



## **Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination CP1365 Remote End Works in Athlone 110kV Station [Exempted Development] County Roscommon**

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 CP1365 Remote End Works in Athlone 110kV Station [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 comprises a control room extension to the existing control room inside the existing Athlone 110 kV station. All works are to be carried out entirely within the boundary of the existing energised substation.

### **Analysis of Pathways to European sites**

The nearest European sites to the Athlone 110kV Substation are associated with the River Shannon. These comprise Middle Shannon Callows Special Protection Area (SPA) (site code 004096<sup>1</sup>), River Shannon Callows Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (site code 000216<sup>2</sup>), and Lough Ree SPA (site code 004064<sup>3</sup>), all located approximately 1.3km away ('as the crow flies'), and Lough Ree SAC (site code 000440<sup>4</sup>), located approximately 1.4km away.

The Qualifying Interests (QIs) of both River Shannon Callows SAC and Lough Ree SAC are a range of Annex I habitats and otter *Lutra lutra*, whilst Lough Ree SPA and Middle Shannon Callows SPA are designated for a range of Special Conservation Interest (SCI) bird species.

There are no watercourses within or adjacent to the Development that are hydrologically connected with these European sites. Furthermore, a review of the Tailte Eireann PRIME2 Watercourses layer indicates that there are no ditches, drains or engineered channels that connect the Development to the River Shannon. Due to the absence of a hydrological connection, likely significant effects from the Development on any European site regarding water quality are, therefore, excluded.

Since all construction works will be undertaken within the Station boundary, there is no potential for a direct temporary or permanent loss of functionally-linked habitat. The Development lies within the core foraging range of some of the SCI species of Middle Shannon Callows SPA and Lough Ree SPA. For example, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus* are mobile SCI species of both European sites that are associated with foraging habitats which can extend beyond the designated site boundary (also known as 'functionally-linked' habitats)<sup>5</sup>. Guidance published by NatureScot<sup>5</sup> suggests that 20km is the maximum distance to which wintering waterbirds (in particular certain geese species) may travel outside of the boundary of an SPA for which they are a designated feature. There are

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<sup>1</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Middle Shannon Callows SPA 004096. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: River Shannon Callows SAC 00216. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>3</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives for Lough Ree SPA [004064]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>4</sup> NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Lough Ree SAC 000440. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (2016) Assessing Connectivity with Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

four other SPAs within 20km of the Development: Mongan Bog SPA (site code 004017<sup>6</sup>), Lough Croan Turlough SPA (site code 004139<sup>7</sup>), Four Roads Turloughs SPA (site code 004140<sup>8</sup>), and River Suck Callows SPA (site code 004097<sup>9</sup>).

However, from a review of aerial photography, these fields appear to be overgrown and scrubby in character, and are unlikely to offer suitable foraging opportunities for these SCI species. Further, likely significant effects on ex-situ populations will not occur, due to the limited scale and temporary nature of construction works, and because there is an extensive resource of suitable agricultural fields much closer to both SPAs.

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 applicable site Conservation Objectives.

#### **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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Robert Fennelly CEcol MCIEEM Lead Senior Ecologist

22 January 2025

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<sup>6</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation objectives for Mongan Bog SPA [004017]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>7</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation objectives for Lough Croan Turlough SPA [004139]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>8</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation objectives for Four Roads Turlough SPA [004140]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>9</sup> NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: River Suck Callows SPA 004097. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.