



CORRIB FIELD: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT AN INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE SURVEY PROGRAMME OF THE CORRIB OFFSHORE GAS PIPELINE

NOTICE DIRECTING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR THE PURPOSES OF CARRYING OUT STAGE II APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

On the 18th November 2020, Vermillion Exploration and Production Ireland Ltd (hereafter referred to as **Vermillion**) submitted an application within the Corrib Petroleum Lease to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (**DECC**) seeking Ministerial approval to conduct a geophysical and visual survey programme of the Corrib offshore gas pipeline, sections of the umbilical, Bellanaboy Bridge Gas Terminal (BBGT) treated surface water outfall pipeline, and infield flowlines and umbilicals between the Corrib Field manifold and the landfall at Glengad, northwest Co. Mayo, to include repair and maintenance work as necessary, between the months of May and September 2021.

Vermillion submitted the following documents with the application:-

- (i) Application to Conduct an Offshore Survey;
- (ii) Corrib Subsea Infrastructure Inspection and Maintenance Surveys EIA Screening and Environmental Risk Assessment for Annex IV species, dated November 2020, prepared by RSK on behalf of Vermillion;
- (iii) Corrib Subsea Infrastructure Inspection and Maintenance Surveys 2021 Natura Impact Statement, dated November 2020, prepared by RSK on behalf of Vermillion;
- (iv) Corrib Field Subsea Inspection and Maintenance Works 2021 Method Statement, dated November 2020;
- (v) Notification of Application to Conduct Corrib Gas Field Offshore Works 2021.

Appropriate Assessment Screening

On 3rd February, 2021 a determination was made, following screening under Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011), as amended, that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required to be carried out in respect the proposed subsea infrastructure inspection and maintenance survey, the subject of the Vermillion application, as it cannot be excluded on the basis of objective scientific information that the proposed inspection and maintenance survey programme, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European Site.

Additional Information Required for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment

Regulation 42(3) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations provides as follows:-

(3) At any time following an application for consent for a plan or project, a public authority may give a notice in writing to the applicant, directing him or her to—

(a) furnish a Natura Impact Statement and the applicant shall furnish the statement within the period specified in the notice, and

(b) furnish any additional information that the public authority considers necessary for the purposes of this Regulation.

As described above, Vermillion submitted a Natura Impact Statement and Environmental Risk Assessment for Annex IV species (prepared by RSK on behalf of Vermillion) with their application.

A review of the Natura Impact Statement and information supplied by Vermillion with regard to the assessment of impacts on Annex IV species was carried out by Ramboll UK Limited, the external environmental consultants engaged by DECC to advise the Environment Advisory Unit on the carrying out of statutory environmental assessments.

The Ramboll NIS Review is at section 4 of the Ramboll Report entitled *“Statutory Environmental Assessment Appropriate Assessment Screening Determination for Vermillion Inspection / Maintenance of Pipeline and Subsea Structures 2021”*, which was adopted and included as Appendix 1 to the AA Screening Determination made in respect of the Vermillion application. Ramboll identify specified additional information as being required, so that all pathways that need to be taken forward to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment are taken forward and in order to enable an Appropriate Assessment be carried out in respect of the proposed activities, the subject of the Vermillion application.

Having reviewed the material submitted by Vermillion with their application – in particular the Natura Impact Statement – and the advice from Ramboll in relation to the adequacy of the information provided by Vermillion for the purposes of carrying out a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, I agree with and adopt the conclusion reached by Ramboll in section 4 of their Report that additional information is required for the purposes of carrying out a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment of the activities the subject of the Vermillion application.

Accordingly, pursuant to Regulation 42(3) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations, Vermillion is hereby directed to provide the additional information set out below, which is considered necessary for the purposes of carrying out a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment in respect of the proposed inspection and maintenance surveys the subject of the Vermillion application.

Specifically, the following have not been adequately addressed and require further clarification to enable a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment be carried out in relation to the inspection and maintenance survey activities proposed in the Vermillion application:-

- Potential effects on the qualifying habitat features of the Broadhaven Bay SAC associated with the mini-dredging tool and placement of rock filter units should be assessed, or, if there is no interaction between feature and pressure, screened out.

- Qualifying features have not been included for several SACs/SPAs, despite being listed on the NPWS/ScotLink websites. These features (listed below) should be included:-
 - Common bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*, of the Dullivaun Islands SAC;
 - Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*, of the Lough Corrib SAC;
 - Common bottlenose dolphin, of the Slyne Head Islands SAC;
 - Annex I Reef habitat [1170], of the Kilkieran Bay and Islands SAC;
 - European otter *Lutra lutra*, of the West of Ardara / Maas Road SAC;
 - Annual vegetation of drift lines, of the Rutland Island and Sound SAC;
 - Red-throated diver *Gavia stellata*, of the Blacksod Bay / Broadhaven SPA;
 - Slavonian grebe *Podiceps auritus*, of the Blacksod Bay / Broadhaven SPA;
 - Black-throated diver *Gavia arctica*, of the Inner Galway Bay SPA;
 - Common guillemot *Uria aalge*, of the Rum SPA;
 - Black-legged kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, of the Rum SPA.
- The mean maximum foraging range for seabird species from Woodward et al. (2019) has been described as having been used in the NIS. However, the furthest SPA from the project area considered is located 397 km away (southwest Wales). Using Manx shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* as an example (1,347 km), it would be expected that sites on the coast of mainland Europe would be considered within the document, such as those on the French and Spanish coasts. Whilst, it is noted that there is no direct line of sight between these SPAs and the project area, they should still be included for consideration.
- Minor errors with regard to site codes/features have been noted and should be rectified, as follows:
 - Correction to remove shoveler *Anas clypeata* as a qualifying species, of the Inner Galway Bay SPA;
 - Correction of the Latin namesite code for Kerry Head SPA, from “004153” to “004189”, as per NPWS;
 - Correction of the site code for Puffin Island SPA, from “00403” to “004003”, as per NPWS;
 - Correction of the Latin name for red-throated diver, of the Rum SPA;
 - Correction of the site code for Glannau Aberdaron ac Ynys Enlli / Aberdaron Coast and Bardsey Island SPA, from “UK901321” to “UK9013121”;
- Clarification should be provided on the operating frequency of the doppler velocity log (DVL), as there is inconsistency in the document.
- The distance used for screening of other plans and projects should be explicitly stated. While the NIS states that the study area for the project and cumulative effects encompasses typical foraging and migratory ranges for qualifying features of European designated sites, the explicit distance should be detailed.
- Abundance / distribution maps of sensitive marine mammal species
- Inclusion of all qualifying features of all sites within area of effect.
- Conservation status of all features of all sites screened into Stage 2.
- Inclusion of a statement noting that there are no management plans for the sites screened into assessment.

Public Consultation for the Purposes of Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment

Please note that when the additional information has been received from Vermillion, it will be published on the Department website and the public invited to submit observations on the Vermillion application during a 21-day public consultation for the purposes of the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. Any observations received will be taken into account for the purposes of carrying out a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment of the proposed inspection and maintenance survey activities that are the subject of the Vermillion application.

3rd February, 2021

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jean Clarke", is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Jean Clarke, Senior Advisor