

Have a whale of a time in west Clare

Kilkee event to inform public on rich marine life in estuary and off coast

Fiona McGarry

AN UPDATE on the 145 dolphins that are unique to the Shannon Estuary will be presented on Friday night, April 1, in Kilkee.

Members of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG), as well as their supporters, will gather at Cultúrlann Sweeney for a discussion that will cover the life marine life off the Clare coast, including humpback whales, fin whales and basking sharks.

“The Wonderful Wildlife of West Clare” is open to all and bookings can be made on the IWDG website. Those attending will see incredible new images of sea creatures off the Clare coast, including drone footage shot by Dr Simon Berrow off Doonbeg, which is simply wonderful.

IWDG has spent the past three decades monitoring the estuary’s dolphins and are well placed to track their daily lives. “Mags Daly is Project Manager for the Shannon Dolphin Project and she calls them her babies,” said Dr Berrow. “We saw one about a month ago in poor condition and Mags recognised her as ‘Astra’. She saw her again last Friday, so it’s great to know she’s fine.

“These dolphins are genetically discrete and unique to the area. Mags will be giving an update on how they’re getting on, who’s had a calf and so on.”

Humpback whale activity off Loop Head will be discussed by John and Dixie Collins.

“John and his dad have been watching them for years,” Dr Berrow said.

“In 2021, they came close enough to be seen easily from the land. If we can get to see their tails, we can check their unique



Sally O’Keeffe and Dr Simon Berrow and colleagues observing a dolphin in the Shannon Estuary.

markings in a catalogue that IWDG has been co-ordinating for 20 years.

“Last year, we saw three that had been off the Clare coast previously and one that had been seen in Iceland.”

Dr Berrow has been tracking basking sharks off the coast for 15 years.

“Normally, I would be going to Kerry to observe them, but for the last two years, they’ve been off the coast of Clare,” he said.

“They should be up here feeding on plankton in the next few days. Late last summer, we saw them circling. Dixie Collins had been able to see this behaviour through his telescope.

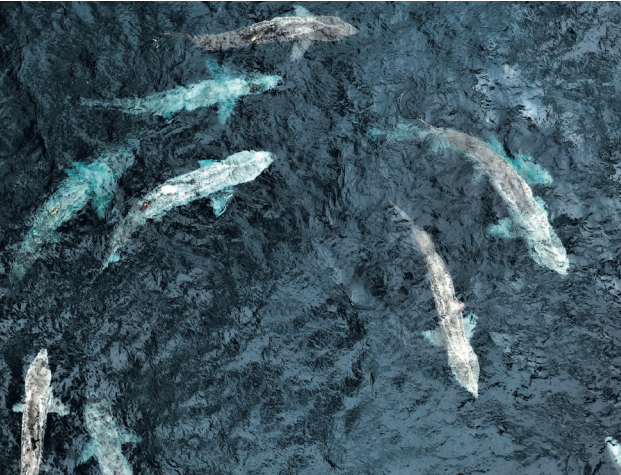
“Now that we’re flying drones,

we can see from above and recognise this as courtship behaviour. Vanessa and Emma have been swimming and diving with them.

“We want to share that experience and wonder and Cultúrlann Sweeney is an amazing venue. The evening will include some music and it’ll be a celebration and a sharing of science.”

The IWDG will also invite some new arrivals from Ukraine to join them and learn more about the area.

“They’re in a welcoming and wonderful place and Friday night will offer an opportunity for everyone to learn more about what’s around them,” Dr Berrow said. Bookings can be made on iwdg.ie.



Basking sharks off the Clare coast. Photographs courtesy of Dr Simon Berrow

Clare house prices up 18% in one year

Owen Ryan

HOUSE prices in Clare increased by just under 18% between the first quarter of last year and the first quarter of this year, new figures from Daft.ie shows.

The property website’s research also shows that there was a 2.8% increase in the asking price for houses in Clare in the first three months of this year.

The average asking price in the Banner now stands at €227,645, an increase of 90% compared to the low point of the market, seen during the recession.

While there were increases in price throughout the country, they were particularly noticeable in the west of the country, with

Leitrim seeing a 26% increase and Mayo one of 22%.

Writing in the Daft.ie report, Ronan Lyons, Associate Professor of Economics at Trinity, said that housing shortages are widespread in Ireland.

“There has been significant commentary about the impact of Covid-19 on the construction of new homes – and rightly so, given the need for at least 35,000 new homes per year and realistically closer to 50,000 if we are to have, as a country, the right mix of housing to suit our needs.

“In that context, it is unfortunate that Covid-19 hit the construction sector just as it looked as though the number of completions would increase beyond the 20,000 threshold.

“Since 2019, the sector has been somewhat stuck at this level, although the expectation is that this year may see as many as 27,000 new homes built across all three main tenures: sale, market rental and social rental.

He noted that the new homes part of the sales market is just one component of it. The other is the secondhand market.

“On the face of it, this may seem unconnected to the supply-demand dynamic, as it’s just housing getting ‘recycled’ not made,” wrote Dr Lyons.

“But given the ‘arrival’ of new households all the time, the liquidity – or extent of transactions in the secondhand market – is a key determinant of conditions in the sales market.”

RTÉ Investigates uncovers 2014 Council grant breach

Fiona McGarry

INVESTIGATIONS by RTÉ, as part of a probe into accountability in local government, have revealed an incident in which Clare County Council breached grant claims procedures.

The programme, Council Chamber Secrets, was broadcast on March 23. While it focused on allegations relating to local authorities across the country, it did not include the Clare case.

Details of that incident were published online by RTÉ, however, as part of coverage which highlighted procedural breaches and other issues in 23 of Ireland’s 31 local authorities.

A 2014 Local Government Audit of Clare County Council found that it had breached procedures, by wrongly submitting a grant claim to a the National Roads Authority (NRA) stating that it had incurred costs of €131,000 for a project. At the time of the claim, the Council had not yet spent the money.

Local Government Auditor, Thomas O’Callaghan, outlined in his report that “an examination of a claim for state grant funding on roads revealed breaches

in procurement and grant claim procedures”.

The audit, seen by The *Champion*, said: “It was noted that a claim was made for expenditure which had not been incurred. The total sum involved amounted to €131k. I have also highlighted to management that claims/receipts should refer to actual expenditure only...”

Responding, the then Chief Executive told the auditor: “The comments on this point have been noted and the relevant section is reviewing controls in this regard to avoid a recurrence.”

RTÉ Investigates identified similar issues in grant claims submitted by several other local authorities.

RTÉ said, in respect of the Clare incident, that a grant claim was made to the NRA for the upgrade of salt-spreading vehicles.

While the Council said an amount of €131,000 had been paid to a supplier, that payment had actually been withheld because of delays with the works.

In response to a query from The *Champion*, a spokesperson for Clare County Council said: “In 2014, Clare County Council were allocated grant funding of €221,400 for the upgrading

of the Council’s winter maintenance fleet. The required specialist works were contracted out and in November 2014 a grant draw-down in the sum of €200,435.60 was submitted to the National Roads Authority (now Transport Infrastructure Ireland). This was on the basis of expenditure committed on the project and agreed with the National Roads Authority.

“It was expected at the time, that the works procured from a specialist contractor would be carried out in early 2015, however, significant delays were experienced by the Local Authority in relation to the supplier’s completion of the necessary works. The NRA/TII were kept updated on the delay. The supplier was not paid until the works were completed. The works were completed in March 2016 and final payment was made at that point.”

In response to a query from RTÉ Investigates, the council said the works were completed in early 2016 and that the final payment was made at that point.

It said it had been not aware at the time that if it recouped the grant that it would take so long for the committed expenditure to be actually incurred.

PUBLIC NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR A FORESHORE CONSENT

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING DETERMINATION/INVITATION FOR PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS FOR PURPOSES OF CONDUCTING STAGE 2 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Application for a foreshore licence in relation to EirGrid Cross Shannon Cable Project FS007083

A proposed electricity transmission infrastructure development and associated works (known as the ‘Cross Shannon 400 kV Cable Project’) generally comprising the laying of 400 kV underground cables (UGC) across the Lower Shannon Estuary, between the existing Moneypoint 400 kV Electricity Substation in the townland of Carrowdotia South Co. Clare and the existing Kilpaddoge 220/110 kV Electricity Substation in the townland of Kilpaddoge, Co. Kerry. The proposed development comprises 3 main elements:

Connection of a 400 kV UGC Installation at the Moneypoint 400 kV Electricity Substation (Co. Clare), including:

- the laying of 3 no. 400 kV UGC (approx. 1.8 kilometres (km) each) between the existing Moneypoint 400 kV Electricity Substation and 3 no. land-submarine transition joint bays located east of the existing Moneypoint Generation Station. The UGC will be installed by standard trenching and includes the provision of 3 no. joint bays along their length and the associated provision, upgrading and/or extension of existing internal access tracks to provide operational vehicular access.
- the provision of 4 no. land-submarine transition joint bays located east of the existing Moneypoint Generation Station to connect the land cables to submarine cables (this arrangement also includes a land-submarine transition joint bay for the spare submarine cable).

Laying of 400 kV Submarine Cables across the Lower Shannon Estuary, including:

- the laying of 4 no. 400 kV submarine cables (approx. 2.8 km each) from the proposed land-submarine transition bays located east of the existing Moneypoint Generation Station in Co. Clare across the Lower Shannon Estuary to the proposed 400 kV Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) Compound at the existing Kilpaddoge 220/110 kV Electricity Substation in Co. Kerry. The submarine cables will be installed by standard submarine installation techniques, which primarily involves them being buried in the seabed.
- the installation of communication links between both substations, this will take the form of a fibre optic cable that will be integrated into each of the proposed 400 kV cables.
- the installation of fibre optic cables for maintenance and cable monitoring, this will take the form of an armoured fibre cable wrapped helically around each of the proposed 400 kV cables.
- associated works in the foreshore include the reinforcement of the ground beneath and around the cables by various methods including concrete ramps, concrete cable channels, infilling with gravel/concrete, articulated pipes, gabion wall and rock protections where required.

Connection of a 400 kV UGC Installation and substation extension at the Kilpaddoge 220/110 kV Electricity Substation (Co. Kerry) including:

- the laying of the 4 no. 400 kV UGC (approx. 51 metres (m) in length) from the southern foreshore of the Lower Shannon Estuary, to a proposed extension (approx. 5,500 m²) to the north of the existing Kilpaddoge 220/110 kV Electricity Substation.
- the provision, within the proposed substation extension, of a 400/220 kV AIS compound, containing electrical equipment and apparatus to connect the submarine cables to the existing Kilpaddoge 220/110 kV Electricity Substation including the following:
 - 9 no. surge arrestors (approx. 7.9 m high);
 - 6 no. cable sealing ends (approx. 7.4 m high);
 - 1 no. 400 / 220 kV transformer (approx. 8.9 m high);
 - 9 no. post insulators (approx. 9.8 m high);
 - 1 no. disconnector (approx. 8.6 m high);
 - 9 no. instrument transformers (approx. 7.6 m high);
 - 3 no. circuit breakers (approx. 7.5 m high);
 - 5 no. lightning protection masts (approx. 25 m high);
 - a control building (approx. 14.6m x 6.6m x 4.6m high);
 - an associated access track (approx. 155 m in length and 5 m in width);
 - 12 no lighting poles (approx. 9 m high);
 - 3 no. 220 kV UGC (approx. 151 m in length);
 - The AIS compound will be enclosed by a palisade fence (approx. 2.6 m in height).

The proposed development includes all associated and ancillary development, including communication links, temporary construction compounds, temporary construction tracks, site development, landscaping works and vegetation removal. Access to the existing electricity substations will be retained from their existing entrances onto the N67 Road in Co. Clare and the L1010 Tarbert Coast Road in Co. Kerry.

Project Area Foreshore Licence Application FS007083



The Irish Transverse Mercator XY coordinates of Location Points Displayed on Map are set out in the table below

Townland	Point	X	Y
Not Applicable	Point No. 1	504303.33	651034.56
Not Applicable	Point No. 2	504835.84	649090.46
Kilpaddoge, Co. Kerry	Point No. 3	505267.61	648733.15
Kilpaddoge, Co. Kerry	Point No. 4	505411.55	6468782.81
Not Applicable	Point No. 5	505353.55	648857.88
Not Applicable	Point No. 6	505070.97	650089.34
Not Applicable	Point No. 7	504710.86	650756.71
Not Applicable	Point No. 8	504674.54	650824.03
Not Applicable	Point No. 9	504489.26	651087.76
Carrowdotia South, Co. Clare	Point No. 10	504445.31	651190.34
Carrowdotia South, Co. Clare	Point No. 11	504295.83	651213.33

Notice is hereby given in accordance with Regulation 42(8) of S.I. No. 477/2011 - European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 that the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, in considering an application for a foreshore licence under the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended and in particular whether or not the plan or project would have a significant impact on a European Site, has determined that an Appropriate Assessment is required.

A copy of the Appropriate Assessment screening decision is available on www.housing.gov.ie In considering this matter the Minister had regard to the following:

- 1 The Screening for Appropriate Assessment Report prepared by Independent Environmental Consultants.
- 2 The Environmental Report prepared by the Departments Marine Advisor (environment);
- 3 A number of application documents submitted by EirGrid plc which informed the Screening for Appropriate Assessment and are contained in the submission the Minister determined on.

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage is responsible for making a decision on the application and the Minister may either grant, approve or consent to the application with or without covenants, conditions or agreements, where applicable, or refuse the application.

The Minister will carry out an Appropriate Assessment and in doing so, shall have regard to the matters in Regulation 42 (12). The Minister will make a determination as to whether or not the proposed plan or project would adversely affect the integrity of a European site in accordance with Regulation 42(11) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

In this regard, in accordance with Regulation 42(13), public submissions are invited for the purposes of conducting the Appropriate Assessment in this case. Any person may make a submission or observation to the Minister concerning the proposed project within 30 days of the date of this notice. The Minister shall have regard to any submissions or observations received during the public consultation.

A copy of the application, map of the proposed project, the determination that an Appropriate Assessment is required in respect of the project, the Natura Impact Statement included with this application, and the other information and documentation relevant to the application, are available for inspection for 30 calendar days, between 31st Mar 2022 and 29th April 2022, free of charge at:

- Kerry County Council, Planning Department, Rathass, Tralee, Co. Kerry. Opening hours Monday – Friday 09:00 to 17:00

- Listowel Garda Station, Church St., Listowel, Co. Kerry. Opening hours 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

- Clare County Council, Planning Department, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare. Opening hours Monday – Friday 9:00 to 16:00

- Kilrush Garda Station, Ennis Road, Kilrush, Co. Clare. Opening hours 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The documentation is available on the Department’s website:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/foreshore-notice/07fcb-eirgrid-plc/>

Members of the public who wish to make a submission or observation concerning the proposed plan or project for the purposes of conducting the Appropriate Assessment may do so between 31st Mar 2022 and 29th April 2022 (quoting ref: FS007083) to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Foreshore Section, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Newtown Road, Wexford, Co. Wexford or foreshore@housing.gov.ie. The closing date for submissions is close of business (17:30) on 29th April 2022.

Take notice that material upon which the Minister shall make the Appropriate Assessment determination will be published on the Department’s website. In this regard the Department wishes to draw attention to its policy on defamatory material that may be contained in submissions it receives, which may be found at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/foreshore/public-participation-foreshore-consent-process>

Dated this 30th March 2022

Conor Cronin,
EirGrid Project Manager – Cross Shannon 400 kV Cable Project
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