objectives are respected and that no Likely Significant Effect arises.

1.1.2 ACHIEVING GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS (MSFD) AND HIGH/GOOD STATUS (WFD)

The NBAP requires full implementation of the WFD (Attachment 4.5) and the MSFD (Attachment 4.6) for all transitional, coastal and marine waters, to maintain or achieve good ecological/environmental status.

Consistency:

The proposed Maritime Usage will not cause deterioration of water quality, as activities will involve only low-intensity sampling and remote sensing.

No discharge, release of contaminants, or permanent alteration of water body status will occur.

Temporary and localised sediment disturbance (if any) is not expected to affect WFD status or MSFD descriptors such as noise, contaminants, or seabed integrity.

1.1.3 SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE RESOURCES (FISH & SHELLFISH)

NBAP actions require the maintenance and restoration of fish and shellfish stocks to levels capable of producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), in line with the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Consistency:

The SI activities will not target, remove, harvest, or interfere with fish or shellfish resources. Any seabed sampling (if proposed) will be negligible in scale and will not disrupt spawning or nursery areas. The project therefore does not conflict with sustainable fisheries or ecosystem-based management commitments.

1.1.4 REDUCTION OF PRESSURES FROM MARITIME ACTIVITIES

NBAP implementation requires reducing pollution, underwater noise, and human pressures on marine species and habitats through OSPAR and MSFD commitments (noise, litter, species protection, habitat protection).

Consistency:

SI vessels will comply with MARPOL, and no pollutants will be discharged.

Underwater noise emissions from SI equipment and vessels will be low, temporary, and localised.

Mitigation measures (e.g., MMO observations, soft-start protocols, adherence to NPWS 2014 Guidance where applicable) will ensure disturbance to protected species is avoided.

There will be no long-term increase in noise, habitat loss, or disturbance pressure.

1.1.5 RESTORATION AND PROTECTION OF COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

The NBAP adopts a national target to restore at least 30% of degraded marine and coastal ecosystems by 2030, in keeping with the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Consistency:

The proposed activities do not involve habitat removal, reclamation, dredging, or construction. No part of the project will hinder future restoration of marine ecosystems. The SI works support evidence-based planning, which is itself a NBAP-aligned action.

1.1.6 MARINE BIODIVERSITY DATA AND MONITORING

NBAP places strong emphasis on improving biodiversity knowledge through enhanced data collection, monitoring and “citizen science activities in inshore and offshore waters”.

Consistency:

The SI activities will generate marine environmental data (e.g., sediment, benthic, or geophysical information where applicable). While not a biodiversity survey, the data will contribute indirectly to:

- marine environmental baseline understanding
- evidence-based planning
- informed assessment of marine biodiversity pressures

This supports NBAP objectives for better marine data infrastructure and decision-making.

1.2 INTEGRATION OF BIODIVERSITY INTO OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY (ORE) PLANNING

NBAP requires biodiversity integration into OREDP II**,** emphasising early consideration of environmental constraints in offshore renewable energy development. DECC will ensure “biodiversity representatives” form part of OREDP governance.

Consistency:

The proposed Maritime Usage supports early-stage environmental assessment for potential offshore renewable energy or related maritime development. The use of AA Screening, EIAR methodology (if applicable), and adherence to the precautionary principle aligns strongly with NBAP’s requirement for biodiversity mainstreaming in maritime developments.

1.3 CONCLUSION

The proposed Maritime Usage is considered fully consistent with the objectives and policy direction of Ireland’s 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023–2030. The temporary, small-scale nature

of the SI activities, supported by robust environmental safeguards, ensures that the project does not pose pressures inconsistent with national biodiversity priorities.

In particular, the Maritime Usage:

- Avoids impacts on marine biodiversity and protected areas, supported by a rigorous AA Screening that confirms no Likely Significant Effects (LSE).
- Does not hinder the designation or management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including Ireland's commitment to protect 30% of the marine environment by 2030.
- Supports MSFD and WFD requirements, with no potential for deterioration of Good Ecological Status or Good Environmental Status.
- Does not interfere with sustainable fisheries objectives, as activities are non-extractive, spatially limited, and negligible in ecological footprint.
- Minimises pressures such as underwater noise, sediment disturbance and pollution, consistent with NBAP, MSFD and OSPAR commitments.
- Contributes to improved environmental data availability, indirectly supporting NBAP objectives to strengthen marine biodiversity knowledge and evidence-based decision-making.
- Aligns with national policies to integrate biodiversity considerations into marine spatial planning and offshore renewable energy frameworks, including OREDP II.
- Does not impede the restoration or future recovery of coastal and marine ecosystems, given the absence of any lasting physical or ecological impact.

Overall, the proposed Maritime Usage aligns with the NBAP's vision to protect, restore and sustainably manage Ireland's marine environment. The nature, scale and controls associated with the SI activities ensure full compatibility with Ireland's biodiversity commitments and reinforce adherence to national conservation objectives.



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