



## **Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination CP1556 Ballybeg-Carrickmines 110kV Refurbishment and Arklow- Carrickmines 220kV Refurbishment [Exempted Development] Counties Dublin and Wicklow.**

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 CP1556 Ballybeg-Carrickmines 110kV Refurbishment and Arklow-Carrickmines 220kV Refurbishment [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 overhead line (OHL) refurbishment works:

- Ballybeg-Carrickmines OHL:
  - replacement of; insulators, earthwire hardware, clamps and dampers.
  - tower painting.
- Arklow-Carrickmines OHL:
  - replacement of; insulators, hardware, vibration dampers, shieldware vibration dampers, earthwire hardware, clamps and dampers.
  - tower replacement of towers EW DCINT 103 and 104.
  - tower painting.

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

Between Poles 121 and 122, the Development crosses over Glen of the Downs Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (site code 000719<sup>1</sup>), which is designated for the Annex I habitat type Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles. However, there will be no works within this SAC and no requirement for personnel, plant or machinery to enter the SAC. No vegetation will be removed as part of the works, and there will be no direct loss of any Qualifying Interest (QI) habitat.

Between poles 143 and 149, the Development passes between Ballyman Glen SAC (site code 000713<sup>2</sup>) and Knocksink Wood SAC (site code 000725<sup>3</sup>), coming to within approximately 140m and 220m of each site, respectively. Ballyman Glen SAC is designated for the Annex I habitats petrifying springs with tufa formation and alkaline fens, while Knocksink Wood SAC is designated for two woodland habitats, as well as petrifying springs with tufa formation. There will be no works within or removal of any vegetation from either SAC and, therefore, there will be no loss of QI habitat.

Knocksink Wood SAC is located upstream of the Development, and there is no possibility of waterborne pollution of the more sensitive QI habitats, particularly the petrifying springs and alluvial forest. Ballyman Glen SAC lies downstream of the Development, oversailing an un-

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<sup>1</sup> NPWS (2020). Conservation Objectives: Glen of the Downs SAC 000719. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> NPWS (2019). Conservation Objectives: Ballyman Glen SAC 000713. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

<sup>3</sup> NPWS (2021). Conservation Objectives: Knocksink Wood SAC 000725. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

named watercourse (as shown on the OSi PRIME2 Watercourses dataset) which flows into the European site. However, the nearest tower locations are more than 100m from this watercourse. Two unidentified watercourses shown on the OSi PRIME2 Watercourses dataset flow beneath the Development and then through Glen of the Downs SAC. However, the nearest tower locations to these watercourses are between approximately 30-200m distant. The works associated with the Development are not of a type that will generate sediment which could run-off into these watercourses. All works will take place in a small area around tower locations, and it is very unlikely that material pollution could be generated which could run-off overland across the distances between the tower/works locations and these watercourses. Furthermore, the magnitude of any aquatic pollution potential would be very minor given the nature of the works and the type of plant/machinery which will be used. Considering these points, likely significant effects on QI habitats as a result of waterborne pollution are excluded.

For the same reasons described above, and considering also their location further downstream (and thus subject to greater dilution effects), likely significant effects on QI habitats of other SACs with a hydrological connection to the Development is also excluded.

Wicklow Mountains SAC (site code 002122<sup>4</sup>) is designated for a number of Annex I habitats and the Annex II species, otter *Lutra lutra*. The Development is hydrologically connected to this SAC via numerous watercourses, and it is possible that otter could move between the European site and the vicinity of works areas. However, the works are relatively minor in nature and will take place over a short period of time. Most works will also take place during daylight hours (when otters are typically inactive) and beyond 30m from a watercourse, and thus the risk of disturbance/displacement is low. Even in the unlikely case that disturbance/displacement were to occur, there is substantial alternative habitat both within the SAC boundary and the wider area around both the European site and the Development which would remain available to otter. There would consequently be no effect on the favourable conservation condition of QI otter, and likely significant effects are excluded.

According to published research<sup>5</sup>, the maximum distance that non-breeding SCI bird species will typically travel from SPAs to off-site foraging habitats is 20km from the designated site boundary. There are five SPAs designated for non-breeding SCI bird species located within 20km of the Development:

- The Murrough SPA (site code 004186<sup>6</sup>), approximately 1.2km east;
- South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA (site code 004024<sup>7</sup>), approximately 5.2km north-east;
- North Bull Island SPA (site code 004006<sup>8</sup>), approximately 10.4km north-north-east;
- North-West Irish Sea SPA (site code 004236<sup>9</sup>), approximately 10.4km north-north-east; and,
- Baldoyle Bay SPA (site code 004016<sup>10</sup>), approximately 16.1km north-east.

All of these sites are beyond the distance at which disturbance of SCI birds within the designated site boundary could occur as a result of works associated with the Development (a

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<sup>4</sup> NPWS (2017). Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Mountains SAC 002122 Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> SNH (2016). Assessing Connectivity with Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Version 3 – June 2016.

<sup>6</sup> NPWS (2024). Conservation Objectives: The Murrough SPA 004186. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>7</sup> NPWS (2015). Conservation Objectives: South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA 004024. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

<sup>8</sup> NPWS (2015). Conservation Objectives: North Bull Island SPA 004006. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

<sup>9</sup> NPWS (2023). Conservation Objectives: North-west Irish Sea SPA 004236. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

<sup>10</sup> NPWS (2013). Conservation Objectives: Baldoyle Bay SPA 004016. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

typical disturbance zone is usually 300m, in line with research<sup>11</sup>). However, the Development crosses several habitats which could be used by SCI birds outside SPA boundaries (although, considering light-bellied brent goose *Branta bernicla hrota* specifically, the Development does not lie in proximity to any known location used by this species<sup>12 13</sup>). Habitat outside of an SPA boundary which supports a significant proportion of relevant SCI species would be considered functionally-linked to that site, but given the relatively minor nature of works associated with the Development, as well as their intermittent and temporary duration, any disturbance/displacement which could be caused would only extend over short distances and periods of time. Furthermore, the types of habitat crossed by the Development (e.g. arable farmland and semi-improved grassland) are ubiquitous in the wider landscape surrounding the SPAs, and extensive tracts of alternative foraging habitat would continue to be available for use. Likely significant effects as a result of disturbance/displacement of non-breeding SCI birds using functionally-linked habitat are, therefore, excluded.

Due to the nature of the Development, which involve refurbishment works to an existing powerline, there will be no permanent loss of any habitat, including loss of any functionally-linked habitat which could be used by SCI bird species (breeding or non-breeding).

Wicklow Mountains SPA is designated for breeding peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and merlin *Falco columbarius*. According to published research<sup>5</sup>, peregrine has a core foraging range of 2km during the breeding season. At closest, Wicklow Mountains SPA is approximately 3.8km from the Development. It is therefore likely to lie outside of the core foraging range of SCI peregrine associated with Wicklow Mountains SPA, and these birds will not be subject to impacts as a result of works associated with it. According to the same research, merlin have a core foraging range in the breeding season of 5km. Although the Development lies partly within this distance, merlin hunt over open moorland habitat during the breeding season; this habitat is absent from the vicinity of the Development, and it is very unlikely that SCI merlin associated with Wicklow Mountains would occur within the zone of influence. As for peregrine, impacts on merlin will therefore not occur, and likely significant effects on the SCI species of Wicklow Mountains SPA are excluded.

Other SPAs along the coast to the north/east of the Development (including Dalkey Island SPA and Howth Head Coast SPA) are designated for breeding seabirds which are predominantly restricted to the use of marine foraging habitats and will make no use of the habitats crossed by the Development. There will be no impacts on the SCI species of these sites.

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.

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<sup>11</sup> Cutts, N., Hemingway, K. and Spencer, J. (2013). Waterbird Disturbance Mitigation Toolkit: Informing Estuarine Planning & Construction Projects. Produced by the Institute of Estuarine & Coastal Studies (IECS) University of Hull.

<sup>12</sup> Benson, L. (2009). Use of inland feeding sites by Light-bellied Brent Geese in Dublin 2008-2009. *Irish Birds* 8, pp563-570.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Cawley (2017). Natura Impact Statement: Information for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment – Proposed Residential Development, St Paul's College, Sybil Hill, Raheny, Dublin 5. Report produced for Crekav by Scott Cawley. An Bord Pleanála case reference PL29N.302225.

Signed:



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