

# AMENDMENT NO. 1 TO IRELAND'S CAP STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2027

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## APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

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**Prepared for:**

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
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## Appropriate Assessment Screening Report of Amendment No. 1 to Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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**Abstract:** Fehily Timoney and Company is pleased to submit this AASR to of Amendment No. 1 to Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Fehily Timoney and Company (FT) were commissioned by The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to prepare a report to inform the competent authority about the Screening for Appropriate Assessment, as required by Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive). The preparation of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening report is for a proposed amendment to Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (proposed amendment).

This report presents an examination of whether the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on a European site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) and is based on best available scientific knowledge. This report is to inform the competent authority in completing their statutory obligation to carry out a Screening for AA.

### 1.1 Legislative Requirements

Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Habitats Directive) provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. The Habitats Directive provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the "favourable conservation status" of habitats and species of European Community Interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives (Habitats Directive as above and Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds) with Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable among them. These two designations are collectively known and referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect such sites. Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA. These requirements are implemented in the Republic of Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Specifically, Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

*"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (Natura 2000 sites) but likely to have significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public".*

Therefore, the AA process is an assessment of the following key concepts:

- Whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site.
- Whether the project will have a potentially significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, in view of the site's conservation objectives or if residual uncertainty exists regarding potential impacts.



The provisions of Article 6(3) do not apply where the proposed plan or project is 'connected with or necessary to the management of the site'. Where a formal consent process applies, the AA process is concluded by the relevant competent authority making a determination in accordance with article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

## 1.2 Guidance

The assessment was conducted in accordance with the following guidance:

- Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg (European Commission, 2002).
- This document was updated by Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Commission Notice (2021) Brussels, 28.9.2021 C(2021) 6913 final;
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin (2009, updated 2010);
- Commission Notice: Managing Natura 2000 sites. The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (2018). Brussels, (2019/C 33/01). OJ C 33, 25.1.2019;
- Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats. Version EUR 28. European Commission 2013;
- OPR Practice Note PN01 Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, Office of the Planning Regulator (2021).

The AA screening is based on best scientific knowledge and has utilised ecological and hydrological expertise. In addition, a detailed online review of published scientific literature and 'grey' literature was conducted. This included a detailed review of the National Parks and Wildlife Website including mapping and available reports for relevant sites and in particular sensitive qualifying interests/special conservation interests described and their conservation objectives. The EPA Envision Map-viewer ([www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)) and available reports were also reviewed:

- Definitions of conservation status, integrity and significance used in this assessment are defined in accordance with 'Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC' (EC, 2000).
- The conservation status of a natural habitat is defined as the sum of the influences acting on a natural habitat and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long-term survival of its typical species;
- The conservation status of a species is defined as the sum of the influences acting on the species concerned that may affect the long-term distribution and abundance of its population;
- The integrity of a European Site is defined as the coherence of the site's ecological structure and function, across its whole area, or the habitats, complex of habitats and/or populations of species for which the site is or will be classified; and
- Significant effect should be determined in relation to the specific features and environmental conditions of the protected site concerned by the plan or project, taking particular account of the site's conservation objectives.



### 1.3 Assessment Process and Approach

The assessment commences with a description of the receiving environment, along with a description of the project and the associated sources for impacts to the receiving environment which may arise through interactions on same. All elements of the project are presented including the proposed project location and existing baseline environment. The type of impacts that are likely due to the proposed project are identified having regard to the spatial and temporal scale of the project, resource requirements and likely emissions; these sources are then used to define the zone of influence (Zol)<sup>1</sup> of the project as detailed in Section 2.3

The European Commission Notice (2021) on the 'Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, states that in identifying European sites (Natural 2000 sites), which may be affected by the project, the following should be identified:

- Any European sites geographically overlapping with any of the actions or aspects of the plan or project in any of its phases, or adjacent to them;
- Any European sites within the likely zone of influence of the plan or project. European sites located in the surroundings of the plan or project (or at some distance) that could still be indirectly affected by aspects of the project, including as regards the use of natural resources (e.g., water) and various types of waste, discharge or emissions of substances or energy;
- European sites whose connectivity or ecological continuity can be affected by the plan or project.

An ecological desktop study has been completed for the AA screening of the proposed project, which comprised the following elements:

- Identification of European sites within 15km<sup>2</sup> of the subject lands;
- Identification of European sites pathways for effects from the site (if relevant<sup>3</sup>) greater than 15km from the subject lands;
- Review of the NPWS site synopses and conservation objectives for European sites within 15km and for which potential pathways from the proposed site have been identified; and
- Examination of available information on protected species.

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<sup>1</sup> The zone of influence is the area which the sources for impacts are likely to have effect - emanating outwards from the subject lands.

<sup>2</sup> While the actual zone of influence is likely to be much smaller, the initial 15km radius has been applied as a starting point which can be amended later in the assessment process (where appropriate as supported by a detailed rationale) - further detail on this is identified in section 3.2.

<sup>3</sup> This is particularly relevant for all sites with hydrological connectivity or other significant ecological pathways.



Section 3.1 sets out the detailed rationale for the identification of relevant European sites looking at the ZOI (as explained above) and the potential interactions due to ecological connectivity with the ZOI. Subsequently, an assessment process is undertaken with respect to potential connectivity to European Sites and their qualifying interests/special conservation interests are identified.

The process of determining the likelihood of significant effects from a proposed project on European sites is an iterative process centred around a Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) model. In order for an effect to be established, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. The absence or removal of one of the elements of the mechanism is sufficient to conclude that a potential effect is not of any relevance or significance.

- Source(s) – e.g., pollutant run-off, noise, removal of vegetation etc.;
- Pathway(s) – ecological connectivity linkages e.g., groundwater connecting to nearby qualifying wetland habitats; and,
- Receptor(s) – ecological resources supporting the qualifying habitats and species of European sites.

In the context of this report, a receptor is an ecological feature that is known to be utilised by the Qualifying Interests (QI) or Special Conservation Interests (SCI) of a European site. A source is any identifiable element of the proposed project that is known to interact with ecological processes. A pathway is any connection or link between the source and the receptor<sup>4</sup>.

An important element of the AA process is the identification of the Conservation Objectives, QIs and/ or SCIs of European sites requiring assessment. QIs are the habitat features and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive for which each European site has been designated and afforded protection. SCIs are wetland habitats and bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive. It is also vital that the threats to the ecological / environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs are considered as part of the assessment.

The potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects is also assessed having regard to the identified impacts of the proposed project relative to the spatial temporal effects along the ecological pathways identified (see Section 3.2).

The likelihood of significant effects on the European Sites is then interrogated having regard to the sensitivity of each European site with pathways for impacts associated with the proposed project on its own and in combination with other plans and projects. Where significant effects are determined to be likely, or where there is uncertainty regarding the likelihood of significant effects, the proposed project will be required under law to be subjected to stage 2 AA and the preparation of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS).

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<sup>4</sup> qualifying interest or special conservation interests of the European site in question and the known sensitivities of these key ecological receptors





Having regard to the European Commission Communication on the Precautionary Principle (European Commission, 2000) the:

*“absence of scientific evidence on the significant negative effect of an action cannot be used as justification for approval of this action. When applied to Article 6(3) procedure, the precautionary principle implies that the absence of a negative effect on Natura 2000 sites has to be demonstrated before a plan or project can be authorised. In other words, if there is a lack of certainty as to whether there will be any negative effects, then the plan or project cannot be approved.”*

This AA screening is based on best scientific knowledge and has utilised ecological expertise. In addition, a detailed online review of published scientific literature and ‘grey’ literature was conducted. This included a detailed review of the National Parks and Wildlife Website including mapping and available reports for relevant sites and in particular sensitive qualifying interests/special conservation interests described and their conservation objectives.



## 2. DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CSP

### 2.1 Overview of the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027

These amendments relate to Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP). The core legislative proposals were published by the EU Commission in June 2018, of which draft Regulation (COM 2018) 3921 sets out the principal proposals for mainstream CAP financial support of agriculture, farming and rural development. After extensive negotiations, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, and the European Commission reached a political agreement in June 2021.

Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No.1307/2013.

The strategic statement for the CAP Strategic Plan sets out the main expected achievements and interventions of the plan. The strategic aim of the plan is for it to underpin the sustainable development of Ireland's farming and food sector by supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness, by strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, and by contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels.

A total budget of €9.8 billion will be provided for under CAP, with supports provided for: via the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) for Pillar I measures: via the European Union via the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and by the national Exchequer for Pillar II measures.

Supports will be based on direct payments and the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan's green architecture. The mechanism for the delivery of direct payments will be the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) under Pillar I. This payment is designed to provide a direct income support to Irish farmers to underpin their continued sustainability and viability and to support farmers in their continued delivery of a secure food supply.

The green architecture of the CAP Strategic Plan establishes the mechanisms for the delivery of support that aims to align the continued delivery of a secure food supply with the environmental and climate action ambitions. The green architecture will operate across both pillars of CAP funding and will be implemented by three core elements, namely Conditionality; Pillar I Eco-schemes; and Pillar II climate/environment and animal welfare related interventions. Conditionality sets the base line requirements for farmers in receipt of CAP Payments. Consisting of Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and standards for the maintenance of land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAECs), Ireland proposes to implement a system of enhanced conditionality through the CSP.

Pillar I eco-schemes is a voluntary scheme that will strengthen the environment and climate outcomes achieved by Pillar I payments, by building on baseline improvements achieved through conditionality. Regulations require at least 25% of the Pillar I CAP budget to be devoted to Eco-Schemes. Ireland proposes to introduce an Eco-Scheme "for all farmers" with the objective being to maximise farmer participation to achieve climate and environmental improvements across all farmed lands.



Pillar II interventions represent voluntary environmentally focused interventions that aim to deliver significant long-term environmental improvement through participation by a significant number of farmers, with each making a strong improvement on their farm. This broad range of interventions will build on, and complement, achievements under Conditionality and Eco-Schemes.

## 2.2 Proposed Amendment No. 1

Most of the proposed amendments are text based or clerical corrections, some of the amendments also relate to text clarification to ensure the intended meaning of provisions are clearly understood. The remaining amendments are intended to provide additional data resources and/or align with higher order plans as well as ensuring the plan is pragmatic and implementable. A summary of the amendments is provided below - Table 2-1 - and these assessments should be read in conjunction with the amendment itself:

**Table 2-1: Summary of the changes within Amendment No. 1 to the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027**

Area	Summary of amendment
Section 2.3.3 Measures under the CAP Strategic Plan (Eligible Hectare)	Increased clarity / correction of a drafting error.
GAEC 8: Amendment to weighting factor under ASSAP	Remove the weighting / estimate process provided to the ASSAP areas and reflect the fact that Ireland can map these areas accurately.
GAEC 8	Stonewalls-This change is to ensure that traditional stonewalls made of rock / stones and which use traditional lime mortar are not excluded. Excluding such traditional stonewalls was not intended, and this change will ensure that all traditional stonewalls are accounted for appropriately. There is no risk in making this correction to align with our original intention.
Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme	Updated to allow for 3-star DBI bull to be used. Indicators changed to account for 2024 start date.
ACRES Genetic Resources Template	Update to indicators-R.25 added to the target plan since the support under ACRES GR will be granted to animals. Rectified technical error in Planned Unit Amounts.
ACRES Genetic Resources Template	Correction to the protection of Rare Breeds action so that it is clearer that the payment is per maternal livestock unit.
ACRES General	Clerical update-Correction to the protection of Rare Breeds action so that it is clearer that the payment is per maternal livestock unit.
GAEC 5 - Nitrates Action	GAEC 5 to align with the Nitrates Action Programme 2022-2025 Tillage management, reducing the risk of soil degradation and erosion, including consideration of the slope gradient. This change is to ensure alignment with the Nitrates Action Programme 2022-2025, focusing the GAEC on the main nitrates loss counties, and providing slightly additional flexibility to farmers to implement the GAEC in the most environmentally advantageous way (e.g., a slight increase in the cultivation period from 7 to 10 days to account for weather).
AECMTR	Clerical update- A number of corrections have been added to Section 53AECMTR. This is where the name of the national scheme has now been decided and so phrases like



Area	Summary of amendment
	"name to inserted" have been replaced with the scheme name (ACRES / ACRES Training etc.).
Section 3.4	Correction to Section 3.4 Overview as regards the aim of fairer distribution and more effective and efficient targeting of income support: There was an incorrect reference made to table 6 in this section, it should have referred to table 4. This correction fixes that
Annex 7.3 IACS EAFRD	Annex 7.3 IACS EAFRD updated based on further refinements to controls and penalties across schemes.
Annex 7.3 IACS EAGF	Annex 7.3 IACS EAFRD updated based on further refinements to controls and penalties across schemes.
Section 7.3.1.1.4	The section has been updated to reflect the latest information on the development of Ireland's AMS, and to remove defunct text regarding Ireland's position in the development of draft secondary legislation that has now been adopted.
Section 7.2	Changed "Administrative Article 48 checks are also recorded and available for control purposes" to "Administrative checks are also recorded and available for control purposes" for clarity.
Sections 7.1 and 7.4.4	Clerical Update-a number of update / additions to email addresses for the relevant competent control bodies responsible for the checks of conditionality practices, statutory management requirements.
Section 3.1.3	Clerical update- Deleted the characters "[WJ1]" from section 3.1.3 for clarity / removal of an unnecessary reference.
Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organisations	Indicators updated to reflect the Operational Programmes
GAEC 7	GAEC 7 implementation of derogation for 2023. Notice added to the CSP that Ireland has availed of the derogation under Commission Implementing Regulation 2022/1317.
Knowledge Transfer	Clerical update- Simplification to language used in eligibility criteria for KT participants
Link for SEA Report in Annex 1	Clerical update.
Link for Ex ante Report in Annex I	Clerical update.
Organic Farming Scheme	Clerical update.
Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme	Updated eligibility criteria to be clearer that the requirement is to be a member of Bord Bia Quality Assurance Scheme (SBLAS) by 16 October 2023 and retain this status for the duration of your participation in the scheme.
Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme	Increase number of reference animals from 70% of animals to 80% of eligible cow-calf pairs that calve annually to provide for better data. Changed based on industry feedback.
Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme	Clerical update- The correction has been made to the incorrect listing of output in hectares. It has changed it from 256,666 ha to 266,666 ha.
Sheep Improvement Scheme	Clerical update.
Various Tables in the CSP	Clerical update.



Area	Summary of amendment
Young Farmer (Section 4.2.1.4)	Clerical update.
CIS-YF paragraph in Section 2.1.SO1.9	An additional reference has been added into the paragraph so that it is clearer when the paragraph is referring to a financial year or a calendar year.
LEADER	Correction of a technical error-correction to a technical drafting error in 53LEADER Section 13 where a row in a table was inadvertently and mistakenly filled in with detail that belonged to another row. This correction deletes the offending material.
Correction to Section 4.2.1.3	The text on convergence changed to adjust payment entitlement values in "four equal steps where financially possible".
Correction to Indicator C.19	Target value for R.33 changed from 80.14% to 52.48% because of the correction of the Indicator C.19 by the European Commission
Clerical update to financial figures in other programmes	The allocation for ERDF, Interreg, JTF, ESF+ programmes referenced in the CSP was updated to match with the latest figures.
Clerical updates to NAP and RBMP	References to the fourth review of the NAP and the draft RBMP were corrected (i.e., it is the fifth review, and the RBMP is no longer draft).

## 2.3 Relationship with other Relevant Plans and Programmes

The Proposed Amendment must comply with the CSP and relevant higher-level strategic actions and may, in turn, guide lower-level strategic actions. The Proposed Amendment is subject to a number of high-level environmental protection policies and objectives with which it must comply, the Strategic Environmental Objectives in Section 6 of the CSP SEA Environmental Report and the mitigation measures within the Section 9 of the document and Section 6 of the Natura Impact Report (NIR). The NIR for the initial CSP concluded the following:

*The CAP Strategic Plan does not indicate the precise location of any land use measures to be implemented under the Plan but is underpinned by an approach of the "right measure for the right place". This approach along with the mitigation measures and recommendations outlined in Section 6 that will be adhered to throughout the lifetime of the Strategic Plan will provide sufficient safeguards that will not have adverse effects on the integrity of any European Sites.*

Therefore, the amendment must be considered in relation to the current CSP which has already been subject to SEA and AA considerations. All amendments are considered therefore in the context of potential additional sources for impacts/effects which were not previously considered.



### 3. SCREENING FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

#### 3.1 Introduction to Screening

This stage of the process identifies any likely significant effects to European Sites from a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans. The screening phase was progressed in the following stages. A series of questions are asked during the Screening Stage of the AA process in order to determine:

- Whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site.
- Whether the plan or project will have a potentially significant effect on a European Site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, in view of the site's conservation objectives or if residual uncertainty exists regarding potential impacts.

An important element of the AA process is the identification of the “conservation objectives”, “Qualifying Interests” (QIs) and/ or “Special Conservation Interests” (SCIs) of European Sites requiring assessment. QIs are the habitat features and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive for which each European Site has been designated and afforded protection. SCIs are wetland habitats and bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive. It is also vital that the threats to the ecological / environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs are considered as part of the assessment.

Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) have been designed to define favourable conservation status for a particular habitat or species at that site. According to the European Commission interpretation document ‘Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC’, paragraph 4.6(3) states:

*“The integrity of a site involves its ecological functions. The decision as to whether it is adversely affected should focus on and be limited to the site's conservation objectives.”*

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- Its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing;
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future; and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- Population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats;
- The natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future; and
- There is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.



The screening stage of the AA takes account of the elements detailed above with regard to the details and characteristics of the Project or plan to determine if potential for effects to the integrity of the European Site are likely. The characteristics of the Plan were constructed through an iterative process, as a result the European Sites which are screened below may differ from those of high-level plans, due to refinements in the methods/Project details available.

### 3.2 Assessment Criteria

Sites are screened out based on one or a combination of the following criteria:

- Where it can be shown that there are no pathways such as hydrological links between the Proposed amendments, and the European Site being screened;
- Where the site is located at a distance from Proposed amendments area such that effects are not foreseen;
- Where known threats or vulnerabilities at a site cannot be linked to potential effects that may arise from the Proposed amendments.

The following parameters are described when characterising impacts (following CIEEM (2016), EPA (2002) and NRA (2009)):

- **Direct and Indirect Impacts** - An impact can be caused either as a direct or as an indirect consequence of a proposed development.
- **Magnitude** - Magnitude measures the size of an impact, which is described as high, medium, low, very low or negligible.
- **Extent** - The area over which the impact occurs – this should be predicted in a quantified manner.
- **Duration** - The time for which the effect is expected to last prior to recovery or replacement of the resource or feature.
  - Temporary: Up to 1 Year;
  - Short Term: The effects would take 1-7 years to be mitigated;
  - Medium Term: The effects would take 7-15 years to be mitigated;
  - Long Term: The effects would take 15-60 years to be mitigated; and
  - Permanent: The effects would take 60+ years to be mitigated.
- **Likelihood** - The probability of the effect occurring taking into account all available information.
  - Certain/Near Certain: >95% chance of occurring as predicted;
  - Probable: 50-95% chance as occurring as predicted;
  - Unlikely: 5-50% chance as occurring as predicted; and
  - Extremely Unlikely: <5% chance as occurring as predicted.



The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) guidelines for ecological impact assessment (2016) define: an ecologically significant impact as an impact (negative or positive) on the integrity of a defined site or ecosystem and/or the conservation status of habitats or species within a given geographic area; and the integrity of a site as the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area, which enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was classified.

The Habitats Directive requires the focus of the assessment at this stage to be on the integrity of the site as indicated by its Conservation Objectives. It is an aim of NPWS to draw up conservation management plans for all areas designated for nature conservation. These plans will, among other things, set clear objectives for the conservation of the features of interest within a site.

SSCOs have been prepared for a number of European Sites. These detailed SSCO aim to define favourable conservation condition for the qualifying habitats and species at that site by setting targets for appropriate attributes which define the character habitat. The maintenance of the favourable condition for these habitats and species at the site level will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

*Favourable conservation status of a species can be described as being achieved when: 'population data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself, and the natural range of the species is neither being reduced or likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.'*

*Favourable conservation status of a habitat can be described as being achieved when: 'its natural range, and area it covers within that range, is stable or increasing, and the ecological factors that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable'.*

Generic Conservation Objectives for SACs have been provided as follows:

- To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected.

One generic Conservation Objective has been provided for SPAs as follows:

- To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA.

EC guidance<sup>5</sup> outlines the types of effects that may affect European sites. These include effects from the following activities:

- Land take;
- Resource Requirements (Drinking Water Abstraction Etc.);
- Emissions (Disposal to Land, Water or Air);
- Excavation Requirements;
- Transportation Requirements;

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<sup>5</sup> Assessment of plans and Projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, European Commission Environment DG, 2001.





- Duration of Construction, Operation, Decommissioning.

In addition, the guidance outlines the following likely changes that may occur at a designated site, which may result in effects on the integrity and function of that site:

- Reduction of Habitat Area.
- Disturbance to Key Species.
- Habitat or Species Fragmentation.
- Reduction in Species Density.
- Changes in Key Indicators of Conservation Value (Water Quality Etc.).
- Climate Change.

### **3.3 Elements of the Proposed amendments with Potential to Give Rise to Effects**

The first amendments generally have a negligible influence on other plans or programmes. They are broadly intended to add clarity and give better effect to the Plan. Some of the proposed amendments relate to Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) defined in the CSP, which are for the purpose of improving performance in the agriculture sector and support the achievement of measures and objectives set out in the Nitrates Action Programme 2022 -2025 and the National River Basin Management Plan for example. A full list of the amendments and the environmental evaluation of each can be found below (Table 3-1). They do not introduce any potential environmental effects that have not already been considered in the existing SEA/AA processes undertaken for the CSP.



**Table 3-1: Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction in the first amendment to the CSP**

Area	Summary of change or correction	Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction to the CSP
Section 2.3.3 Measures under the CAP Strategic Plan (Eligible Hectare)	Increased clarity / correction of a drafting error.	Clerical amendment only.
GAEC 8: Amendment to weighting factor under ASSAP	Remove the weighting / estimate process provided to the ASSAP areas and reflect the fact that Ireland can map these areas accurately.	The process for estimating ASSAP areas (e.g., riparian zones) has now been removed to reflect the fact that these areas can now be accurately mapped. This amendment does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.
GAEC 8	Stonewalls-This change is to ensure that traditional stonewalls made of rock / stones and which use traditional lime mortar are not excluded. Excluding such traditional stonewalls was not intended, and this change will ensure that all traditional stonewalls are accounted for appropriately. There is no risk in making this correction to align with our original intention.	GAEC 8 has been updated to clarify that traditional stone walls are not excluded from the definition of stone walls. Excluding traditional stone walls was not intended.  This change adds clarity and supports the implementation of GAEC 8. It does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.
Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme	Updated to allow for 3-star DBI bull to be used. Indicators changed to account for 2024 start date.	The Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme has been updated to allow for the inclusion of 3-star DBI bulls. DBW indicators have been changed to account for a 2024 start date. This supports the implementation of the scheme but does not materially change the scheme in a manner that introduces additional environmental impacts not previously considered.
ACRES Genetic Resources Template	Update to indicators-R.25 added to the target plan since the support under ACRES GR will be granted to animals. Rectified technical error in Planned Unit Amounts.	This change will support the implementation of the ACRES Generic Resource measures which are intended to 'Contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, enhance ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes.' The change also corrects a technical error. It does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.



Area	Summary of change or correction	Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction to the CSP
ACRES Genetic Resources Template	Correction to the protection of Rare Breeds action so that it is clearer that the payment is per maternal livestock unit.	Clerical amendment only.
ACRES General	Clerical update-Correction to the protection of Rare Breeds action so that it is clearer that the payment is per maternal livestock unit.	Clerical amendment only.
GAEC 5 - Nitrates Action	<p>GAEC 5 to align with the Nitrates Action Programme 2022-2025</p> <p>Tillage management, reducing the risk of soil degradation and erosion, including consideration of the slope gradient.</p> <p>This change is to ensure alignment with the Nitrates Action Programme 2022-2025, focusing the GAEC on the main nitrates loss counties, and providing slightly additional flexibility to farmers to implement the GAEC in the most environmentally advantageous way (e.g., a slight increase in the cultivation period from 7 to 10 days to account for weather). The Department considers it important that farmers have full clarity in a timely fashion. Farmers have already been advised of the changes made to the Nitrates Action Programme and that our proposed implementation of GAEC 5 will align with it.</p> <p>The date of effect of this change is 01 July 2023.</p> <p>This will ensure alignment with the Nitrates Action Programme 2022-2025, focusing the GAEC on the main nitrates loss counties, and provide slightly additional flexibility to farmers to implement the GAEC in the most environmentally advantageous way (e.g., a slight increase in the cultivation period from 7 to 10 days to account for weather).</p>	<p>This change ensures GAEC 5 aligns with and better supports the Nitrates Action Programme 2022 - 2025. The Nitrates Action Programme is designed to protect surface water and groundwater. The change does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impact not previously considered.</p>
AECMTR	Clerical update- A number of corrections have been added to Section 53AECMTR. This is where the name of the national scheme has now been decided and so phrases like "name to be inserted" have been replaced with the scheme name (ACRES / ACRES Training etc.).	Clerical amendment only.



Area	Summary of change or correction	Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction to the CSP
Section 3.4	Correction to Section 3.4 Overview as regards the aim of fairer distribution and more effective and efficient targeting of income support: There was an incorrect reference made to table 6 in this section, it should have referred to table 4. This correction fixes that.	Clerical amendment only.
Annex 7.3 IACS EAFRD	Annex 7.3 IACS EAFRD updated based on further refinements to controls and penalties across schemes.	This update makes small changes to the administrative controls and penalties defined in the 'Governance and Coordination System' section of the plan. It does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.
Annex 7.3 IACS EAGF	Annex 7.3 IACS EAFRD updated based on further refinements to controls and penalties across schemes.	This update makes small changes to the administrative controls and penalties defined in the 'Governance and Coordination System' section of the plan. It does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.
Section 7.3.1.1.4	The section has been updated to reflect the latest information on the development of Ireland's AMS, and to remove defunct text regarding Ireland's position in the development of draft secondary legislation that has now been adopted.	This change adds further detail on Ireland's Area Monitoring System. It does not alter the nature, scope or purpose of the Area Monitoring System. It does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.
Section 7.2	Changed "Administrative Article 48 checks are also recorded and available for control purposes" to "Administrative checks are also recorded and available for control purposes" for clarity.	Clerical amendment only.
Sections 7.1 and 7.4.4	Clerical Update-a number of update / additions to email addresses for the relevant competent control bodies responsible for the checks of conditionality practices, statutory management requirements.	Clerical amendment only.
ASSAP	Mapping of ASSAP to be done accurately, no need to apply a weighting and estimate. CSP updated to reflect this.	The process for estimating ASSAP areas (e.g., Riparian zones) has now been removed to reflect the fact that these areas can now be accurately mapped. This amendment does not introduce any sources of additional environmental impacts not previously considered.



Area	Summary of change or correction	Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction to the CSP
Section 3.1.3	Clerical update- Deleted the characters "[WJ1]" from section 3.1.3 for clarity / removal of an unnecessary reference.	Clerical amendment only.
F and V Producer Organisations	Indicators updated to reflect the Operational Programmes – significant amount of work involved across multiple interventions.	<p>Various targets and results indicators for the Fruit &amp; Vegetable Producer Organisation Support Scheme have been updated. Targets and indicators relating to farmer training, improved financial risk management measures and farm modernization and improvements have been updated.</p> <p>The target for investments related to climate change has been increased slightly. The target has been increased for number of persons benefitting from advice, training, knowledge exchange, or participating in European Innovation Partnership (EIP) operational groups supported by the CAP related to environmental or climate-related performance. These more ambitious targets have supported bringing about environmental and climate change improvements in the sector.</p> <p>The target for renewable energy generation for agriculture from supported investments in renewable energy production capacity has increased (from 25.54 MW to 39.4 MW).</p> <p>These changes do not introduce any sources of additional environmental impact not previously considered or mitigated against in the CSP. Mitigation Measures No. 6 defined in the SEA Statement for the CSP will ensure that additional renewable energy development promoted by this objective/target will be subject to suitable statutory environmental assessment processes embedded in Ireland's development planning system.</p>
GAEC 7	GAEC 7 implementation of derogation for 2023. Notice added to the CSP that Ireland has availed of the derogation under Commission Implementing Regulation 2022/1317.	A notice that Ireland has availed of the derogation under Commission Implementing Regulation 2022/1317 for the year 2023 has now been included. This derogation gives farmers greater flexibility to make use of their available arable land for food



Area	Summary of change or correction	Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction to the CSP
		<p>production due to need for the production capacity as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. This derogation is limited to 2023.</p> <p>This change temporarily limits the objectives of GAEC 7 but does not introduce any additional sources of environmental impacts.</p>
Knowledge Transfer	Clerical update- Simplification to language used in eligibility criteria for KT participants	Clerical amendment only.
Link for SEA Report in Annex 1	Clerical update.	Clerical amendment only.
Link for Ex ante Report in Annex I	Clerical update.	Clerical amendment only.
Organic Farming Scheme	Clerical update.	Clerical amendment only.
Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme	Updated eligibility criteria to be clearer that the requirement is to be a member of Bord Bia Quality Assurance Scheme (SBLAS) by 16 October 2023 and retain this status for the duration of your participation in the scheme.	This change supports the implementation of the Suckler Carbon Efficiency programme. It does not introduce any additional sources of environmental impacts.
Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme	Increase number of reference animals from 70% of animals to 80% of eligible cow-calf pairs that calve annually to provide for better data. Changed based on industry feedback.	This change supports the implementation of the Suckler Carbon Efficiency programme. It does not introduce any additional sources of environmental impacts.
Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme	Clerical update- The correction has been made to the incorrect listing of output in hectares. It has changed it from 256,666 ha to 266,666 ha.	Clerical amendment only.
Sheep Improvement Scheme	Clerical update.	Clerical amendment only.
Various tables in CSP	Clerical update.	Clerical amendment only.



Area	Summary of change or correction	Evaluation of Potential Environmental Implications of each Proposed change or correction to the CSP
Young Farmer (Section 4.2.1.4)	Clerical update.	Clerical amendment only.
CIS-YF paragraph in Section 2.1.SO1.9	An additional reference has been added into the paragraph so that it is clearer when the paragraph is referring to a financial year or a calendar year.	Clerical amendment only.
LEADER	Correction of a technical error-correction to a technical drafting error in 53LEADER Section 13 where a row in a table was inadvertently and mistakenly filled in with detail that belonged to another row. This correction deletes the offending material.	Clerical amendment only.
Correction to Section 4.2.1.3	The text on convergence changed to adjust payment entitlement values in "four equal steps where financially possible".	Clerical amendment only.
Correction to Indicator C.19	Target value for R.33 changed from 80.14% to 52.48% because of the correction of the Indicator C.19 by the European Commission	Clerical amendment only.
Clerical update to financial figures in other programmes	The allocation for ERDF, Interreg, JTF, ESF+ programmes referenced in the CSP was updated to match with the latest figures.	Clerical amendment only.
Clerical updates to NAP and RBMP	References to the fourth review of the NAP and the draft RBMP were corrected (i.e. it is the fifth review, and the RBMP is no longer draft).	Clerical amendment only.

### 3.4 Other Plans and Programs

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires an assessment of a plan or project to consider other plans or programmes that might, in combination with the plan or project, have the potential to adversely impact upon European Sites. There are no additional sources for effects identified within the Proposed amendments; therefore, there are no in-combination effects.



## 4. CONCLUSION

Stage 1 Screening for AA of Amendment no. 1 to Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has been carried out. It has been demonstrated that implementation of the proposed amendments are not foreseen to have any significant effects on any European Site.

The proposed amendments do not set out a development control related framework for projects or activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources. The principal reason for this is that the proposed amendments are either of a clerical nature, are for providing additional clarity, or are for giving better effect to the plan, having regard to the intention of the measures set out in the plan. They do not introduce any potential environmental effects that have not already been considered in the existing SEA/AA processes undertaken for the CSP. It has been evaluated that the proposed amendment No. 1 has no additional sources for effect on ecological processes.

It is concluded that the proposed amendment No. 1 will not give rise to any adverse effects on designated European sites<sup>6</sup>, alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Consequently, a Stage 2 AA is not required for the amendment.

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<sup>6</sup> Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be:

- a) no alternative solution available,
- b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the plan/programme/strategy/project etc. to proceed; and
- c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.





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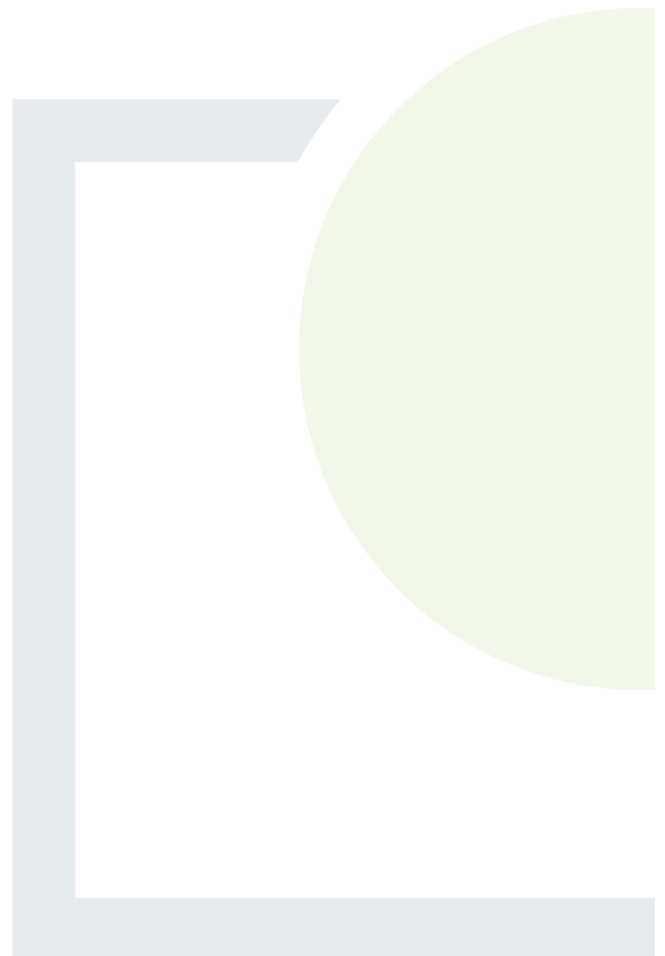
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# APPENDIX 1

Author Details



## Author Details

**Lead Author - Andrew Torsney** is a Principal Ecologist with over 10 years' experience working on major national and local scale projects. Andrew graduated from University College Dublin in 2011 with a B.Sc. degree in Zoology and obtained Master's degree in Biodiversity and Conservation from the University of Leeds in 2012. He has a range of ecological skills which include habitat mapping, ecological surveying, data interpretation and report writing. Andrew is a vegetative plant specialist, who has a wealth of experience classifying riparian habitats and identifying rare floral species. Andrew has a vast knowledge of riparian and freshwater ecosystems and undertakes freshwater surveys regularly. Andrew holds 4 national protected species licenses and has a lot of experience optioning surveying licenses for aquatic species such as the white clawed crayfish. He is also a Bat specialist with a wealth of experience, in acoustic surveying and monitoring of bats. Throughout Andrews's career he has worked on a number of large-scale multifaceted projects such as the Killaloe to Dublin water supply project NIS. For this work, Andrew designed and oversaw all ecological field work relating to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and AA.

Andrew has been the principal ecologist for a range of projects including the AA of the National Wind Energy Guidelines, a number of AAs for County Councils and a range of large-scale infrastructure projects.



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