Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Determination on Fen Restoration Works within Scragh Bog Special Area of Conservation as a component of the Tóchar Midlands Wetland Restoration Scheme in accordance with Regulation 42A EC (Birds and Natural) Habitats Regulations 2011-2021

Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
npws.ie

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1. Introduction

This determination on Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) has been made by the Ecological Assessment Unit (EAU) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2021 ('the 2011 Regulations").[1]

On the 29th April 2026, in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 42A(3) of the 2011-2021 Regulations, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage ('the Minister') furnished the EAU with a request for a Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) determination for proposed Fen Restoration Works within Scragh Bog Special Area of Conservation [Site Code: 000692]. The proposed works are a component of the Tóchar Midlands Wetland Restoration Scheme. Hereafter referred to as "the project".

The EAU have evaluated and analysed the information contained in the referred to above documents and location maps provided and carried out a determination. The purpose of this document is to provide a record and an audit trail of the EAU reasoned thinking in view of best scientific information and the Conservation Objectives of European Sites. This determination does not constitute consent or authorisation for the proposed works. The proponent is responsible for ensuring that all other necessary consents, licences, or permissions are obtained, including, where relevant, a declaration under Section 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

[1] As inserted by Regulation 7 of the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Amendment).

2. Background

Pursuant to Regulation 42A(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011), a Screening for AA is required to be carried out on the project. AA is a process required under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive. Article 6(3) is transposed in Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended, and by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

All plans and projects which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site, but which either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant effect on a “European Site”, require an AA of these effects to determine if they will adversely affect the integrity of these sites. The proposed monitoring is considered to fall under the requirements of AA as applied to all plans and projects.

The Screening for AA process scrutinises the plan or project to determine if there is potential for likely significant effects either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on a European Site. European Sites are part of the Natura 2000 network and include those designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Candidate SACs (cSACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPA). This Screening for Appropriate Assessment describes the outcome of this analysis in respect of the project.

3. Legislation and Guidance

This section provides details on the adopted methodology with sources of guidance and information gathered to inform the preparation of the report.

3.1. Guidance and Data Sources

- Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle. European Commission (2000);
- European Commission. (2001) Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodical Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- European Commission. (2007) Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. (2010) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities;
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive; Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10;
- European Commission. (2018) Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provision of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- Office of the Planning Regulator. (2021) Practice Note PN01 - AA Screening for Development Management; and,
- Official Journal of the European Union. (2021) Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (Volume 64; 2021/C 437/01).
- *The Fen Management Handbook*, (2011), Editors A. McBride, I. Diack, N Droy, B. Hamill, P.Jones, J. Schutten, A. Skinner, and M. Street. Scottish Natural Heritage, Perth.

3.2. Assessment Methodology

This report is based on review of desktop data. Sources of information utilised for this report and accessed during May 2026 include the following:

- National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) Designations Viewer[2]; and,
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) Maps[3].

3.3. Legislative Background

According to the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), Member States are required to establish a Natura 2000 network of sites of highest biodiversity importance for rare and threatened habitats and species across the EU.

In Ireland, the Natura 2000 network of European sites comprises SACs, candidate SACs and SPAs.

SACs are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats (including priority types which are in danger of disappearance) and Annex II species (other than birds). SPAs are selected for the conservation of Annex I birds and all migratory birds and their habitats. The Annex habitats and species, for which each site is selected, are the Qualifying Interests (QI) for SACs and Special Conservation Interests (SCI) for SPAs of each site. Conservation Objectives for the site are defined for these QI or SCI.

A key requirement of the Habitats Directive is that the effects of any plan or project, which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site, but which alone, or in combination with, other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant effect on a European Site, should be assessed before any decision is made to allow that plan or project to proceed. The obligation to undertake a screening for AA, and if necessary, an AA, derives from Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and both involve a number of steps and tests that need to be applied in sequential order.

Article 6(3) is concerned with the strict protection of sites, while Article 6(4) is the procedure for allowing derogation from this strict protection in certain restricted circumstances.

[2] National Parks & Wildlife Service Designation Viewer. Accessed at ArcGIS Web Application 7/5/2026

[3] National Biodiversity Data Centre Maps. Accessed at Maps - Biodiversity Maps (biodiversityireland.ie) 7/5/2026

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

> "Any plan or project not directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and 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 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".

Article 6(4) states:

> "If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.
>
> Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species, the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest."

The competent authority is required to carry out a screening for AA, and if necessary, an AA as required by Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. If the competent authority determines that the plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of a European site, it may only authorise that plan or project by following the Article 6(4) procedure.

The Article 6(3) and 6(4) procedures are outlined as follows:

Stage 1 - Screening for Appropriate Assessment – to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the project or plan, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the Natura 2000 site.

Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment – This is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the project or plan, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. The AA must include a final determination by the competent authority as to whether or not a proposed project would adversely affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site. In order to reach a final determination, the competent authority must undertake examination, analysis and evaluation, followed by findings, conclusions and a final determination. The appropriate assessment must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions, and may not have lacunae or gaps.

Stage 3 – Assessment of alternative solutions - the process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Stage 4 - Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain - an assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Under Regulation 42A(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011-2021 (S.I. 293 of 2021), the Ecological Assessment Unit is the competent authority in relation to screening for AA of projects and plans (such as the proposed monitoring) which the Minister proposes to undertake or adopt.

4. Overview of the Project

Scragh Bog lies approximately 10 km north-west of Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. This site comprises a wet transition fen with a floating root mat which has developed in a small oval-shaped depression. The fen is fed by weak surface springs and drains by an artificially defined outlet. The fen becomes open carr in the central area and in places grades into ombrotrophic bog.

Most of the site is managed as a Nature Reserve. The outflow stream is included in the site, since interference with this outflow could damage the site hydrology. A small section at the bottom of a field to the south is also included - this area supports a species-rich marsh/wet grassland vegetation. As well as being vulnerable to interference with its hydrology, Scragh Bog is also susceptible to eutrophication as a result of agricultural run-off from the surrounding land.

Scragh Bog contains excellent examples of two habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive - Alkaline Fen [7230] and Transition Mire [7140]. These habitats support a number of rare plants, notably Slender Green Feather-moss (Drepanocladus vernicosus) [1393], and also play host to a well-developed invertebrate fauna. The site supports a uniquely complete fauna of transition mire invertebrates.

Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*, Order Lepidoptera), a butterfly listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, has been recorded from the site, but in its present condition the habitat is only marginally suitable for the species and any populations present are likely to be intermittent, small and short-lived.

The proposed project involves the implementation of fen restoration measures at Scragh Bog SAC under the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Tóchar Midlands Wetland Restoration Scheme. The works are informed by, and will be implemented in accordance with a Scragh Bog Fen Restoration Plan (April 2026) prepared for NPWS under the Tóchar Midlands Wetland Restoration Scheme.

4.1. Purpose

The Fen Restoration Plan identifies key pressures affecting the SAC habitats and qualifying species, including nutrient enrichment, scrub encroachment, absence of appropriate grazing management, and intrusive research and monitoring activities. The proposed restoration measures are restorative in nature and are designed to address these pressures and contribute towards the achievement of the site-specific conservation objectives.

The purpose of the proposed project is to maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alkaline fens and Transition Mires in Scragh Bog SAC, for the species that rely on them. This objective is defined through attributes and targets relating to habitat distribution, hydrological regime, water quality, peat formation, vegetation structure and composition, and control of negative indicator species.

The proposed restoration measures are explicitly designed to support these conservation objectives by addressing identified hydrological, nutrient and vegetation pressures on the site, as detailed in the Fen Restoration Plan.

5. Project Description

The proposed on-site restoration actions comprise:

- Targeted scrub removal at the south-eastern end of the transition mire (manual scrub clearance as required), to address scrub encroachment pressure and support maintenance of open fen structure.
- Hydrological monitoring and vegetation monitoring to establish baseline information and inform whether further hydrological interventions may be required in the future (e.g. drain blocking if monitoring demonstrates it is necessary for maintaining appropriate water levels).
- Water quality assessments to track nutrient levels and support adaptive management.
- Installation of coir logs with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis)*, planting to create a vegetated buffer zone adjacent to the fen habitat that intercepts and assimilates surface and sub-surface nutrients (notably phosphate and nitrogen), thereby reducing nutrient input to the fen and supporting favourable hydrological and water quality conditions.

5.1. Scrub Removal

There will be Initially one cut followed by continued monitoring to allow for adaptive management. Works will be undertaken outside the main bird breeding season (typically March–August inclusive), unless a suitably qualified ecologist confirms absence of nesting birds.

Small stands of willow form part of the transition mire community and so the aim is to control this area of willow scrub rather than eliminate it. Scrub removal will be carried out manually using hand tools (e.g. loppers, bow saws, hand saws). No motorised machinery will be used. Scrub species (e.g. willow Salix spp.) will be cut as close to ground level as practicable to minimise regrowth and disturbance. Cut material will be carefully lifted and removed by hand to avoid damage to fen habitat.

Access

Contractors to access the area on foot utilising the existing board walk into the area identified for scrub removal.

Protection of Habitats and Species

No herbicides, stump treatments, or soil disturbance will be used.

The site is designated for supporting *Hamatocaulis vernicosus* (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216], which is abundant across the transition mire of Scragh Bog. Whilst the process of scrub removal has the potential to cause negative impacts e.g. trampling to this moss species, this is deemed to be a temporary impact which will be reversible and the long term benefits will have a positive impact on the species e.g. increased light and reduced competition.

Arisings Management

Arisings will be removed from the fen and either:

- stacked well away from sensitive habitats in agreed locations, or
- removed off-site entirely.

No arisings will be burned on site.

5.2. Hydrological Monitoring Groundwater

Frequency/timing of groundwater monitoring will be quarterly for year 1 and annually for year 2-5.

Equipment Specification

Groundwater monitoring will be carried out using floating dip wells, installed into the base of the peat profile without the need for drilling rigs or heavy plant. This approach is appropriate given the nature of the peat substrate and avoids significant ground disturbance. Each monitoring point will comprise a machine-slotted PVC standpipe (Boode or equivalent) of sufficient internal diameter to house a Diver-type water level data logger. A minimum internal diameter of 50 mm is recommended to comfortably accommodate a standard Diver logger and associated cable whilst allowing unobstructed manual dipping. A 50 mm (2-inch) internal diameter slotted PVC standpipe is the preferred specification.

Installation Procedure

Holes will be hand-augered to a diameter of approximately 100 mm to 110 mm to provide sufficient annular space around the standpipe for installation. This clearance is sufficient to allow placement of the geotextile sleeve and, where required and a gravel or sand filter pack around the slotted section if required.

The installation procedure will be as follows:

- Peat probing, with handheld peat probes, will be completed to confirm the depth of peat.

- Hand-auger the borehole to the required depth. This will not extend to within 25cm of the base of the peat to ensure the pore pressures in any underlying strata do not influence the results.
- Prepare the stand pipe components including: base cap, slotted section, plain section and geotextile around the slots. It is recommended the slots should not extent to within 25cm of the ground surface.
- Wrap the slotted section of the standpipe with a suitable geotextile sock or filter fabric prior to installation to prevent sediment ingress and maintain long-term function of the monitoring point.
- Install the slotted PVC standpipe, ensuring the slotted section is positioned to span the target monitoring interval (generally the lower portion of the peat profile).
- Backfill the annular space around the standpipe with excavated peat or clean sand/gravel as appropriate.
- Install a lockable cap on the top of the standpipe to prevent tampering and debris ingress. The standpipe should be cut to an appropriate height above the anticipated maximum water table level.

All monitoring points will be surveyed to a common datum (Ordnance Datum Malin) where practicable to allow comparison of water level data across the monitoring network.

Data Logging

Vented (baro-compensated) data loggers will be installed in selected dip tubes. These will be installed by hand and will not require any additional construction work. It is not proposed to implement telemetry at the site and therefore no additional post, solar panel or aerial is required. The data loggers will be downloaded on a quarterly basis by the project hydrologist.

Access

Surveyors to access the area on foot utilising the existing board walk into the area identified for groundwater monitoring.

5.3. Hydrological Monitoring Surface Water

Frequency/timing of groundwater monitoring will be quarterly for year 1 and annually for year 2-5.

A stilling well, comprising a 50mm diameter slotted PVC pipe and submersible level logger will be utilised to collect surface water monitoring data. The stilling well will be installed upstream of the weirs to monitor the influence of the drain blocking on the water channel level. A 100mm wooden stake will be driven into the peat by hand to secure the PVC monitoring pipe. Surveys and sampling will be undertaken alongside

the hydrological monitoring visit where feasible to reduce the impacts of trampling. These surveys are non-intrusive and surveyors will access the site via foot utilising hand held equipment.

5.4. Vegetation Monitoring

First monitoring visit year 2-3 (after scrub removal). Subsequent visits should then be every 5-6 years if there is no additional active management.

Pre-identified monitoring points will be re-visited to collect releve data on positive and negative indicators of fen habitat. Surveyors will utilise basic field equipment including a GPS, canes and tape for marking out quadrats and a phone/tablet or pen and paper for recording data. Surveys will be undertaken by NPWS staff who will be familiar with the site.

Access

Surveyors to access the monitoring points utilising the existing board walk into the fen habitat area.

5.5. Coir logs and common reed planting

The location of the coir logs is on the east side of the Scragh Bog. The exact location of coir logs will be adapted to suitable positions following a ground-truthing exercise which will determine appropriate aspect. Works will be undertaken during the growing season (typically spring to early autumn). Installation will avoid periods of high water levels or saturated ground that could increase disturbance or erosion.

EPA Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) maps, ecological indicators and field water quality data suggest that the north-eastern part of the site boundary may benefit from the implementation of a riparian buffer zone to reduce run off (risk of phosphorus losses), which help to intercept and retain nutrients transported from adjacent fields through surface and subsurface pathways. A coir log buffer zone will act as a pathway interception measure for nutrients and sediments transferred from the western hill side. The effect of this zone will be through trapping sediments and runoff transported during rainfall events. In addition to the installation of the coir log there will also be inclusion of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) within the coir or adjacent to the coir log to allow for effective establishment of vegetation. The installation of vegetation will enhance sub-surface trapping of nutrients.

Site Preparation/Access

No excavation within the fen habitat will occur. The buffer zone footprint will be clearly marked prior to works, maintaining an agreed stand-off distance from

sensitive fen vegetation and qualifying features. The contractor and technical specialist will ground truth the proposed area to agree on the location of the coir logs. Access routes will be pre-defined and kept to a minimum to avoid trampling and soil compaction. Access will seek to be undertaken from the adjacent private landowners land through existing agricultural land (outside the SAC).

Coir Log Installation

Biodegradable coir logs will be installed along the interface between the nutrient source and the fen, positioned to intercept shallow surface flows and encourage sediment and nutrient deposition creating a buffer. The coir log installation will extend over the 200m of land parcel 606 (Appendix A). There will be two strips of coir logs, extending across the 200m length (i.e. 2 x 200m). As each coir log is 3m, this will require up to 120 coir logs. The width of the buffer will be between 5-10m, with the placement of the coir log strips following the contour of the land. The coir log placement will need to be in a 'U' shape against the water flow from the hillslope. Up to eight wooden stakes will be needed for each coir log. Logs will be placed directly onto the ground surface and secured using untreated wooden stakes driven by hand. The coir logs should be positioned and pegged in a long strip across the 200m to suit the terrain along the hillslope contour. There may be a need to construct a temporary fence to ensure livestock access is restricted during construction.

Common Reed Planting

Common reed will be planted within and immediately upslope of the coir logs to enhance nutrient uptake and promote long-term buffering. Planting will use plug plants or rhizome sections of local provenance where possible. Reeds will be planted by hand at an appropriate spacing to allow establishment while avoiding excessive initial shading or competition. No fertilisers, soil ameliorants or herbicides will be used. Common reed is currently present within the fen and is deemed an appropriate species for the purpose of assimilating surface and sub-surface nutrients.

Protection of Fen Habitat and Species

All works will be undertaken from the buffer zone side only, with no entry into the fen habitat unless explicitly agreed. If protected species or nesting birds are encountered, works will cease and advice sought from an ecologist.

Monitoring and Aftercare

Planted areas will be monitored during the first growing season to ensure establishment. Any failed plants or displaced coir logs will be replaced or re-secured as needed. No routine maintenance within the fen will be required.

5.6. Protection of Habitats and Species

- All operatives will be briefed on the ecological sensitivity of the SAC and the presence of qualifying habitats and species.
- No chemicals, reagents or pollutants will be introduced to the site as part of the monitoring programme.
- All sampling will be non-destructive.
- Restoration action activities will avoid sensitive periods for protected species where relevant.
- Any incidental disturbance will be temporary and localised.

5.7. Biosecurity

- Tools, footwear and equipment will be cleaned before and after works to prevent the introduction or spread of invasive non-native species or pathogens.

5.8. Supervision and Compliance

- Works will be supervised or overseen by an ecologist where required, and carried out in accordance with any consents, method statements or conditions agreed with the relevant statutory nature conservation body.

6. Part 1: Necessary conservation measures

Answer these questions if the activity is “directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site”. Otherwise go to Part 2.

a). List the European site(s) and the relevant Conservation Objectives (include version number of the Conservation Objective).

Scragh Bog SAC [Site Code: 000692]

NPWS (2018) Conservation Objectives: Scragh Bog SAC 000692. Version 1. Accessed 13th June 2024.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000692.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]

Alkaline fens [7230]

Hamatocaulis vernicosus (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Transition mires and quaking bogs in Scragh Bog SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients; peat formation; hydrology – water levels; hydrology – flow patterns; and, water quality.
- Community diversity.
- Vegetation composition: typical vascular plants and bryophytes; native negative indicator species; and, non-native species.
- Physical structure: drainage; and, disturbed bare ground.

- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Alkaline fens [7230]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Alkaline fens in Scragh Bog SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients; peat formation; hydrology – groundwater levels; hydrology - surface water flow; and, water quality.
- Community diversity.
- Vegetation composition: brown mosses; typical vascular plants; native negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; and, soft rush and common reed cover.
- Vegetation structure: litter; disturbed bare ground; and, tufa formations.
- Indicators of distinctiveness.

Hamatocaulis vernicosus (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Slender Green Feather-moss (Shining sickle-moss) in Scragh Bog SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Distribution.
- Population size.
- Population cover.
- Area of suitable habitat.
- Hydrological conditions: water table level; tree cover; shrub cover; grass cover; bryophyte cover; and, cover of *Calliergonella cuspidata*.
- Vegetation structure: vegetation height.

b). State how this activity furthers the Conservation Objective(s)

Under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive, DHLGH is required to ensure the favourable conservation status of all Annex I habitats and Annex II species within SACs.

Under Article 11 of the Directive, DHLGH is obliged to undertake surveillance of the conservation status of the natural habitats and species in the Annexes and under Article 17, to report to the European Commission every six years on their status and on the implementation of the measures taken under the Directive. Article 18 of the Directive encourages the necessary research and scientific work having regard to the obligation set out in Article 11. The project is considered to fall under these legal requirements and align with these obligations.

The Conservation Objectives seek to maintain protected SAC feature(s) where evidence exists that it is in favourable condition in the site, or where there is uncertainty concerning the assessed condition of a feature but no reason to suspect deterioration in condition since designation.

Where evidence exists that a feature is declining and/or damaged and therefore not in a favourable condition in the site, the Conservation Objectives will seek to restore the protected feature.

The Conservation Objectives seek to improve unfavourable conditions of QIs. Alkaline Fen [7230] is the main focus of this project and has an overall conservation status as “Bad”. The project will provide important data and information on the ongoing condition of the site and inform management plans if necessary to improve the conservation status of Alkaline Fens and associated QIs. The necessary conservation measures resulting from the project will directly contribute to the Site Specific Conservation Objectives. Notably:

Alkaline fens [7230]

- **Ecosystem function: soil nutrients, peat formation, water quality, hydrology – groundwater levels, surface water flow.**

c). Does this activity have the potential to impact negatively on any Conservation Objective (CO), Qualifying Interest (QI)/Special Conservation Interest (SCI) for this or any other European site?

The proposed fen restoration measures have been examined in relation to the proximity of all QI. Spatial data on Annex I habitats and Annex II species has been cross referenced using an internal NPWS Map-viewer and reviewing the

Conservation Objective documents for the designation. The effect of the project on QI has been considered in regard to the activity, duration of installation and potential for disturbance.

Access to the site will be undertaken on foot and will result in only minor, temporary ground disturbance. Once monitoring equipment has been placed on the site the need for continued site visits will be infrequent. No excavation of peat will be required. Works will avoid areas known or suspected to support ***Hamatocaulis vernicosus*** **(Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]** or sensitive fen microhabitats.

The proposed actions are necessary to characterise hydrological dynamics across the site and to restore favourable conservation condition of Annex I Habitats, as part of the Tóchar Wetland Restoration Scheme.

Protection of habitats and species is a key objective of this project. The avoidance of likely significant effects has been integrated into the functioning of the project at every stage. This will be achieved by following best Practice Guidance, implementing strict Biosecurity Protocols and providing expert oversight through supervision and compliance.

No likely significant effects on the QIs or SCIs features of any other SACs or SPAs are anticipated.

Yes ☐ No ☑

d). Are there aspects of this activity which are NOT directly connected with the management of the site?

Yes ☐ No ☑

If the answer to EITHER of the above questions is **Yes** a Screening for AA is required, go to Part 2.

If the answer to BOTH questions is **No** go to Part 5.

7. Part 2: Identification of European Sites within the Potential Zone of Influence of proposed activities

List all European sites which may be affected by this activity because they are linked by an ecological pathway. If the site has a second European designation (SAC, SPA) this also needs to be considered.

8. Part 3: Assess the likelihood of significant effects

Provide this information for **each site** listed in Part 2.

List the QI/SCIs for the site(s), their current conservation condition and the Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO) for that QI/SCI. Then answer the questions about the impact on that QI/SCI.

Tick all the boxes below which may apply.

Your answer will determine if the activity is likely to have a (negative) effect on this QI/SCI. Negative effects may arise because of the activity's location within the site; its proximity to the QI/SCI or the size of the land take involved; the abstraction of water or minerals; emissions or waste arising; the types of transport or machinery being used; the length of time involved or seasonality of the work.

a). There is likely to be a reduction in the area of QI/SCI habitat ☐

b). The physical/chemical quality of the environment is likely to be changed in a way which may cause the deterioration of the QI/SCI habitat (e.g. applying lime to an acidic soil) ☐

c). The structure of the ecological community is likely to be altered (e.g. through altered species composition) in a way which will have negative impact on the QI/SCI. ☐

d). A QI/SCI species is likely to be disturbed (e.g. through noise, vibrations) ☐

e). The population size, characteristics or reproductive success of a QI/SCI species is likely to be changed either directly or indirectly (e.g. lighting close to a bat roost entrance) ☐

f). QI/SCI species or habitats are likely to be more vulnerable to change or less resilient to external change (e.g. to flooding, fire or drought) ☐

g). There are likely to be effects on other species /habitats (not a QI/SCI for this site) which are ecologically linked with this QI/SCI and, as a consequence, there are likely to be negative effects on this QI/SCI (e.g. the impacts on geese which are the SCI when their non-QI feeding areas are damaged). ☐

h). This activity will cause a deterioration in the conservation condition of this QI/SCI. ☐

i). There are likely to be other ecological effects not listed above which are likely to have a significant effect on the QI/SCI. ☐

Explain the effects**:**

_____

If you have ticked a box for any QI/SCI in any of the sites affected by this activity the likelihood of a significant effect cannot be ruled out and the activity MUST be screened IN for AA.

9. Part 4: In Combination Effects

Is this activity likely to cause negative effects in combination with any other plan or project?

(In answering this question you should consider any other consents which have been applied for or granted. For example, other ARCs, planning consents, forestry consents, or activities authorised as part of an agreed farm or land management plan. List the plans or projects considered).

_____

_____

No ☑ **Yes** ☐ **Uncertain** ☐

If the answer is Yes or Uncertain the activity MUST be screened IN for AA. Fill in Part 5 accordingly.

10. Part 5: Findings of the Screening for AA

Screening not carried out as the activity is “directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site”. ☑

Likely significant effects are expected or uncertain.

This activity Screens **IN** and AA **is** required. ☐

Likely significant effects are NOT expected.

This activity Screens **OUT** and AA **is not** required. ☐

Prepared by: Darren Ellis, Ecologist, Ecological Assessment Unit.

Signed:

Date: 7th May 2026

11. Part 6: Determination

Following an analysis of the project, the EAU determines, in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the 2011 Regulations, that the proposed fen restoration measures within Scragh Bog SAC are entirely comprised of activities that directly support the Site Specific Conservation Objectives of this European site.

It can be concluded with certainty that the project is a necessary conservation measure that is directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site.

Determined by: Laura Connolly, Ecologist, Ecological Assessment Unit

Signed:

Date: 7th May 2026

12. Supplementary Information

Figure 1 (below): Scragh Bog SAC as per NPWS (2018) Conservation Objectives: Scragh Bog SAC 000692. Version 1.

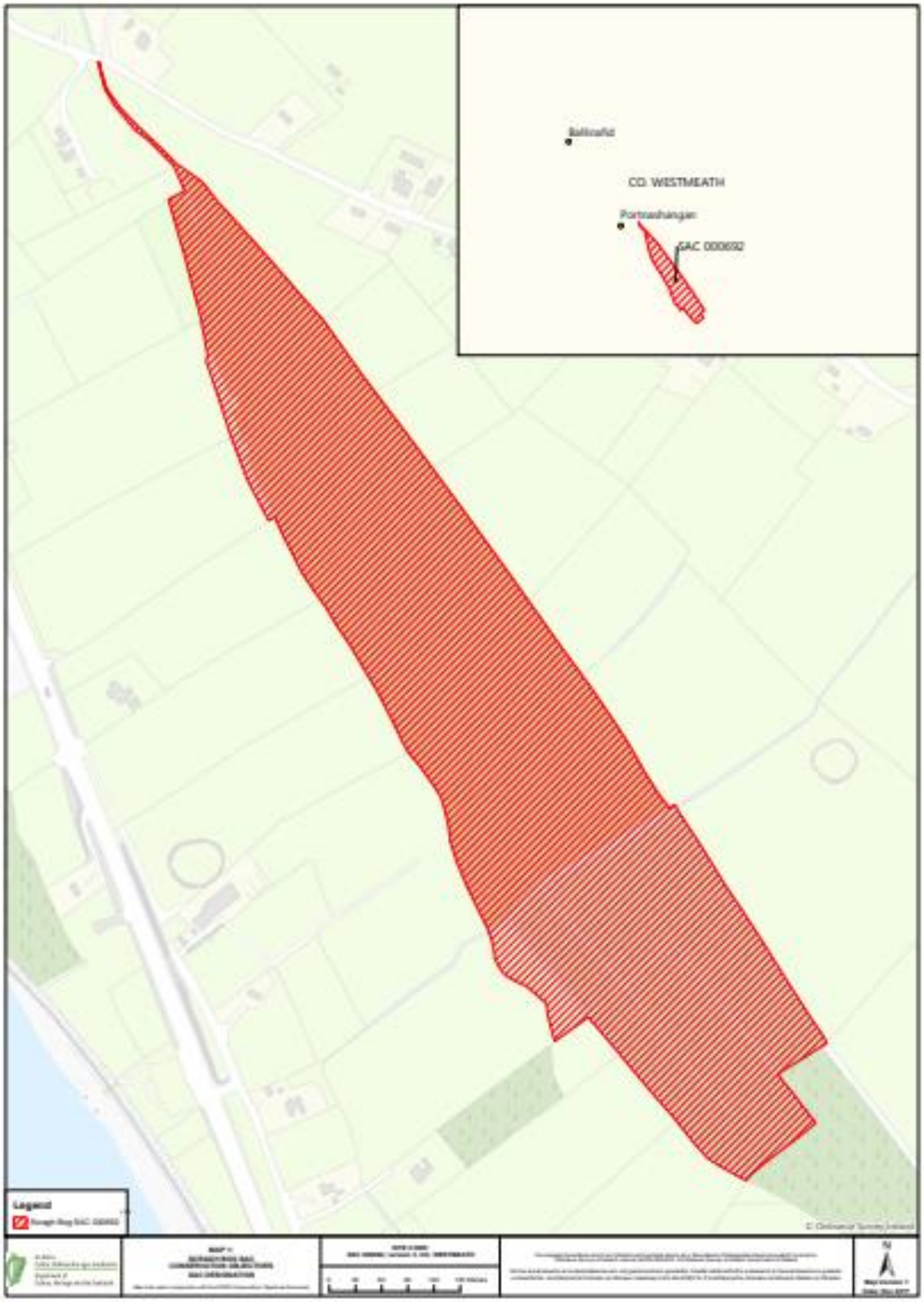
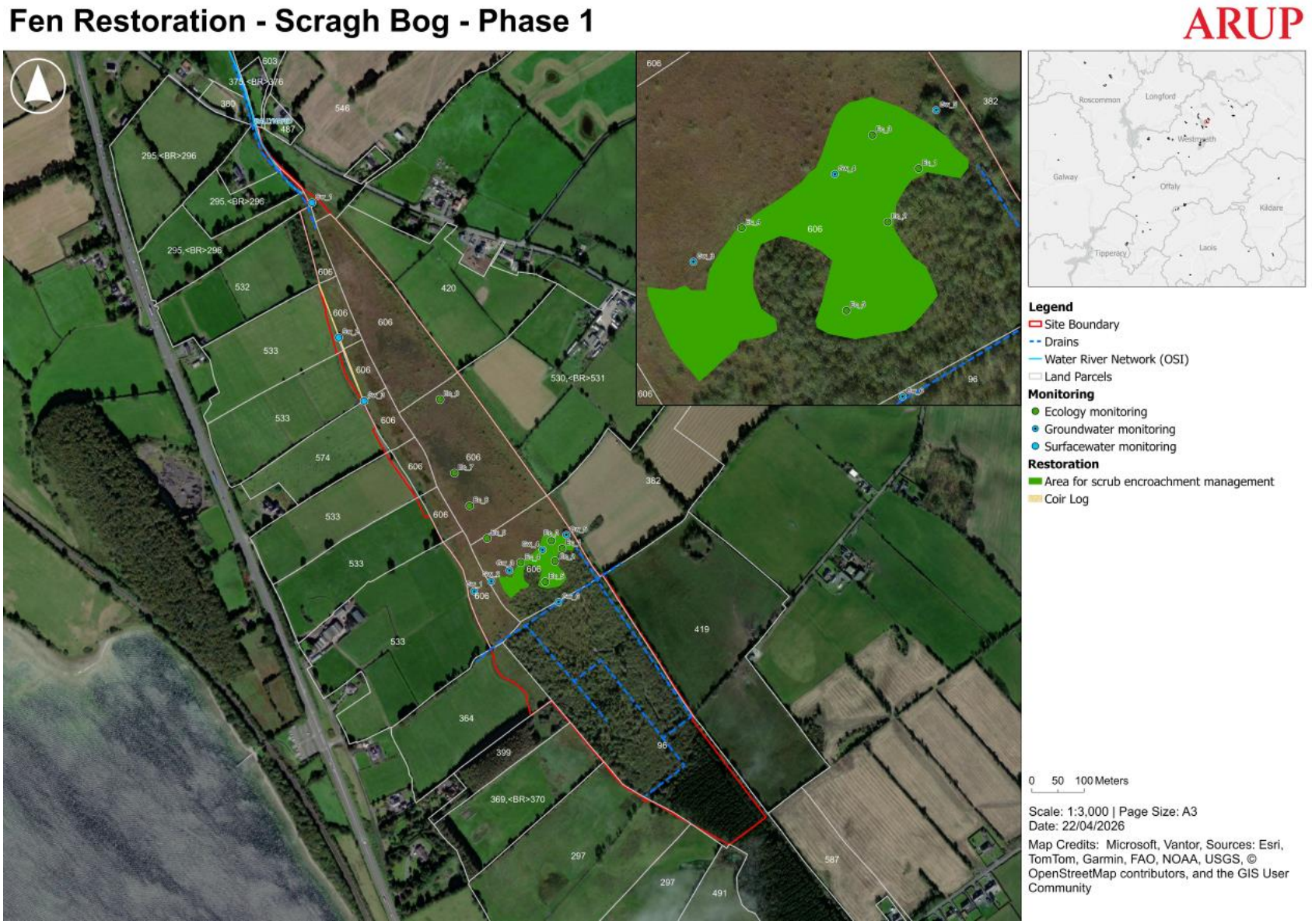


Figure 2. (Right): Annotated Illustration of measures proposed under the Scragh Bog SAC Fen Restoration Plan.



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