



Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination CP0901 Kilbarry, Knockraha and Mallow Substation Works, and Kilbarry- Knockraha 110kV Circuit 2 Overhead Line Uprate and Kilbarry-Mallow Overhead Line Uprate (1.25 km double circuit section) [Exempted Development] County Cork

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 CP0901 Kilbarry and Knockraha Substation Works and Kilbarry-Knockraha Circuit 2 Overhead Line (OHL) Uprate and Kilbarry-Mallow Overhead Line Uprate (1.25 km double circuit section) [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 will comprise the following elements:

- Works within Kilbarry, Knockraha and Mallow Substations;
- Uprate Kilbarry-Knockraha Circuit 2 including structure replacements;
- Fibre installation on Kilbarry-Knockraha Circuit 2 OHL.
- Proposed changes in tower height and width (ranging from 1m to 2.6m in height and no greater than 1.2m in width) on Kilbarry-Knockraha Circuit 2; and
- Inclusion of an earthwire which will be no greater than 6.5m above the pole height for towers 1 to 7 on Kilbarry-Knockraha Circuit 2.
- Uprate 1.25 km double circuit section of Kilbarry-Mallow circuit from structure no.3 to structure no.7 on the circuit (shared with Kilbarry-Knockraha Circuit No. 2).

Analysis of Pathways to European sites

The closest European sites to the Development are Cork Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA; site code 004030¹) and Great Island Channel Special Area of Conservation (SAC; site code 001058²). Both European sites are directly (the SAC) or indirectly (the SPA) sensitive to a deterioration in water quality. Due to the limited nature of the works within the Kilbarry, Knockraha and Mallow Substations, they have minimal potential for the release of aquatic pollutants. Furthermore, the three substations are sufficiently distant from the nearest waterbodies linking to the Cork Harbour SPA and Great Island Channel SAC for preventing pollution impacts to the waterways. The Development also comprises OHL uprate, fibre installation and structure replacement, the latter involving excavations of the existing and for the installation of new wooden poles using a tracked excavator. This process has the potential to release sediment into watercourses, while the use of construction machinery inevitably comes with a risk of oil, fuel and chemical leakages. The OHL crosses two waterbodies (the Glashaboy [Lough Mahon] and Butlerstown) that are hydrologically connected to the Cork Harbour SPA and, ultimately, via waters in the harbour, to the Great Island Channel SAC. The closest crossing of the OHL to the Cork Harbour SPA is to the east of Poulacurry South (poles 37 and 38), approximately 946m upstream from the SPA boundary. While the poles are generally situated some distance from watercourses (e.g. pole 37 is located approximately 89m from the watercourse) while considering the distance between the Development and Cork Harbour SPA,

¹ NPWS (2014). Conservation Objectives: Cork Harbour SPA 004030. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

² NPWS (2014). Conservation Objectives: Great Island Channel SAC 001058. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

and the very limited potential for pollutant release, dilution is highly likely to have occurred prior to reaching the European site. Moreover, Cork Harbour SPA and, more distantly, Great Island Channel SAC, are estuarine sites, where a massive degree of dilution would occur. Consequently, likely significant effects from waterborne pollution are excluded.

The Development poses a potential risk to the SCI bird features of SPAs in the wider area surrounding it. According to published research³, the maximum distance that non-breeding bird species for which SPAs are designated will typically travel to forage is 20km from the designated site boundary. Cork Harbour SPA is the sole European site within 20km of the Development that is designated for such mobile SCI bird species (located approximately 420m away at its closest). The closest point of the OHL to Cork Harbour SPA lies within an existing conurbation, which is associated with its own visual and noise disturbance profile (e.g. moving cars, pedestrians and industrial activity). The existing intervening structures will also provide some shielding of intrusive elements of the works for SPA birds occurring within the SPA boundary.

It is considered that there will be no likely significant effects on SCI bird species regarding visual and noise disturbance for the following reasons:

- OHL uprate, structure replacement, fibre installation and conductor stringing along a relatively long, linear project will be undertaken sequentially, such that potential disturbance will only affect small sections of functionally-linked habitats at any given point in time;
- The duration of each stage of the construction works will be time-limited, typically being completed in a matter of days, and any disturbance will, therefore, be temporary and short-lived;
- There is an extensive supply of alternative suitable foraging habitats (particularly arable farmland and pasture) available in the wider area surrounding Cork Harbour SPA, which will be available for continued use by the relevant SCI species; and
- All agricultural parcels potentially used by SCI species are subject to inter-annual variation in suitability depending on the cropping regime deployed by farmers, meaning that individual fields may not be usable by SCI species at the time that construction works are undertaken. Furthermore, disturbance (of similar magnitude to that potentially caused by the Development) is a natural element of routine farming operations, potentially rendering foraging habitats unsuitable to SCI bird species.

The majority of the works proposed for the Development do not exacerbate the collision risk for SCI bird species, given that they merely involve the uprate of an existing conductor with 430mm² ACSR. However, some elements of the works propose new/altered infrastructure. For example, the Development involves changes in structure height (between 1m to 2.6m) as well as width. It is not considered that this change in the height of towers (and associated conductor wiring) will have a material impact on mobile SCI species in Cork Harbour SPA. Any birds already traversing the OHL route would simply need to adjust to the changed configuration, but this would not add a new 'obstacle' to existing bird flyways. A more significant change is represented by the inclusion of an earthwire between poles 1 to 7 (no greater than 6.5m above pole height). Earthwires are thinner than the more visible conductor bundles and, therefore, pose an elevated collision risk for SCI birds. Poles 1 to 7 of the Development are located to the north-west of the Development in the conurbation of Ballincolly, with the closest of the poles (pole 7) located approximately 4.2km from the SPA. Initially, it should be taken into account that Cork Harbour SPA is not designated for any heavy, large-bodied and less manoeuvrable goose and swan species, which are most susceptible to OHL collisions. This significantly reduces any collision injury/mortality impact potential associated with the new earthwire. Furthermore, given that this section of the Development is surrounded by urban development it is considered relatively unlikely that SCI species would be using any supporting habitats to the north-west of Ballincolly. There is also no waterway traversed by this

³ SNH (2016). Assessing Connectivity with Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Version 3 – June 2016.

section of the Development that could act as an obvious flyway to/from the SPA. Generally, birds prefer open flightlines to off-site foraging/roosting grounds, such that habitat usage closer to the SPA is much more likely. Finally, given that these poles are located amidst urban development, it is considered that any birds using habitats to the north-east of Kilbarry Substation would be flying at altitudes above the new earthwire to steer clear from existing urban infrastructure. Overall, it is concluded that there are no likely significant effects of the Development on SCI features of Cork Harbour SPA regarding collision risk.

It is noted that the Development does not fall within or is hydrologically connected to a known freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera* catchment. Furthermore, it is not hydrologically connected to any European sites that are designated for QI species (e.g. migratory fish, otter) that are known to utilise aquatic or bankside habitats at long distances from designated site boundaries. There are no other European sites connected via linking impact pathways whose Conservation Objectives could be impacted by the implementation of the Development.

The impacts of the Development itself are so small and will occur over a short period of time such that there is no potential for likely significant effects and no possibility of the impacts of other projects or plans acting in-combination.

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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