



Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination

Powering Up Offshore South Coast (PUOSC) Project: Site Investigations (terrestrial) at selected landfall sites [Exempted Development] (Counties Cork and Wexford)

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, if the PUOSC Site Investigations (terrestrial) at selected landfall sites [Exempted Development] ('the Works') will result in likely significant effects on a European site(s), individually or in-combination with other plans or projects

The Works are located at two candidate landfall sites for the Powering Up Offshore Southcoast project, namely:

- Coastal fields adjoining the Long Gap Beach, in the townland of Bannow, east of the mouth of Bannow Bay (Co. Wexford) ('the Wexford Works site')
- Coastal fields adjoining Ballycrenane Beach (Ballycotton Bay), in the townlands of Ballybutler and Garryvoe Lower (Co. Cork) ('the Cork Works site')

The Works comprise:

- Trial pits (3 no.), boreholes (3 no.), Cone Penetration Tests (3 no.) at the Wexford Works site
- Trial pits (6 no.), boreholes (2 no.), Cone Penetration Tests (4 no.) at the Cork Works site

Analysis of Pathways to European Sites

The proximity of each Works site to potentially relevant European sites is set out in Table 1. Neither work site is within or directly adjoins a European site

Table 1: Proximity of Landfall sites to Potentially Relevant European sites

Landfall Site	Nearest Special Area of Conservation	Nearest Special Protection Area	Other More Distant Sites of Potential Relevance
The Long Gap Beach (Bannow, Wexford)	Hook Head SAC (NPWS, 2025) (c.0.2 km)	Keeragh Islands SPA (NPWS, 2022) (c. 2.5 km)	Bannow Bay SPA (NPWS, 2012 ¹) (c. 1.3km)
Ballycrenane Beach (Ballycotton, Cork)	Ballymacoda (Clonpriest and Pilmore) SAC (NPWS, 2015) ² (c.3.9km)	Ballycotton Bay SPA (0.3 km) (NPWS, 2014) ³	N/A

¹ NPWS (2012) Conservation Objectives: Bannow Bay SPA 004033. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

² NPWS (2015) Conservation Objectives: Ballymacoda (Clonpriest and Pilmore) SAC 000077. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

³ NPWS (2012) Conservation Objectives: Ballycotton Bay SPA 004022. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Direct Damage to Habitats

Neither Works site is within a European site. As such, there is no potential for likely significant effects arising from direct damage to Qualifying Interest (QI) habitats.

Hydrological/Pollution Pathways

There are no watercourses within > 10m of the Cork Works, and no watercourses within more than 700m of the Wexford Works. There are no watercourses at the Wexford Landfall site at Long Gap. There is no risk of pollution of European sites via overland flow of oils or fuels. Improved grasslands are present between the Works site, and the adjacent coastal areas. As such, in the unlikely event of pollution from the Works (e.g. minor leaks from machinery), such pollutants would be readily absorbed by intervening improved grassland habitat and therefore would not enter nearby coastal waters (and would not enter European sites). As such, in the unlikely event of pollution, there is no possibility for pollutants to enter European sites.

As the Works are all located at coastal beaches, there is no potential for hydrological connectivity with the QI habitats or species located upstream freshwater designated sites. There is no risk of silt or other pollutants from the Works posing a risk to mobile QI aquatic fish and crustacean species (freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*, Atlantic salmon, lamprey species), because there are no spawning or migratory habitats of these species present within the Zone of Influence of the Works.

As such there is no potential for Likely Significant (pollution) Effects on any European sites via pollution.

Disturbance Pathways to Mobile Species

SCI Birds at Ballycrenane Beach (Cork)

The Works at Ballycrenane Beach adjoin the Ballycotton Bay SPA designated for a suite of wintering bird species. Two years of wintering bird surveys (2024/2025 and 2025/2026⁴) have been undertaken to inform the below assessment summary:

- There are no significant high tide shoreline roosts within the zone of influence of the Works.
- Birds feeding on the adjacent beach will not be significantly disturbed by the (onshore) Works since the Works will be generally neither visible nor audibly intrusive to receptors on the beach due to their location onshore 50-150m inland of the beach.
- Coastal fields in the immediate vicinity of the Works are used by SCI Curlew⁵ and SCI lesser black-backed gulls⁶ through the tidal cycle and will be temporarily disturbed (for the c. week Works duration), if present during the Works.
- However, lesser-black backed gulls are highly tolerant of human disturbance, noting their preference for nesting on structures in highly industrialised urban areas⁷.
- In the case of SCI Curlew, the highest peaks of coastal feeding birds recorded locally are in fact recorded >150m from the Works, and screened from the Works by topography and several intervening hedgerows. As such, the most significant flocks of SCI Curlew are outside the zone of influence of disturbance from the Works.

In conclusion for Works at Ballycrenane, there is no potential for Likely Significant (disturbance) Effects to mobile designated SCI bird populations of the Ballycotton Bay SPA (or any other European site), given:

⁴ Unpublished intertidal bird survey reports for winters 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, which will be synthesized and integrated into future reporting informing the consent for the Powering Up Offshore South Coast project.

⁵ Peak of 34 Curlew (6% of the qualifying population for designation of the Ballycotton Bay SPA

⁶ Estimated 3% of the Ballycotton Bay SPA population, based on the “baseline period (1995-2000)” of 1,293 gulls quoted in the NPWS’ Conservation Objective Supporting Document (Version 1; NPWS, 2014).

⁷ As personally observed by the author in a census of roof-nesting gulls in Dublin City, and supported by the literature (e.g. Spelt, A., Williamson, C., Shamoun-Baranes, J., Shepard, E.L.C., Rock, P., & Windsor, S. (2019). Habitat use of urban-nesting lesser black-backed gulls during the breeding season. *Scientific Reports*, 9, 10527).

- the tolerance of gulls to human disturbance, noting their preference for urban nest sites;
- shoreline SCI birds will not be disturbed due to the Works locations inland
- highest peaks of SCI coastal field feeding Curlew are outside the zone of influence of the Works
- A review of in-combination effects identified no proposed or consented developments within the zone of influence of the Works⁸.

SCI Birds at Long Gap Beach (Wexford)

The Works at the Long Gap ('Bannow') do not adjoin any SPAs, with the closest being the Bannow Bay SPA (1.3 km distant). Similarly to Ballycrenane, two years of wintering bird surveys (2023/2024 and 2024/2025⁹) informed the below summary assessment:

- there are no significant high tide roosts within the zone of influence of the Works¹⁰.
- shoreline SCI birds will not be disturbed due to the Works locations inland, from where Works will generally be neither visible from nor audibly intrusive to shoreline birds
- Unlike Ballycrenane, there are no known SCI coastal field feeding flocks at Long Gap

As such, there is no potential for Likely Significant (disturbance) Effects to mobile designated wintering bird populations of the Bannow Bay SPA (or other SPAs).

QI Otter at Both Landfall Sites

The closest SAC to either landfall site which is designated for otter is c. 13 km distant (Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC), and as such it is highly unlikely that any otters (if present) form part of a QI population. Irish otter populations occasionally occupy underground breeding or resting sites in Coastal habitats such as dunes¹¹, and it is possible that otter could establish underground sites in sea cliff or other coastal habitats. However, otter surveys completed by suitably qualified ecologists¹² identified no breeding or resting sites within the Zone of Influence of the Works. Any otter foraging or commuting within the Zone of influence of the Works are unlikely to be associated with QI populations and in any case will not be significantly affected given the scale and duration of the Works. There is no potential for Likely Significant Effects to mobile QI otter bird populations from the Works.

Other mobile species

There are no other mobile QI or SCI species within the ZOI of the Works.

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 Works 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 Works, including the temporary nature of Works, and has not taken account of mitigation measures intended to avoid or reduce significant effects on European sites.

⁸There are no proposed or consented developments within 100m of the Works. Three consented developments are located c. 150-250m from the Works, but are screened from the Works by intervening topography and hedgerows. Additionally, Cork County Council has, as competent authority for article 6(3) compliance of these developments, concluded that none of these developments will have adverse effects on the integrity of European sites.

⁹ Unpublished intertidal bird survey reports by APEM Consultants

¹⁰ Excluding (non-roosting) mobile foraging flocks of sanderling (peak 14) and turnstone (peak 12) at high tide, to which the inland Works will be neither visible nor audibly intrusive

¹¹ Fennelly, R.N., 2017. Some observations on Irish otter holts. *The Irish Naturalists' Journal*, 35(2), pp.150-151.

¹² Undertaking precautionary confirmatory pre-Works surveys at the Works locations

Signed:



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