



Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination

CP0585 Fibre Duct Requirement [Exempted Development] County Laois

In accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) and Regulation 42(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended ('the Regulations'), EirGrid has undertaken Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and the Conservation Objectives of relevant European sites, whether CP0585 Fibre Duct Requirement [Exempted Development] ('the Development') individually or in-combination with other plans or projects will result in likely significant effects on a European site(s).

The Development involves installing a single 125 mm HDPE duct from Tower 105 on the existing Athy-Portlaoise 110kV line to Tower 6 on the existing Dunstown-Moneypoint 400kV line. Works will include temporary topsoil stripping and storage, excavation of a trench approximately 1m deep and 600 mm wide, installation of a compacted bedding layer, placement of the fibre duct, installation of protective marker boards and underground warning tape, backfilling of the trench, and reinstatement of the affected ground surface.

Analysis of Pathways to European sites

Based on the works involved, the following possible impacts are considered potentially relevant to the Development:

- Waterborne pollution of qualifying, supporting or functionally linked habitat(s), or of qualifying or supporting species using such habitats. However, standard embedded pollution and sedimentation mitigation measures will be implemented to meet standard legal obligations for environmental protection which will preclude any potential for likely significant effect on any European site.
- Disturbance of qualifying species (e.g. visual, noise, vibration or artificial light).

Consequently, the following European sites are considered to be within the potential zone of influence (Zol) of the Development:

- River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site Code: 002162¹). Located approximately 4.9km north-east of the Development. The SAC is designated for a range of Annex I habitats including estuaries, mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, reefs, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, Atlantic salt meadows, Mediterranean salt meadows, water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculus fluitantis* and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation, European dry heaths, hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels, petrifying springs with tufa formation, old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles and alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*). The SAC is also designated for the Annex II species Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*, freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*, white-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*, sea lamprey *Petromyzon marinus*, brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*, river lamprey *Lampetra fluviatilis*, twaite shad *Alosa fallax fallax*, Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*, otter *Lutra lutra* and Killarney fern *Trichomanes speciosum*.

The Development is located within a catchment (Barrow) with previous records of freshwater pearl mussel, although the current status of the species within the catchment is unknown. There is currently no catchment of SAC populations present. Freshwater pearl mussel is a

¹ NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: River Barrow and River Nore SAC 002162. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

qualifying interest (QI) species of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC. The nearest watercourse, the Stradbally (Laois)_020, is located approximately 2km east of the Development. In addition, an unnamed stream occurs approximately 93m from the Development and provides an indirect hydrological connection to the wider watercourse network. The works for the Development are minor and temporary in nature and are confined to an agricultural field. Given the separation distance to the nearest watercourse, the limited extent of the groundworks, and that standard pollution prevention measures will be implemented, there is no potential for impacts on surface water or groundwater quality that would impact freshwater pearl mussel.

For the reasons outlined above in relation to freshwater pearl mussel, there is no potential for impacts on surface water or groundwater quality that could affect any QI habitats or species of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC. Therefore, likely significant effects on the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of the SAC can be excluded.

Otter is a qualifying interest species of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC and may utilise habitats outside the SAC boundary as functionally linked habitat. Studies quoted in Reid *et al.* (2013) indicate that otter have large home ranges in Ireland (approximately 6.5-13.2km)². While an unnamed stream occurs approximately 93m from the Development and could potentially be used by otter, the Development habitat comprises agricultural grassland and the stream is unlikely to provide optimal habitat for otter. Otter are therefore unlikely to occur in proximity to the works area.

Given the separation distance from the SAC, the limited suitability of habitats within and adjacent to the Development, and the small-scale and temporary nature of the works, there is no potential for disturbance effects on otter. Other mobile qualifying interest species of the SAC are also unlikely to be present within the small streams and drainage features associated with the agricultural field. Therefore, likely significant effects on the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC can be excluded.

There are no other European sites nearby or potentially connected to the Development via a source-pathway-receptor link that may result in likely significant effects in view of the relevant European site's Conservation Objectives. Due to the nature of the Development, there is no potential for in-combination effects.

AA Screening Statement

In accordance with Regulation 42(7) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 SI 477 as amended, EirGrid has made a Determination following Screening that an Appropriate Assessment is not required as the project individually or in-combination with other plans or projects is not likely to have a significant effect on any European sites. The risk of likely significant effects on European sites can be excluded on the basis of objective evidence.

This Determination is based on the location, scale, extent and duration of the Development, including temporary works, and has not taken account of measures intended to avoid or reduce significant effects on European sites.

Signed:



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² Reid, N., Hayden, B., Lundy, M.G., Pietravalle, S., McDonald, R.A. and Montgomery, W.I. (2013). National Otter Survey of Ireland 2010/12. Irish Wildlife Manuals No. 76. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.