Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

Renewal for aquaculture licence application T27/002B. Coolroe, Ballyduff, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.

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Part A: AA Screening Report

1. Preface

The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC)[1] establishes legal provisions for conserving natural habitats and species of community interest and within this, Articles 3 to 16 provide the legislative means to create a network of protected sites across the European Union known as Natura 2000 sites. Sites in Ireland, that form part of this Natura 2000 network include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). SACs are designated due to their significant ecological importance for habitats and/or species protected under Annex I and Annex II respectively of the Habitats Directive. SPAs are designated for the protection of populations and habitats of bird species protected under the EU Birds Directive (Council Directive 2009/147/EC)[2] on the conservation of wild birds). The features for which SACs and SPAs are designated are respectively called Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs)(also collectively referred to as conservation features). However, in practice, the common terminology of QIs applies also to SCIs, and is used throughout this report. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) serves as the competent authority for Natura 2000 sites in Ireland.

The Habitats Directive was implemented into national law under Regulation 31 of the Habitats Regulations SI 94/1997 and subsequently amended and consolidated in the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. Article 6(3) of the Directive mandates an Appropriate Assessment (AA) when a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the features for which the site is designated, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, and it is not connected with or necessary for the management of a protected site. The AA evaluates whether the plan or project will have any adverse effect on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites in view of the Conservation Objectives set for the features (habitats and/or species) for which the site(s) is designated.

There is a long history of aquaculture operations within Irish coastal waters, predating the designation of sites as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the relevant Directives. An incremental process of AA is underway for existing and proposed aquaculture activities within these designated Natura 2000 sites. This process, agreed upon with the EU Commission in 2009, aims to eventually cover all aquaculture operations across Natura 2000 sites in Ireland. The AA assesses aquaculture operations against the Conservation Objectives defined by the NPWS for the conservation features of each Natura 2000 site. Aquaculture activities are licensed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM). When receiving applications for such activities, DAFM submits those applications and existing licenses for AA consideration. If the AA process identifies the possibility of significant adverse effects or potential negative consequences for designated conservation features, further mitigation measures are required. While assessment reports may not always specify explicit mitigation methods, they indicate whether mitigation is necessary and the desired outcomes.

This screening report, supporting the AA, considers the renewal application for an aquaculture licence (under licence application T27/002B) for the land-based aquaculture of Rainbow Trout

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01992L0043-20130701
[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02009L0147-20190626

(*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), hereby referred to in this document as 'the project' and will determine whether this project, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have a significant effect on any European site (i.e. Natura 2000 sites), in view of the site's conservation objectives.

2. Introduction

2.1. Overview of this Screening Assessment

This report considers whether the land-based finfish aquaculture of rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny is likely to significantly affect the conservation features of Natura 2000 sites, with respect to their Conservation Objectives (COs), through undertaking an Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening process. If it is deemed that there is the potential for a likely significant effect on the conservation features as a consequence of the activity taking place, these activities will be carried forward for full assessment and considered on a cumulative basis with other aquaculture activities and other potentially disturbing activities (e.g. fisheries).

This AA screening report considers the potential ecological interactions between the proposed aquaculture activities and the Conservation Objectives of the Natura sites.

2.2. Legislative context

Articles 3 – 16 of the European Community (EC) Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna (the Habitats Directive) provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the conservation of an EU-wide network of protected sites, known as Natura 2000 sites.

The Habitats Directive was originally transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997 (S.I. No. 94 of 1997). The 1997 Regulations were subsequently replaced by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended (referred to as the 2011 Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations). Natura 2000 sites are referred to as European sites in these Regulations. The terms Natura 2000 sites and European sites are synonymous - the term Natura 2000 sites is used in this report. Natura 2000 sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which are designated under the Habitats Directive, and Special Protected Areas (SPAs) which are designated under EC Directive EC 79/409/EEC (the Birds Directive).

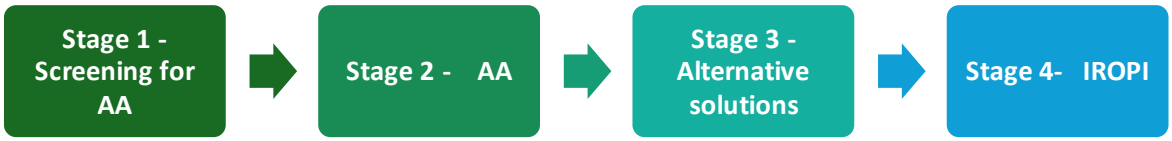
SACs are designated due to their significant ecological importance for habitats and for species protected under Annex I and Annex II respectively of the Habitats Directive. SPAs are designated for the protection of populations and habitats of bird species protected under the Birds Directive. The specific named habitats and/or (non-bird) species for which an SAC or SPA are selected are called the Qualifying Interests (QI), of the site. The specific named bird species for which a SPA is selected are called the 'Special Conservation Interests' (SCI). However, in practice, the common terminology of QI applies also to SCI. The term QI is used throughout this report.

Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive any plan or project likely to significantly affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site must be subject to an Appropriate assessment (AA). The AA focuses on the likely significant effects of a plan or project on a Natura 2000 site and considers the implications for the site in view of its Conservation Objectives (COs). Every Natura 2000 site has COs which are set out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) - the competent authority for the management of Natura 2000 sites in Ireland. The AA process must also consider any plan or proposal in combination with other activities that have the potential to significantly affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

DAFM is also the aquaculture licensing authority under the Fisheries (Amendment) Act (1997)[3] and determines applications for new, review or renewal of, aquaculture licences. They are the competent authority responsible for undertaking AAs of aquaculture licence applications. As part of the licensing process DAFM must determine if the proposed aquaculture activities, individually or in-combination with other activities, are likely to significantly impact the Conservation Status of QIs and the integrity of Natura 2000 sites. DAFM must base its determination on an AA and is also responsible for ensuring that an AA is carried out.

2.3.Appropriate Assessment (AA) process

The requirement for an AA derives directly from Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, which outlines the decision-making tests for considering plans and projects that may have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. No definition of the content or scope of AA is given in the Habitats Directive, but the concept and approach are set out in EC guidance[4]. The Guidance on Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland[5], published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) in 2009, sets out how an AA of plans or proposals in Natura 2000 sites in Ireland should be carried out in alignment with EC guidance. In 2021, the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) published a practice note on AA Screening[6], which provides guidance on how a planning authority should screen an application for planning permission for AA.
The Guidance on Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland document promotes a four-stage process to complete the AA. The four stages are:



The key procedures involved in completing the first two stages of the AA process are described below. Stage 3 and Stage 4 (Imperative Reasoning of Overriding Public Interest - IROPI) are not applicable here.

[3] https://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/1997/act/23/revised/en/html
[4] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/natura-2000/managing-and-protecting-natura-2000-sites_en
[5] https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/guidance-appropriate-assessment-planning-authorities
[6] https://www.opr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/9729-Office-of-the-Planning-Regulator-Appropriate-Assessment-Screening-booklet-15.pdf

2.3.1.Stage 1: Appropriate Assessment Screening

Stage 1 AA Screening is the process that addresses and records the reasoning and conclusions in relation to whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in view of the site's COs. If the effects, on the basis of objective information, are deemed to be significant, potentially significant, or uncertain, or if the screening process becomes overly complicated, then the process must proceed to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. Screening should be undertaken without the inclusion of mitigation. The greatest level of evidence and justification will be needed in circumstances when the process ends at screening stage on grounds of no effect.

2.3.2.Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment

This stage considers whether the plan or project, alone or in combination with other projects or plans, will have adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site, and includes any mitigation measures necessary to avoid, reduce or offset negative effects. This stage requires a targeted scientific examination of the plan or project and the relevant Natura 2000 sites, to identify and characterise any possible implications for the site in view of the site's QIs and COs, taking account of in combination effects.

The sensitivity of identified QIs in relation to the proposed activities is assessed and the significance of any identified adverse effects is then determined. If adverse effects are determined to be likely, then their scale, magnitude, intensity, and duration are considered in light of the COs and relevant guidance documents. If the assessment is negative, then recommendations on mitigation measures or specific management actions on licensing decisions will be made.

2.4.Structure of AA Screening Report

This screening report provides:

1. **Introduction** - an outline of the legislative context and the processes.
2. **Appropriate Assessment Screening** - providing details of the AA screening undertaken.
3. **Conclusion** - a summary of the findings from the screening process.

2.5.Data sources

Reference documents and sources of information used to inform this process may include:

- The Applications
- DAFM Aquaculture & Foreshore Management website
- DAFM - Aquaculture viewer – AquaMIS
- National Parks & Wildlife (NPWS) protected site, marine habitats and community type information
- NPWS Guidance documents
- Aquaculture profiling reports (if prepared)
- Targeted scientific studies & peer-reviewed literature
- Grey literature, reviews and report documents

- Peer reviewed & published literature
- Expert opinion
- Direct queries to applicants through DAFM
- Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997
- Aquaculture (Licence Application) Regulations, 1998, as amended.
- Aquaculture (Licence Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2018
- MI/BIM Commissioned Reports
- EPA GeoHive
- EPA Maps Appropriate Assessment Tool: https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool
- NPWS Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland – Article 17 (Habitats & species
- EU Commission assessments of bird's population status and trends web tool
- Marine Life Information Network: https://www.marlin.ac.uk/
- EPA Catchments.ie dashboard: https://www.catchments.ie/data/
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI)
- National Biodiversity Data Centre: https://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/
- European Environmental agency
- OPR, 2021. Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management. March 2021; Office of Planning Regulator.
- DEHLG, 2009. Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. NPWS, 2009 – updated in 2010 with reference to Natura Impact Statement.
- Möckel, S., 2017. The European ecological network "Natura 2000" and the appropriate assessment for projects and plans under Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive. Nature Conservation, 23.
- NPWS (2019). The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 1: Summary Overview. Unpublished NPWS report. Edited by: Deirdre Lynn and Fionnuala O'Neill.
- EC Article 6 - Managing and protecting Natura 2000 sites
- EC Management of Natura 2000 sites: Best Practice
- EC 2000. Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- EC 2002. 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.
- EC 2006. Nature and biodiversity cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- EC 2018. Guidance on Aquaculture and Natura 2000 Sustainable aquaculture activities in the context of the Natura 2000 Network.
- Poelman *et al.*, 2022. Study on state-of-the-art scientific information on the impacts of aquaculture activities in Europe.

- Marine Institute (2013). A risk assessment framework for fisheries in Natura 2000 sites in Ireland: with case study assessments. Version 1.3., Galway, 31pp.
- Google Earth.

2.6. Assumptions made for Appropriate Assessment reports

Certain assumptions are made for this screening report to ensure that it follows a precautionary approach when considering the extent, magnitude, intensity, and duration of the potential significant effects of the proposed activities. These are:

- All aquaculture sites considered in this assessment report are assumed to be fully operational and that the operations (as well as environmental impacts) are occurring across the entire area of the sites, at a minimum.

- All aquaculture applications which were submitted prior to those being considered here, but may still be pending decisions (e.g., appealed to Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board-ALAB), are also assumed to be fully operational across the entire area of the relevant sites. This ensures a conservative approach in that it assumes these activities will be operational to the maximum extent possible.

- Where multiple species might be proposed to be cultured at a site, the assessment assumes that the species most likely to result in the greatest likely ecological effects on the surrounding environment will be the culture species considered. Furthermore, it will be assessed on the basis that it is cultured throughout the entire area of the proposed site. This ensures that the report considers the highest potential impact in relation to the prospective culture species interaction with the surrounding environment.

- Other assumptions may be identified on a case-by-case basis and clearly communicated in the AA report.

3. Description of the project and local site characteristics

This Appropriate Assessment screening considers the renewal application for an aquaculture licence (under licence application T27/002B) for the land-based aquaculture of Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), hereby referred to as 'the project'.

The application seeks to maintain the existing standing stock of 17.25 tonnes per annum. During low river flow conditions, the installation is equipped with a recirculatory system.

3.1. Brief description of project:

Land-based finfish aquaculture: renewal application for aquaculture licence (T27/002B)

Species proposed for farming	Rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)
Proposed source of stock	IDAS Ltd, Co. Wicklow
Proposed system of culture	13 ponds – drawings submitted with application.
Proposed standing stock/production	Existing licenced standing stock: 17.25 tonnes.
Reason for site selection	Existing licenced site
Source of water supply	Arrigle River
Estimated dry weather flow of water source	75 – 100 litres/second (as referenced in application)

3.2. Location of project

File Reference No.	T27/002B
Size of site	0.5 hectares
Location	Coolroe, Ballyduff, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny
Approximate centroid (lat/long) – see Fig. 1	52.4863°N, 7.1058°W

3.3. Local site characteristics:

The finfish farm (T27/002B project area) is located on the west shore of the Arrigle River. The farm itself sits within the ARRIGLE_030 river sub-basin in good ecological status and at risk[7] and freshwater is abstracted from the adjacent Arrigle River. Waste water is also discharged back into this river (as per the Effluent Discharge Licence (EDL) issued by Kilkenny County Council on 9th January 2013) following treatment. Less than 700m downstream from the project, the ARRIGLE_030 river waterbody drains into the NORE_240 river waterbody[8], in moderate ecological status with risk status under review.

[7] https://www.catchments.ie/data/#/waterbody/IE_SE_15A020300?_k=p8lhkf
[8] https://www.catchments.ie/data/#/waterbody/IE_SE_15N012400?_k=407f46

The project area is located immediately adjacent to/overlapping with the River Barrow and River Nore SAC[9] (Figure 1), where the Qualifying Interest (QI) features include Freshwater Pearl Mussel (FPM) (*Margaritifera margaritifera)* and the White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes).* There are no records of these QIs downstream within a distance of concern.

Figure 1: Location map for the aquaculture licence (T27/002B) renewal application and showing its close proximity/overlap with the River Barrow and River Nore SAC.

[9] https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002162

4. Overview of existing aquaculture activities

There is currently one existing aquaculture site licenced ca. 4.4km to the north-west of the project area, listed in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 2 below, and no existing aquaculture licensed sites downstream.

Table 1: List of existing aquaculture sites licenced within a hydrological distance of 15km of the project area.

Licence No.	Species	Approximate distance from licence area T27/002B
T27-002A	Rainbow Trout	Ca. 4.4km to NW

Figure 2: Existing aquaculture site (T27/002A) licenced to the north-west of the project area.

5. Identification and screening of Natura 2000 sites

5.1. Identification of all European sites within 15km

Three Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and one Special Protection Area (SPAs) were identified within 15km of the licence application (T27/002B). These are listed below in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 3 and Figure 4 below, for SACs and SPAs respectively. All of the above European sites will be taken forward to the AA screening phase, set out in Section 5.2 and Section 5.3 below.

Table 2: A list of European sites located within 15km of the aquaculture renewal licence application (T27/002B).

European Site (code)	Distance from proposed project (km)
River Barrow and River Nore SAC	Ca. 0.0km
Thomastown Quarry SAC	Ca. 5.7km
Hugginstown Fen SAC	Ca. 10.4km
River Nore SPA	Ca. 0.9km

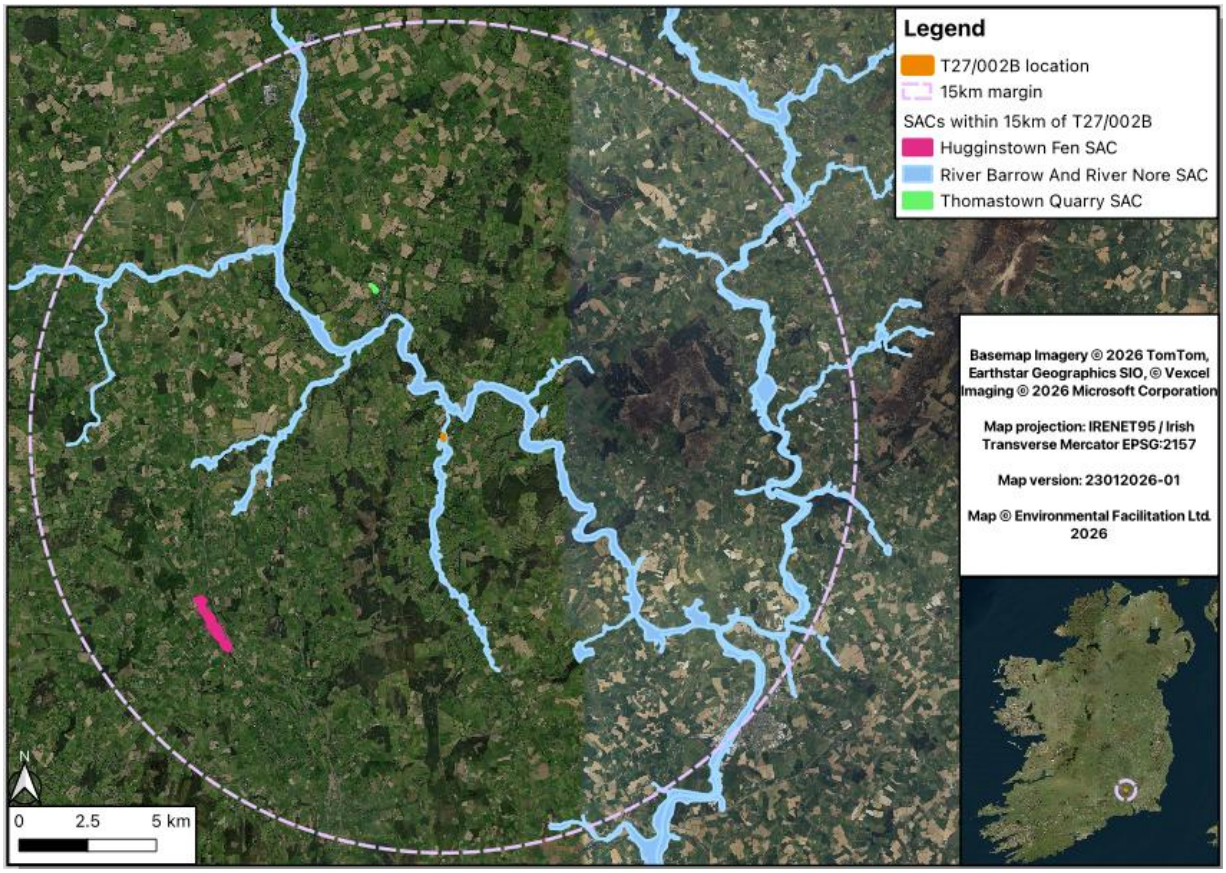


Figure 3: Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) located within 15km of the project.

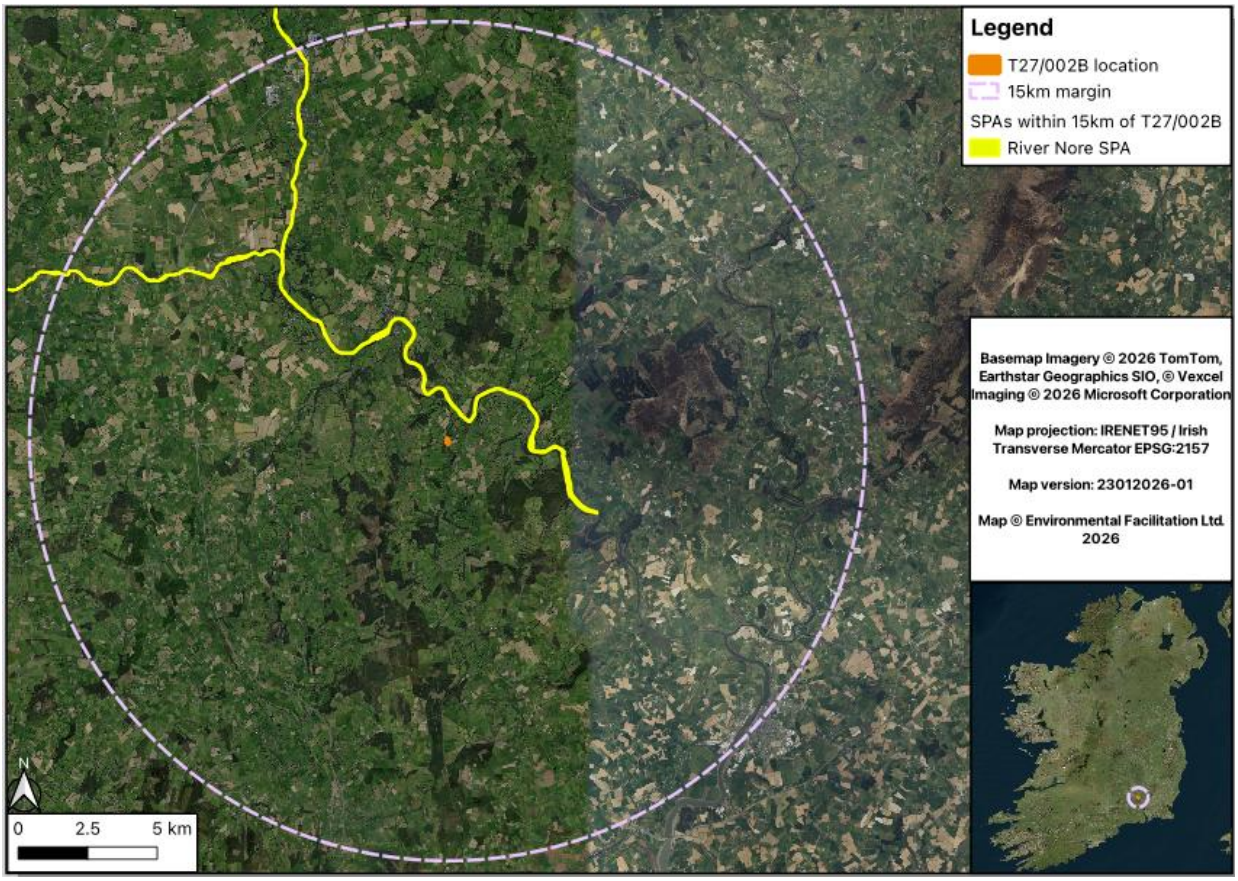


Figure 4: Special Protection Areas (SPAs) located within 15km of the project.

5.2. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects (using Source-Pathway-Receptor model) for Qualifying Interests (QIs) of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), with screening outcomes.

River Barrow And River Nore SAC 002162

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	The project area is located immediately adjacent/overlapping this European site and as the trout farm abstracts water from and discharges waste into the River Arrigle, there is a clear hydrological pathway to this SAC. Noting that while the linked river waterbody (ARRIGLE_030) is in good WFD ecological status and at risk, the subsequent river waterbody (NORE_240 river waterbody[10] is in moderate ecological status with risk status under review. Given the direct hydrological connection and the sensitivity of salmon to changes in water quality and flow, a pathway for potential impact cannot be excluded at the screening stage.	Screened in
Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	Records of otter were noted ca. 5.1km downstream of the project area - source: https://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/Map accessed on 24/01/2026). The project also lies adjacent to /overlaps this SAC where otter is a QI. As records of otter occur within the wider area and suitable habitat is present along the river corridor, a potential pathway for disturbance and indirect effects cannot be excluded.	
Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	The project area is located immediately adjacent/overlapping this European site and as the trout farm abstracts water from and discharges waste into the Arrigle, there is a clear hydrological pathway to this the Qualifying Interest (QI) feature. Therefore, the potential for adverse impact on this QI cannot be ruled out.	
Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	The project area is located immediately adjacent/overlapping this European site and as the trout farm abstracts water from and discharges waste into the Arrigle, there is a clear hydrological pathway to this the Qualifying Interest (QI) feature. Therefore, the potential for adverse impact on this QI cannot be ruled out.	

[10] https://www.catchments.ie/data/#/waterbody/IE_SE_15N012400?_k=407f46

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	The project area is located immediately adjacent/overlapping this European site and as the trout farm abstracts water from and discharges waste into the Arrigle, there is a clear hydrological pathway to this the Qualifying Interest (QI) feature. Therefore, the potential for adverse impact on this QI cannot be ruled out.	Screened in
Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	The project area is located immediately adjacent/overlapping this European site and as the trout farm abstracts water from and discharges waste into the Arrigle, there is a clear hydrological pathway to this SAC. However, the project is not located within a *Margaritifera* sensitive area and there are no FPM records downstream within a distance of concern to the proposed works. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that any significant impact from the aquaculture operations on this QI are highly unlikely.	Screened out
Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	Occurrences of this QI were not noted downstream from the project area within a distance of concern (Map 7 NPWS, 2025). Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that any significant impact from the aquaculture operations on this QI are highly unlikely.	
Alosa fallax fallax (Twaite Shad) [1103]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	The project area is located immediately adjacent/overlapping this European site and as the trout farm abstracts water from and discharges waste into the Arrigle, there is a clear hydrological pathway to this SAC. However, the primary spawning location of this species within the SAC is St Mullins, which is in a different river waterbody with no direct downstream hydrological connection to this project. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that any significant impact from the aquaculture operations on this QI are highly unlikely.	
Estuaries [1130]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	While there is a direct hydrological connection to this QI, considering the significant intervening distance and dilution, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	While there is a direct hydrological connection to this QI, considering the significant intervening distance and dilution, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	Screened out
Reefs [1170]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	While there is a direct hydrological connection to this QI, considering the significant intervening distance and dilution, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae) [1330]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) [1410]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	While there is a direct hydrological connection to this QI, considering the significant intervening distance and dilution, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
European dry heaths [4030]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	Screened out
Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
montane to alpine levels [6430]			Screened out
Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap or direct hydrological connection between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Vandenboschia speciosa (Killarney Fern) [6985]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Vertigo moulinsiana (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles [91A0]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	
Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0]	To restore the Favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	

Thomastown Quarry SAC 002252

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap or direct hydrological connection between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	Screened out

Hugginstown Fen SAC 000404

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Alkaline fens [7230]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	There is no spatial overlap or direct hydrological connection between the project area and this QI. Therefore, there is no likely S-P-R link between the QI and the project and it is concluded that there will be no impact.	Screened out

5.3. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects (using Source-Pathway-Receptor model) for Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) of Special Protection Areas (SPAs), with screening outcomes.

River Nore SPA 004233

Special Conservation Interest (SCI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) [A229]	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	Considering the intervening distance of ~900m between the project and the boundary of this SPA, no hydrological pathway giving rise to disturbance effects (e.g. noise or visual disturbance) is identified.	Screened out

5.4.Screening of potential effects of introduction of non-native species.

- **Risk of Escape and Establishment:** Rainbow Trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss) are non-native within Ireland. Escape from aquaculture facilities can occur during flooding, equipment failure, or poor management. Once escaped, these fish can establish self-sustaining populations, especially in suitable habitats, with documented cases of rainbow trout naturalizing in European rivers (Stanković et al, 2015).

- **Competition with Native Species:** Rainbow Trout can outcompete native salmonids (such as Atlantic salmon and brown trout) for food and territory, particularly during juvenile stages. Research shows that rainbow trout may alter the behaviour, growth, and survival rates of native species, potentially reducing their populations (Houde *et al*, 2016).

- **Hybridization:** While hybridization risk between rainbow trout and native Irish salmonids is generally considered low, it cannot be entirely discounted, especially in environments where native species are stressed or populations are low (Fausch, 2007).

- **Disease and Parasite Transfer:** Rainbow Trout farming can introduce or amplify pathogens and parasites not previously present in the river system. Species like rainbow trout are known carriers of diseases such as whirling disease (*Myxobolus cerebralis*), which can have severe impacts on native fish populations (Stanković et al, 2015).

- **Effects on Local Biodiversity and Ecosystem Function:** The introduction of non-native fish species can alter the structure of aquatic communities, impact invertebrate populations, and disrupt food webs. These changes may be long-term and difficult to reverse, especially in protected areas like SACs that are designated for their high biodiversity value (Rennie *et al*, 2019).

- **Legal and Conservation Considerations:** Natura 2000 sites, including SACs, have strict requirements regarding species introductions. The presence of non-native species is generally discouraged and may contravene conservation objectives for the site (Filipe *et al*, 2023).

Given the contained nature of the facility, and while acknowledging that escape of stock could theoretically occur under exceptional circumstances (e.g. infrastructure failure or extreme events), no credible pathway is identified by which non-native species could establish in the receiving environment at a scale that would give rise to a likely significant effect on the Qualifying Interests of any European site.

5.5. Consideration of in-combination effects on Natura 2000 site Qualifying Interest / Special Conservation Interest features.

The QI that may screen out during the initial Appropriate Assessment screening exercise have been considered from an in-combination perspective. If the impact pathways from the proposed aquaculture operations act in-combination with other activities (including non-aquaculture) to the point where QI are potentially affected, this should trigger a full assessment. In-combination impacts by their nature are greater than the sum of individual impacts. This is a challenging aspect to the assessment with a number of technical challenges to derive conclusive observations. A number of sources were considered in the assessment of the potential for in combination impacts :

- *EPA Catchments WFD Assessments portal: https://www.catchments.ie/data/ (Accessed 20/01/2026)*
- *EIA Portal: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a1a85d92623147b191dd25a14b2571da (Accessed 20/01/2026)*
- *Kilkenny County Council planning https://kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/planning/ (Accessed 20/01/2026)*
- *EPA Pressures & Activities (www. https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water : Accessed: 20/01/2026)*

The proposed project has been considered in combination with other relevant plans and projects, including aquaculture activities, foreshore applications, fisheries, marine/coastal developments and other activities with potential to affect the receiving environment. For the European sites and features screened out in this report, no credible in-combination source-pathway-receptor linkage has been identified. Having regard to the scale and nature of the proposal, the absence of direct overlap with the relevant QIs/SCIs, the absence of significant disturbance, water quality, benthic or supporting habitat pathways, and the separation from the relevant European site features, it is concluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the proposed project, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to have a significant effect on those European sites in view of their conservation objectives.

Part B: AA Screening Conclusions and Recommendations

Screened-Out European Sites
Following AA screening, and pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the European Communities (Birds & Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011) as amended, and the Fisheries (Amendment) Act (1997), the screening assessment has found that there is no likelihood of the project proposed under the aquaculture licence renewal and review application T27/002B having any significant effect, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on any of the following European site(s), for the reasons set out in Part A: Screening Report:

- River Nore SPA
- Thomastown Quarry SAC
- Hugginstown Fen SAC

As such, the project does not advance to the appropriate assessment stage in relation to these European Sites.

Screened-In European Sites
Following AA screening, and pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the European Communities (Birds & Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011) as amended and the Fisheries (Amendment) Act (1997), the screening assessment has found that it cannot be ruled out, based on objective scientific information, that the project proposed under the aquaculture licence renewal and review application T27/002B will have a significant effect, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, on the following European sites, for the reasons set out in Part A: Screening Report:

- River Barrow and River Nore SAC

As a result, the project must advance to the appropriate assessment stage in relation to these European Sites.

AA Screening Report and Determination prepared by:	**Niall Phelan, Environmental Facilitation Ltd, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine** **Date: 25/01/2026**

Part C: References

EC. 2007. COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 708/2007 concerning use of alien and locally absent species in aquaculture. 11 June 2007

K. D. Fausch. 2007. Introduction, establishment and effects of non-native salmonids: considering the risk of rainbow trout invasion in the United Kingdom. Journal of Fish Biology. Volume 71. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-8649.2007.01682.

NPWS, 2020. *Margaritifera* Sensitive Areas Map *(Version 10 – June 2020*). National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Dublin. https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/Margaritifera_sensitive_areas_2020_v10.zip

NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: River Barrow and River Nore SAC 002162. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2025) Site Synopsis: River Barrow and River Nore SAC 002162. Version 2. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Stanković, D., Crivelli, A. J., & Snoj, A. (2015). Rainbow Trout in Europe: Introduction, Naturalization, and Impacts. *Reviews in Fisheries Science & Aquaculture*, *23*(1), 39–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/23308249.2015.1024825

Appendix: Maps and diagrams provided with application:

Figure 1: Planning Pack Map

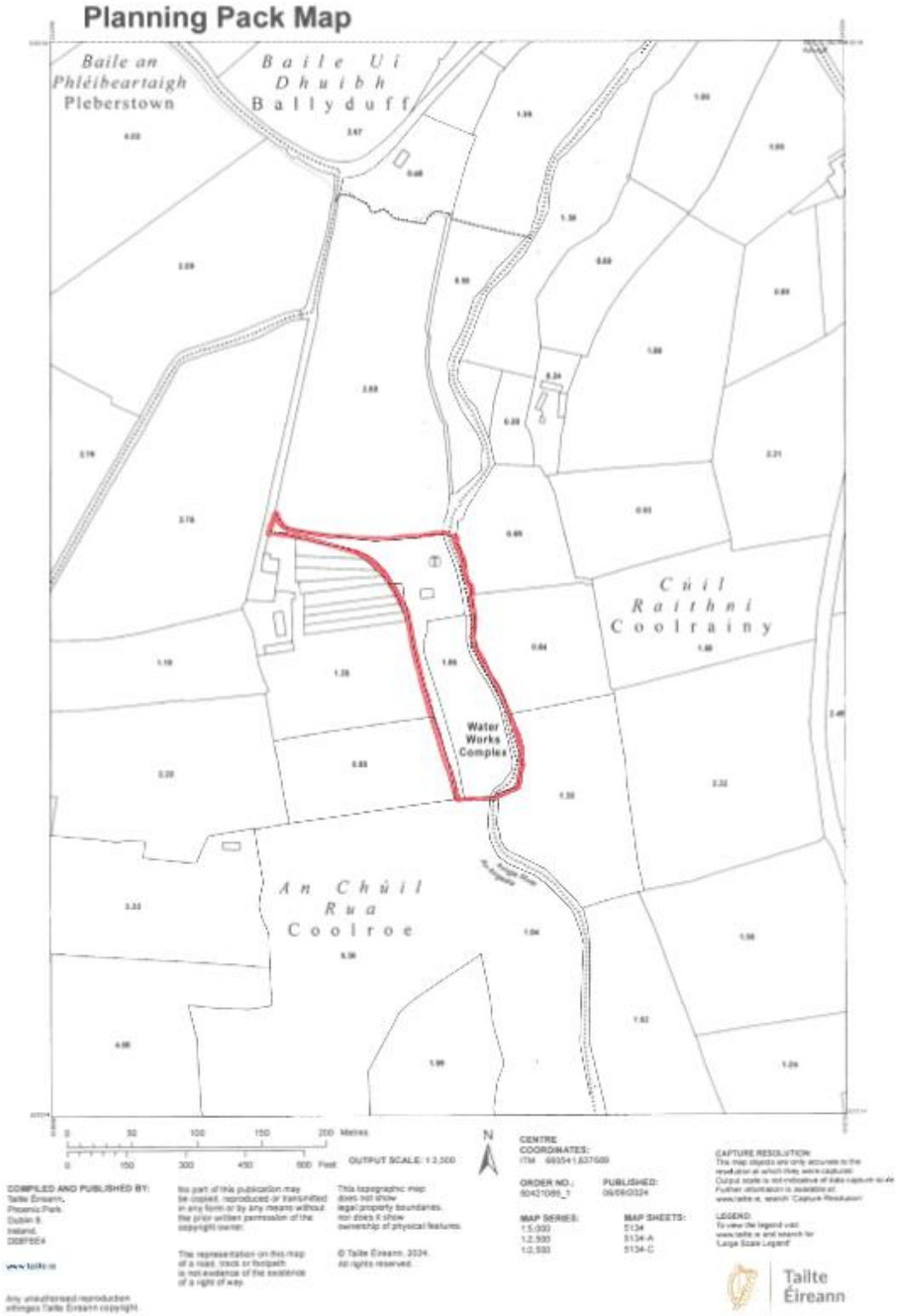


Figure 2: Location Map

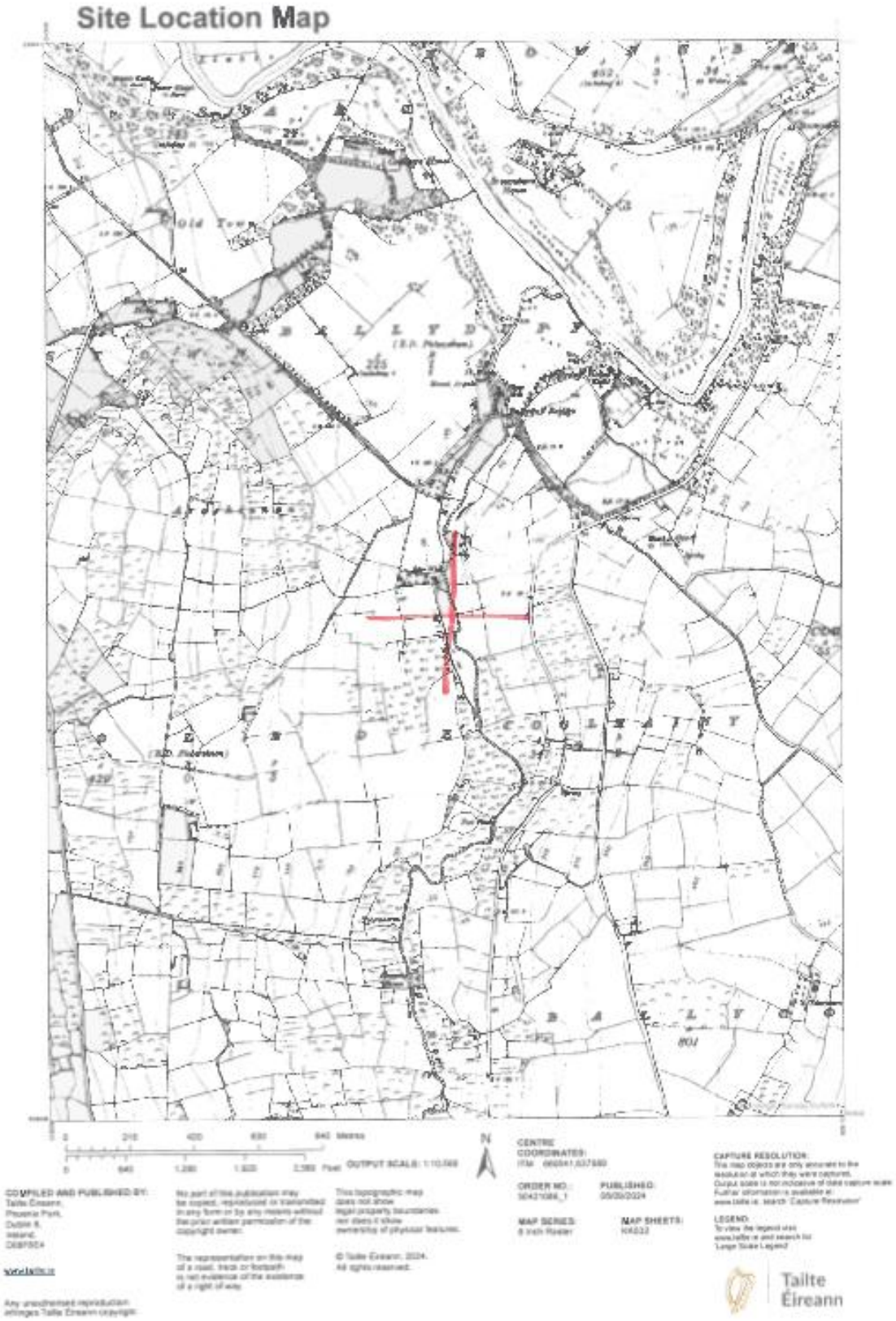


Figure 3: Land Registry Compliant Map

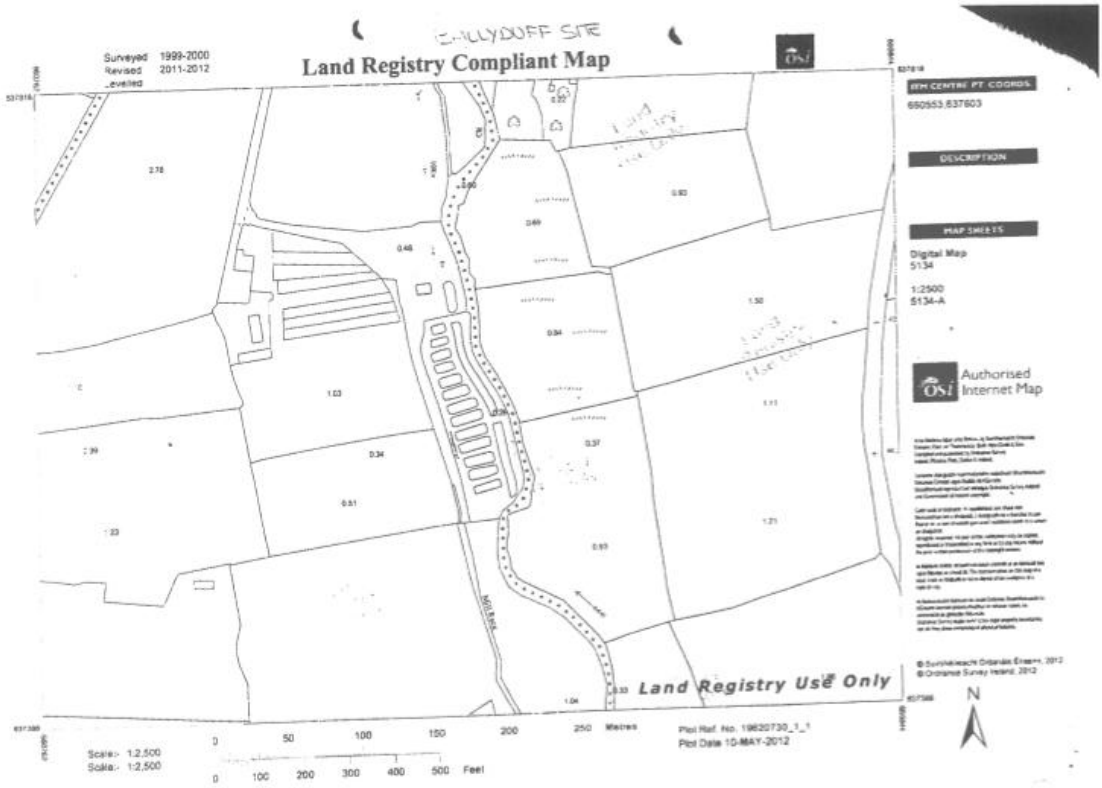
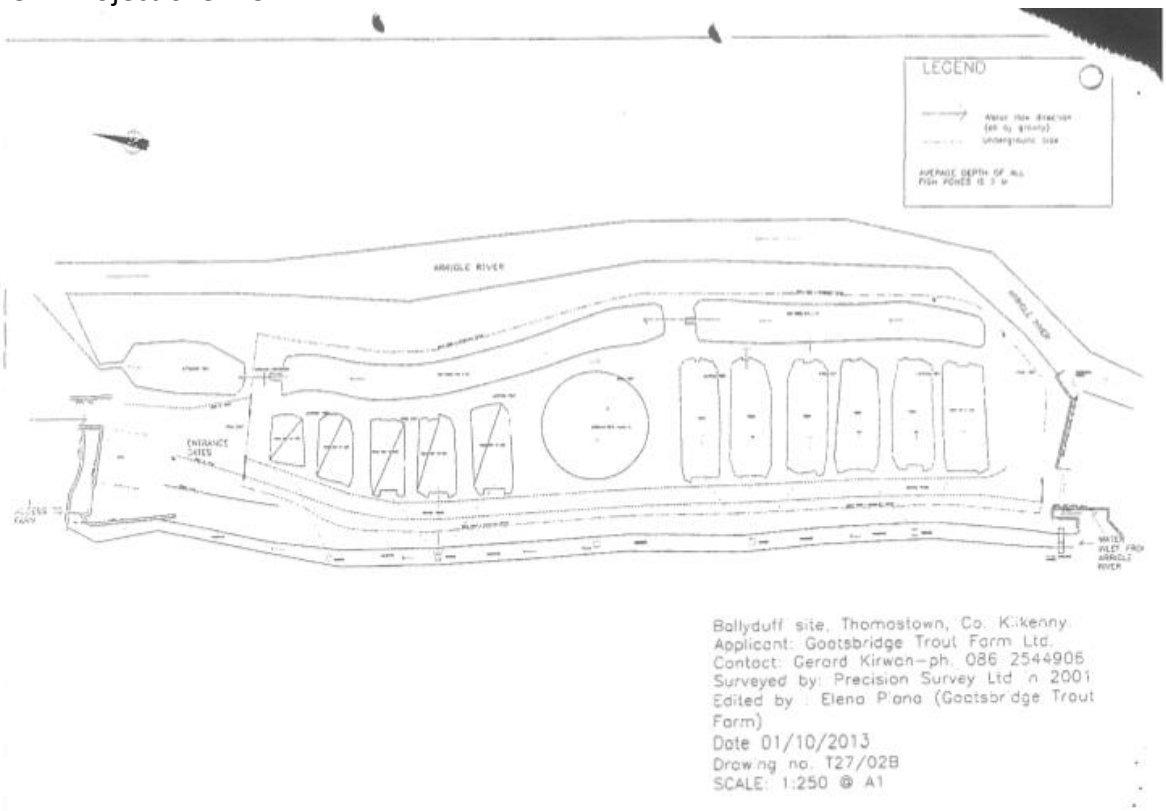



Figure 4: Project overview