MUL Application Supporting Attachment – 4.6 Compliance with Objectives of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive

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1 MARINE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE ASSESSMENT

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD; Directive 2008/56/EC) establishes an integrated, ecosystem-based approach to the protection and sustainable use of Europe's marine waters. The Directive requires EU Member States, including Ireland, to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) across their marine areas by implementing the MSFD through a national Marine Strategy.

Ireland's Marine Strategy comprises three interlinked components:

- **Marine Strategy Part 1**: Assessment of the marine environment, determination of GES and establishment of environmental targets (Articles 8, 9 and 10);
- **Marine Strategy Part 2**: Monitoring Programmes (Article 11); and
- **Marine Strategy Part 3**: Programme of Measures (Article 13)

This attachment provides an assessment of the consistency of the proposed Maritime Usage with the objectives of the MSFD and Ireland's Marine Strategy.

1.1 MSFD & PROPOSED MARITIME USAGE

The MSFD aims to ensure that human activities in the marine environment are conducted sustainably, without compromising ecosystem functioning, biodiversity, or the ability of marine waters to support future uses. The Directive defines GES as a condition where the marine environment is ecologically diverse, clean, healthy and productive, and where uses of the sea are sustainable.

The proposed Maritime Usage consists of short-term, small-scale, SI activities. These activities:

- do not introduce pollutants,
- do not involve dredging or seabed alteration beyond minor sampling points (if applicable),
- do not generate significant underwater noise,
- do not change hydrographical conditions, and
- do not produce waste or discharges to the marine environment.

Accordingly, the project has a very low potential to interact with MSFD environmental targets and is inherently consistent with the overarching ecosystem-based approach required by the Directive.

1.2 MSFD DESCRIPTORS RELEVANT TO THE PROPOSED MARITIME USAGE

GES is assessed using 11 qualitative descriptors (MSFD Annex I), which characterise ecological and environmental conditions across European seas. These descriptors, also listed in the example compliance document provided, are outlined in Table 4-1 below, which summarises how the proposed Maritime Usage aligns with these descriptors.

Table 4-1: Assessment of Consistency of the proposed Maritime Usage with GES Descriptors

MSFD Descriptor	Relevance to Proposed Maritime Usage	Consistency Assessment
D1 Biodiversity	No habitat loss or long-term disturbance will occur as a result of the proposed Maritime Usage. All activities are temporary and reversible.	Fully consistent
D2 Non-indigenous Species	There is no ballast water discharge or biofouling risk associated with the SI vessels expected to be used to undertake the proposed Maritime Usage.	Fully consistent
D3 Commercial Fish & Shellfish	The proposed Maritime Usage activities are non-extractive and do not overlap with key spawning or nursery habitats.	Fully consistent
D4 Food Webs	The proposed Maritime Usage will introduce no pressures that could alter trophic structure or ecological interactions.	Fully consistent
D5 Eutrophication	No nutrient inputs, discharges, or chemical releases are associated with the proposed Maritime Usage.	Fully consistent
D6 Sea-floor Integrity	Any seabed interaction associated with the proposed Maritime Usage will be minimal, small footprint, and within natural variability; no habitat degradation is expected.	Fully consistent
D7 Hydrographical Conditions	The proposed Maritime Usage will result in no modification of currents, seabed morphology, or hydrodynamic regime.	Fully consistent
D8 Contaminants	No contaminants will introduced during or as a result of the proposed Maritime Usage; indicating full compliance with MARPOL pollution prevention requirements.	Fully consistent
D9 Contaminants in Seafood	No pathway for contaminants to enter seafood species; no pollutant generation.	Fully consistent
D10 Marine Litter	Strict waste management procedures will be in place during the proposed Maritime Usage to ensure no litter generation or release.	Fully consistent
D11 Underwater Noise	Low-level, temporary acoustic output from vessels/equipment; no potential to impede GES achievement.	Fully consistent

1.3 ALIGNMENT WITH IRELAND'S MARINE STRATEGY

This section assesses the alignment of the proposed SI maritime usage with Ireland's Marine Strategy, as required under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD; Directive 2008/56/EC), with specific reference to Articles 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13.

1.3.1 ARTICLE 8 – INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMET

Ireland's Initial Assessment noted physical, chemical, and biological pressures from maritime activities. The proposed SI works introduce no pressures beyond minor, short-duration acoustic and seabed interactions that do not alter assessment outcomes.

1.3.2 ARTICLE 9 – DETERMINATION OF GES

Ireland's Article 9 determination (DHPLG 2020 update) indicates that some descriptors have achieved or partially achieved Good Environmental Status (GES), while others require improved evidence and monitoring

The proposed SI activities do not affect the status of any descriptor.

1.3.3 ARTICLE 10 – ENVIRONMENTAL TARGETS

The proposed SI does not hinder progress towards the achievement of Ireland's environmental targets, including those relating to:

- contaminants,
- underwater noise,
- marine litter,
- biodiversity protection,
- sustainable fisheries.

1.3.4 ARTICLE 11 – MONITORING PROGRAMMES

Ireland's updated monitoring programme (DHLGH 2021) emphasises improved evidence for marine status assessments.

While the SI works are not part of the MSFD monitoring programme, the generation of environmental data indirectly supports marine knowledge frameworks and is compatible with Article 11 objectives.

1.3.5 ARTICLE 13 – PROGRAMME OF MEASURES

Ireland's 152-measure Programme of Measures (DHLGH 2022) aims to reduce pressures on the marine environment and ensure sustainable marine use.

The proposed Maritime Usage does not introduce pressures that would conflict with any of these measures.

1.4 CONSISTENCY WITH THE MSFD AND IRELAND'S MARINE STRATEGY

The proposed Maritime Usage is consistent with the objectives of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Ireland's Marine Strategy because it:

- Does not hinder the achievement or maintenance of Good Environmental Status (GES) across any descriptor.
- Introduces no pathways for pollution, chemical inputs, nutrient enrichment, or litter.
- Does not alter hydrographical conditions or affect seabed integrity beyond negligible sampling impacts.
- Produces only low-level, short-term underwater noise, well below levels that could negatively influence marine fauna or MSFD noise indicators.
- Imposes no pressure on commercial fish, shellfish, biodiversity or food webs.
- Does not conflict with national Programmes of Measures, monitoring requirements or environmental targets.
- Supports sustainable and evidence-based marine planning, consistent with both MSFD and the National Marine Planning Framework.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Based on a review of the MSFD and Ireland's Marine Strategy, the proposed Maritime Usage is compliant with the Directive's objectives and does not pose any risk to the achievement or maintenance of Good Environmental Status.

The limited duration, spatial extent of the SI activities, combined with strict environmental safeguards and pollution-prevention measures, ensure full alignment with the MSFD's ecosystem-based approach and Ireland's commitments under Articles 8–13.



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