



Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)

Determination under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended)

CONCERNING *OUR RURAL FUTURE* – RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2021 – 2025

The Department of Rural and Community Development is committed to ensuring the effective implementation of its statutory and other responsibilities towards the environment and biodiversity, as well as towards achieving a climate neutral future. *Our Rural Future* – Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025 is a further articulation of the Government’s commitment to sustainable rural development.

In order to comply with the requirements of Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477, as amended), this determination has been made by the Minister for Rural and Community Development relating to the potential for the proposed adoption by Government of *Our Rural Future* – Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025 to have likely significant effects on European sites,¹ either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

This Determination has been made following consideration of the information contained in the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report (attached, Appendix 1).

Pursuant to an analysis and evaluation of the relevant information, including in particular, the object and purpose of the proposed Rural Development Policy *Our Rural Future*, the nature of its Measures and its potential relationship with sites that could result from the implementation of the associated Measures, as well as considering other relevant plans and projects, and applying the precautionary principle, the Minister agrees and is satisfied that the

¹ As defined by S.I. 477, 2011

recommendation contained in the AA Screening Report that, whilst there is a possibility that the proposed Rural Development Policy could impact upon European sites, appropriate safeguards, mechanisms and conditions have been designed as an integral part of the Policy in order to safeguard European sites.

The principle reason for reaching this conclusion is that in many cases Measures or their frameworks for delivery have already been subject to AA, such assessments are foreseen, or are already underway. Other Measures will, in due course, be subject to Screening for AA based on detailed operational plans and programmes based on accurate geographic information which is currently unavailable. Individual policies, strategies and plans for, or related to, the implementation of any Policy Measure contained in *Our Rural Future* must be considered on their own merits under the AA process at the appropriate level of governance control. Additionally, an explicit Environmental Commitment contained in the Policy, which will assist in guiding oversight mechanisms, emphasises that any Measures giving rise to, or potentially giving rise to environmental impacts will be subject to screening and further consideration under AA, if not already complete. It would be therefore duplicative or ineffective to pursue AA at the level of *Our Rural Future*, hence AA is deemed not to be required at the level of *Our Rural Future*.

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, having carefully considered the information in the AA Screening Report, and having regard to the advice of Officials, agrees with and adopts its reasoning and conclusions. Pursuant to Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477, as amended), and for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, that on the basis of objective information, the proposed Rural Development Policy, individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not have likely significant effect on a European site given the safeguards and mechanisms integral to the Policy, and therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.



Heather Humphreys, TD
Minister for Rural and Community Development
22/03/2021