Appropriate Assessment Screening Report for aquaculture and foreshore licence applications
T32-1012 & T32-1013.
Arklow, Co. Wicklow.

	Prepared by Environmental Facilitation Ltd on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine 24/07/2026

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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 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 "Stage 2" 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

[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

consequences for designated conservation features, Stage 2 assessment is required. While assessment reports may not always specify explicit mitigation methods, they indicate whether mitigation is necessary and the desired outcomes.

This AA Screening Report considers two separate but related aquaculture and foreshore licence applications, T32-1012 and T32-1013, for the suspended longline culture of Blue Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) off the coast of Arklow, Co. Wicklow; they are located ca. 4.9km apart. The applications have been considered within a single report because they are made by the same applicant, concern the same species and culture method, occur within the same general receiving environment and may give rise to combined effects. Each project is nevertheless described and screened individually, after which the two projects are assessed together and in combination with other relevant plans and projects.

2. Introduction

2.1. Overview of this Screening Assessment

This document assesses whether the proposed aquaculture activities under applications T32-1012 and T32-1013, individually, together and in combination with other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant effect on any European site in view of that site's conservation objectives. Extensive aquaculture is defined in Regulation 3(iii) of the Aquaculture (Licence Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 as "aquaculture activities where there is no external supply of feed and the culture depends entirely on natural processes for production and supply of feed". Shellfish (molluscs, echinoderms and crustaceans) and seaweed aquaculture fall within this definition; finfish aquaculture does not. The two applications are considered within a single report because they involve the same applicant, species and culture method and occur within the same general receiving environment; however, each project is assessed separately where project-specific characteristics, distances or pathways differ.

The aim of this report is to consider if the proposed aquaculture activities are 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 Protection Areas (SPAs) which are designated under EC Directive 2009/147/EC (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.

Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, any plan or project that is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site must be subject to Appropriate Assessment where it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on that site in view of its conservation objectives. The conservation objectives for European sites in Ireland are published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. DAFM is the competent authority responsible for undertaking the AA screening and, where required, the Appropriate Assessment associated with the aquaculture and foreshore licensing decisions considered in this report.

DAFM has responsibility for foreshore licensing functions in respect of activities wholly or primarily for the use, development or support of aquaculture under the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended [3]. DAFM is the aquaculture licensing authority under the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997, as amended, and determines applications for new aquaculture licences and for the renewal or review of existing 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

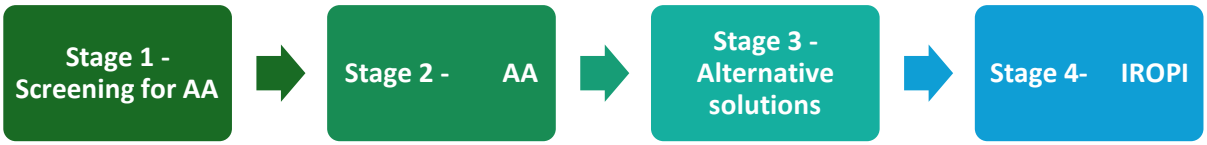
[3] https://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/1933/act/12/front/revised/en/html

activities, individually or in-combination with other activities, will have likely significant effects on a European site in view of its conservation objectives.

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.

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.

[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

2.3.2. 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 adverse 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
- Ireland's Marine Atlas
- MI/BIM Commissioned Reports
- DHLGH Foreshore licensing database
- 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 birds' 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.
- EC 2012. Common methodology for assessing the impact of fisheries on marine Natura 2000. Service Contract No. 070307/2010/578174/SER/B. DGEnv Brussels.

- Poelman *et al*., 2022. Study on state-of-the-art scientific information on the impacts of aquaculture activities in Europe.
- ABPMer, 2013a – h. Tools for Appropriate Assessment of Fishing and Aquaculture Activities in Marine and Coastal Natura 2000 Sites. Marine Institute.
- 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 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 projects and local site characteristics

This Appropriate Assessment screening considers the two aquaculture and foreshore licence applications T32-1012 and T32-1013 for Blue Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) rope culture using longlines ca. 4.9km apart (hereby referred to as 'the projects').

3.1. Brief description of each project:

T32-1012

Species cultivation proposed	Blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*)				
Method and proposed number of ropes	Rope culture – 64 lines				
Source of stock	Naturally occurring spat				
Annual production estimates	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
(tonnes)	500	1000	1000	1000	1000

T32-1013

Species cultivation proposed	Blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*)				
Method and proposed number of ropes	Rope culture – 64 lines				
Source of stock	Naturally occurring spat				
Annual production estimates	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
(tonnes)	500	1000	1000	1000	1000

Each application therefore provides for up to 64 longlines and an annual production of up to 1,000 tonnes from Year 2 onwards. Considered together, the two applications comprise up to 128 longlines within a combined licence area of 144.60 ha, with a combined annual production of up to 2,000 tonnes. These combined figures are used when considering the potential effects of the two projects together.

3.2. Location of projects:

T32-1012

File Reference No.	T32-1012
Size of site	71.97 hectares
Location	Offshore from Arklow, Co. Wicklow
Approximate centroid (lat/long) – see Fig. 1	52.7657° N, 6.0872° W

T32-1013

File Reference No.	T32-1013
Size of site	72.63 hectares
Location	Offshore from Arklow, Co. Wicklow
Approximate centroid (lat/long) – see Fig. 1	52.7909° N, 6.0073° W

Figure 1: Location of projects T32-1012 & T32-1013.

3.3. Local site characteristics:

Arklow is a coastal Wicklow town located on the Irish Sea. T32-1012 is located ca. 3.0 km from the closest shoreline whereas T32-1013 is located ca. 7.4 km from the closest shoreline.

Access points	Boat access to the aquaculture projects will be from South Quay at Arklow Pier (accessed via public road R772). The proposed vessel route between Arklow Harbour and T32-1013 is approximately 8.30 km long.
WFD EPA water body name and quality	The proposed aquaculture projects do not lie within a coastal waterbody. The Southwestern Irish Sea - Brittas Bay (HA 10) is the closest coastal waterbody, in high ecological status, not at risk[7]. However, its boundary ends less than two kilometres from the shore, and does not overlap with the projects.
Hydrological regime (exposure (wave) and tidal currents)	Modelled datasets for kinetic energy at the seabed due to waves[8] (see Figure 2 below) and currents[9], developed as part of the EUSeaMap project (Populus, J. *et al*, 2017), indicate that; - Application T32-1012 is located within an area of relatively high kinetic energy at the seabed due to waves (202.59$Nm^{-2}s^{-1}$) and relatively high levels of kinetic energy at the seabed due to currents (290.97Nm^{-2}). - Application T32-1013 is located within an area of relatively moderate kinetic energy at the seabed due to waves (129.54$Nm^{-2}s^{-1}$) and relatively high levels of kinetic energy at the seabed due to currents (267.75Nm^{-2}).
Water depth range	Application T32-1012 is situated in water depths ranging from ca. 17m down to ca. 22m (Source: depth contours within site plans submitted with licence application). Application T32-1013 is situated in water depths ranging from ca. 24m down to ca. 27m (Source: depth contours within site plans submitted with licence application).
Adjacent marine habitats	For T32-1012, modelled seabed habitats (see Figure 3) are dominated by Circalittoral fine sand or circalittoral muddy sand (Populus, J. *et al*, 2017). For T32-1013, modelled seabed habitats (see Figure 3) are dominated by deep circalittoral coarse sediment and deep circalittoral sand (Populus, J. *et al*, 2017).

[7] https://www.catchments.ie/data/#/waterbody/IE_EA_140_0000?_k=oypyc5

[8] https://emodnet.ec.europa.eu/geoviewer/

[9] https://emodnet.ec.europa.eu/geonetwork/srv/eng/catalog.search#/metadata/d72bfeca-ceb5-4faa-b7b0-e95db8c6310b

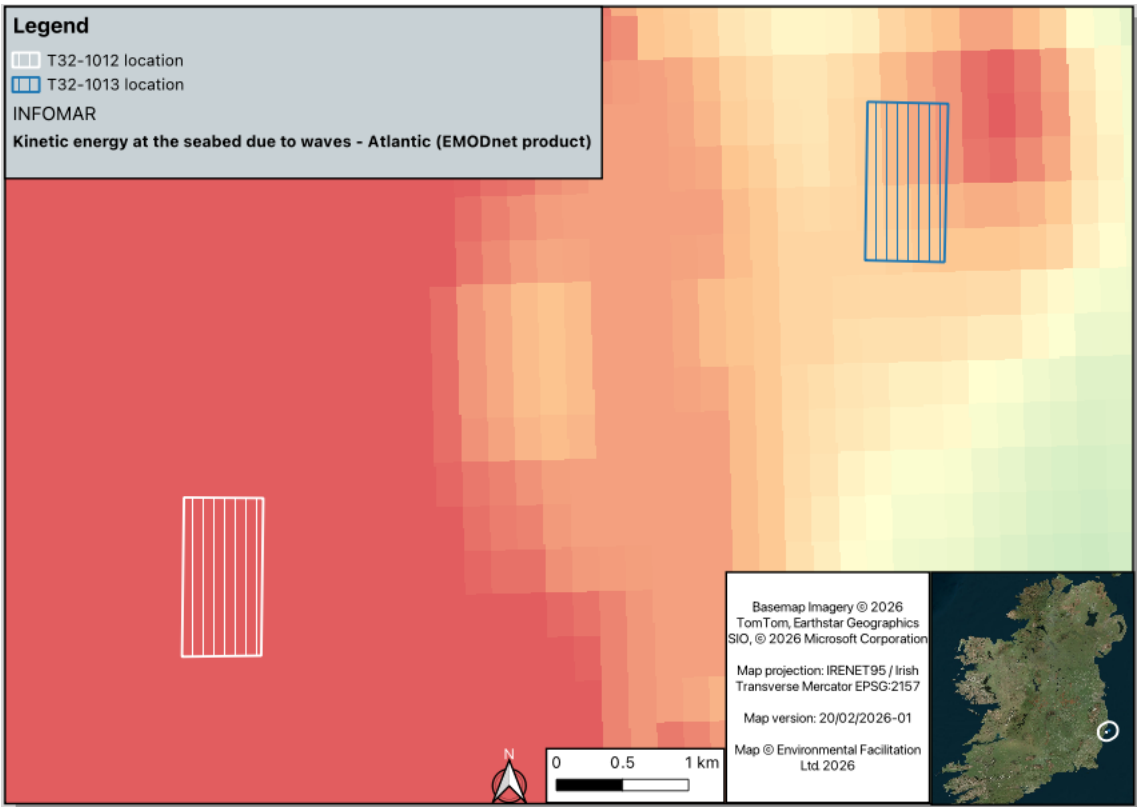


Figure 2: EUSeaMap modelled kinetic energy at the seabed due to waves overlapping with the projects (Populus, J. *et al*, 2017).

Figure 3: EMODNET EUSeaMap (2023) modelled seabed habitats in the vicinity of the projects. https://emodnet.ec.europa.eu/geoviewer/ (Populus, J. *et al*, 2017).

4. Overview of existing aquaculture activities

The two proposed aquaculture sites are located approximately 4.9 km apart off the coast of Arklow, Co. Wicklow, and both applications have been made by Emerald Mussels Limited.

Typically, Blue Mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) farmed in Ireland through suspended rope culture have little environmental impact and do not require any commercial feed sources; all of the mussel nutrient requirements are filtered from the surrounding water (PWC, 2006). Stock will be obtained through the natural settlement of locally occurring mussel spat directly onto the drop ropes deployed at each site. No importation or translocation of mussel seed from another production area is proposed.

There is currently one other existing aquaculture site licensed within ca. 2.4km from T32-1012, and one aquaculture site pending licence within ca. 6.6km from T32-1013.

These two aquaculture sites are listed in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Table 1: List of existing aquaculture sites licensed and pending licence off the Wicklow coast.

Licence No.	Species	Approximate distance from licence area
T32-027A (licensed)	Blue Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*)	Ca. 2.4km SW of T32-1012
T32-28 (pending license)	Winged kelp/Atlantic wakame (*Alaria esculenta*), kelp/mayweed (*Laminaria digitata*), dulse/dillisk (*Palmaria palmata*), sugar kelp (*Saccharina latissima*), sea spaghetti (*Himanthalia elongata*), nori (*Porphyra*), *Asparagopsis*	Ca. 6.6km NW of T32-1013

Figure 4: Existing aquaculture sites off the coast of Wicklow between ca. 2.4km and 6.6km from the projects.

5. Identification and screening of Natura 2000 sites

5.1. Identification of all European sites within 15km

Three Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and no Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were identified within 15 km of the two licence application sites. The minimum distance from each application site to each European site is presented separately in Table 2. The three SACs identified are taken forward for screening in Section 5.3.

Table 2: A list of European sites located within 15km of the two aquaculture licence applications (T32-1012 & T32-1013). Distances are minimum straight-line distances between the boundary of each aquaculture application site and the closest point of the relevant European site.

European Site (code)	Distance from T32-1012 (km)	Distance from T32-1013 (km)
Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC (001742)	ca. 4.2 km	ca. 10.0 km
Buckroney-Brittas Dunes and Fen SAC (000729)	ca. 7.2 km	ca. 7.3 km
Magherabeg Dunes SAC (001766)	ca. 13.0 km	ca. 16.0 km

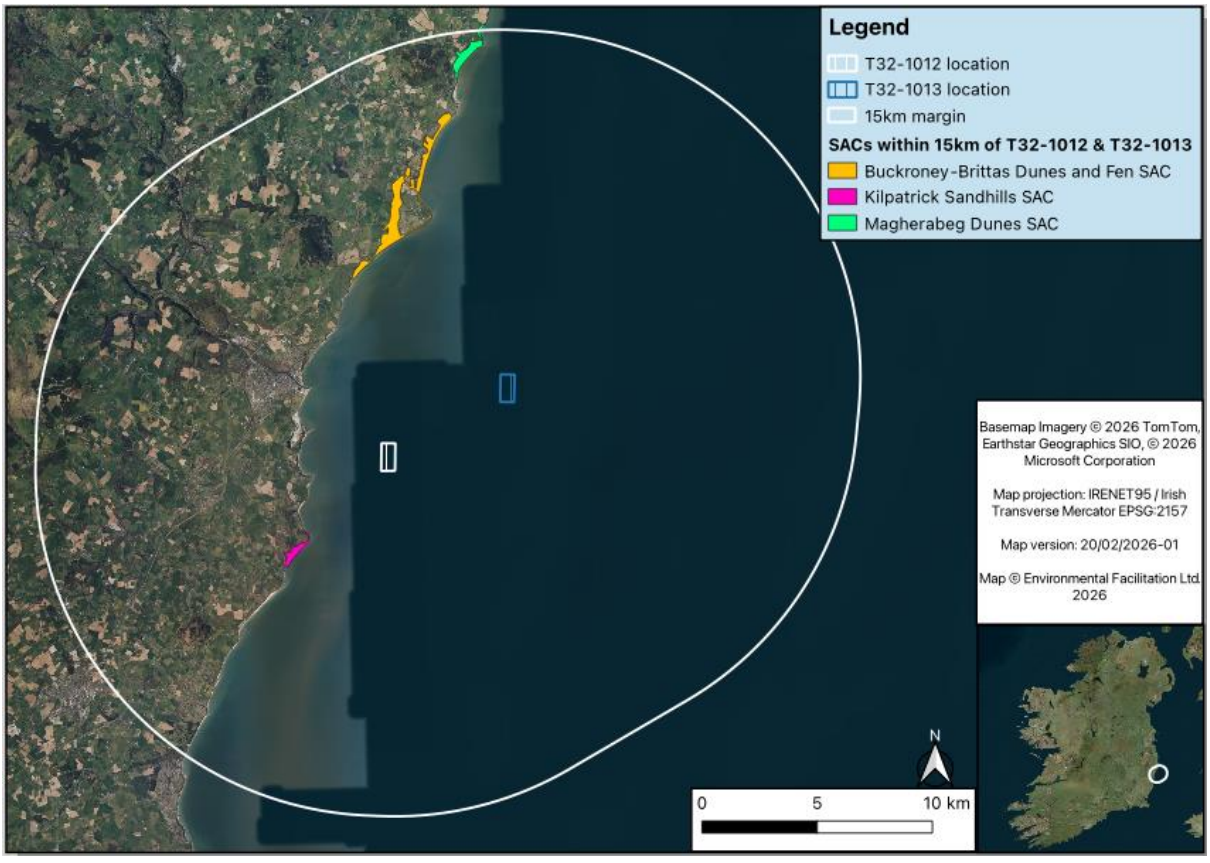


Figure 5: Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) located within 15km of the projects.

5.2. Identification of SPAs within 50km

Given the mobility and potentially large foraging ranges of some bird species, the search for Special Protection Areas (SPAs) was extended beyond the initial 15 km search area to 50 km from the projects. This wider search also allows for potential interactions with migratory and wide-ranging bird species associated with more distant SPAs. Eight SPAs were identified between 15 km and 50 km of the applications and are listed in Table 3 (where the minimum distance from each application site to each cSPA/SPA is presented separately) and illustrated in Figure 6.

Table 3: A list of European sites located 15km-50km from the two aquaculture licence applications (T32-1012 & T32-1013).

European Site (code)	Distance from T32-1012 (km)	Distance from T32-1013 (km)
Wicklow Head SPA (004127)	ca. 21.2 km	ca. 17.7 km
The Murrough SPA (004186)	ca. 23.5 km	ca. 20.6 km
Cahore Marshes SPA (004143)	ca. 23.5 km	ca. 28.2 km
Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	ca. 24.5 km	ca. 27.6 km
Wicklow Mountains SPA (004040)	ca. 27.3 km	ca. 29.1 km
The Raven SPA (004019)	ca. 39.3 km	ca. 43.9 km
Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	ca. 43.8 km	ca. 49.6 km
Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA (004063)	ca. 46.5 km	ca. 47.6km

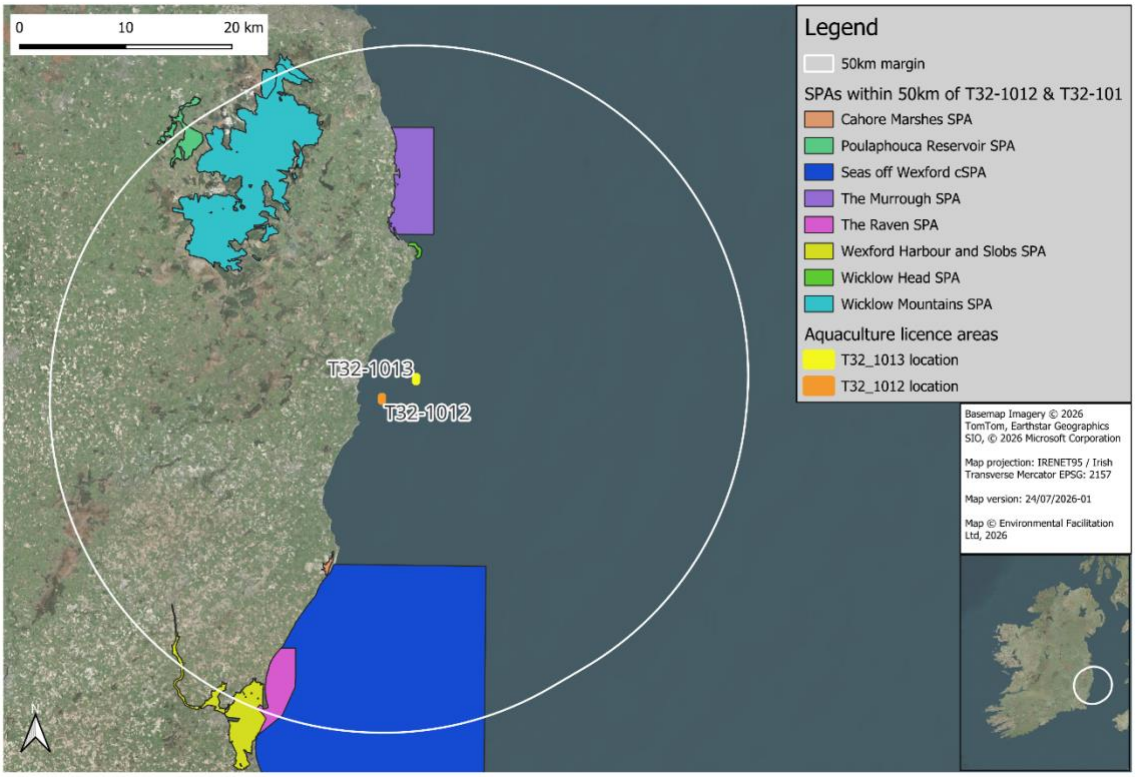


Figure 6: Special Protection Areas (SPAs) located between 15-50km of the projects.

For the SCIs of the eight SPAs located between 15-50km (Table 3) from the aquaculture licence areas, an assessment of likely significant effects was undertaken, set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4: An assessment of likely significant effects for SCIs of European sites located between 15-50km from the aquaculture licence area(s).

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188]	Wicklow Head SPA (004127) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Typically breeds on coasts and prefers high cliffs and steep ledges, and during breeding season found along the coast. Forages at upwellings by surface feeding where prey are abundant. Mainly piscivorous (Hatch et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, the project area is not considered likely to support ecologically significant use by the SCI population, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*) [A001]	The Murrough SPA (004186) The Raven SPA (004019) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	They typically feed along the coasts of tidal estuaries and over mudflats in streams, rivers or larger lakes. It is also reported that they are rarely seen off rocky shorelines (Rizzolo et al., 2020). Prefers breeding in low elevation wetlands. Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Red-throated Diver are not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent or within the licence area, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) [A043]	The Murrough SPA (004186) Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA (004063)	Usually found wintering on "farmland in open country or in swamps, lakes and coastal lagoons". Foraging mostly on vegetation, "grass, roots, leaves, stems, seed heads, fruits and sprouts of wide variety of plants," and forages mainly on land by grazing, but sometimes on water by submerging head and probing in mud for plant matter (Carboneras et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Greylag Goose are not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent or within this licence area, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*) [A046]	The Murrough SPA (004186)	In western Europe, Brent goose use eelgrass meadows (eelgrass is a strong indicator of the abundance of brent goose) and green algae beds, and salt marshes, but they have used grasslands in spring also and now regularly use agricultural grasslands and winter cereals in fall and winter too. However, research has shown that agricultural areas are second choice behind salt marshes (Inger et al. 2008).

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Light-bellied Brent Goose is not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent or within this licence area, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]	The Murrough SPA (004186) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually winters in brackish wetlands, saltmarshes and large estuaries, mainly shallow, sheltered waters of high productivity. Opportunistic feeder on "aquatic vegetation; aquatic insects and larvae, molluscs, crustaceans" (Johnson et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Teal are not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent or within this licence area, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179]	The Murrough SPA (004186) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Black-headed Gull is reported to have a global mean foraging distance of 7km (Woodward et al., 2024) Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Black-headed Gull are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) [A184]	The Murrough SPA (004186) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Herring Gull is reported to have a global mean foraging distance of 21km (Weseloh et al., 2024). Prefers coastal and near coastal habitats, also inland lakes, reservoirs and rubbish dumps. Following an assessment of threats and risks in this context**,** no likely significant effects are identified. Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Herring Gull are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855]	The Murrough SPA (004186) Cahore Marshes SPA (004143) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Wigeon breed on "shallow freshwater marshes, under tussocks adjacent to lakes and lagoons or on lake islands" (Bird Watch Ireland).

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		"Shallow, freshwater marshes, lakes and lagoons surrounded by scattered trees or open forest during breeding season, but in winter moves to coastal marshes, freshwater and brackish lagoons, estuaries, bays and other sheltered marine localities." (Carboneras et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Wigeon are not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent to or within this project area and likely significant effects are therefore extremely unlikely.
Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*) [A885]	The Murrough SPA (004186) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Little Tern is reported to forage locally with respect to the breeding site (within 3km of the colony) (Gochfeld et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Little Tern are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	The Murrough SPA (004186) The Raven SPA (004019) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	There is no spatial overlap or hydrological pathway between the project area and this Special Conservation Interest. Considering this, any likely significant effects are therefore extremely unlikely.
Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]	Cahore Marshes SPA (004143) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found on pastures, open agricultural land, and regularly feeds on intertidal flats. Foraging mostly on invertebrates, polychaetes on intertidal flats, and sometimes berries, seeds and grass. (Wiersma et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Golden Plover are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]	Cahore Marshes SPA (004143) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Lapwing when wintering are typically associated with major wetlands, pasture and rough land adjacent to bogs. "Outside breeding season also appears on harvested stubble and ploughed fields, and is increasingly using arable fields in winter as opposed to pastureland, at least in parts of NW Europe. Roosting flocks prefer spacious, old pastures

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		and sometimes appear on mudflats, as well as (recently) on large open roofspaces." (Wiersma, 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Lapwing are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395]	Cahore Marshes SPA (004143) The Raven SPA (004019) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Prefers to winter on peatlands and improved grasslands and forages mostly on plant matter (Ely et al., 2024). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Greenland White-fronted Goose are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) [A098]	Wicklow Mountains SPA (004040)	Merlin are typically associated with coniferous boreal forest to deciduous parkland, shrub steppe, moorland and open prairies and steppes (Warkentin et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Merlin are not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent to/within this project area and likely significant effects are therefore extremely unlikely.
Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) [A103]	Wicklow Mountains SPA (004040)	This species are typically a cliffs and crags nester (White et al., 2024). Coastal breeding in Ireland usually occurs on the south, west and north coasts, coastal breeding on the east coast is limited by the availability of suitable nesting cliffs. Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Peregrine are not anticipated to be found in significant numbers adjacent to/within this project area and likely significant effects are therefore extremely unlikely.
Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]	The Raven SPA (004019) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Known to frequent open waters, both inland and marine, primarily marine. Prefers sheltered areas and estuaries. Sometimes, lakes, lagoons, reservoirs, wide rivers, and flood waters. (Hatch et al., 2020). Normally feeds in shallow water. Breeds on inshore islands, cliffs, stacks, amongst boulders.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Cormorant are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) [A065]	The Raven SPA (004019) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Usually found breeding on freshwater pools, small lakes or slow-flowing rivers, foraging on plants, invertebrates, and freshwater crustaceans. Winters usually at sea in shallow waters (<20m) and dives several metres (1-3.7m) to feed, predominantly of benthic bivalve molluscs. (Carboneras & Kirwan, 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Common Scoter are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) [A141]	The Raven SPA (004019)	It typically roosts in dense flocks but spreads out over sandy and muddy flats to forage as the tide recedes. It forages almost always on substrate, but may pick prey off low vegetation as well (Poole et al., 2020). Usually found on intertidal mudflats, saltmarshes and beaches when not breeding. Foraging mostly on invertebrates, bivalves and crustaceans. Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Grey Plover are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) [A144]	The Raven SPA (004019) Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Nests on well vegetated areas, and often on stony, well drained ridge tops, often <60m above sea level. Forages on coastal beaches on small invertebrates and bivalve molluscs. (Macwhirter et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Sanderling are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Most wintering occurs on wetlands, sheltered coasts, estuaries and coastal habitats, feeding mainly on invertebrates (Llimona et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Little Grebe are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) [A005]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Outside breeding season, usually found on "coasts, estuaries and large, exposed lakes and reservoirs". Foraging mostly by diving and picking insects from vegetation (Llimona et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Great Crested Grebe are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) [A028]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found on "any kind of shallow water, fresh, brackish, or salt, standing or flowing… generally prefers areas with some trees but can occupy very open areas." Highly opportunistic forager, mostly on fish, but also insects, molluscs, amphibians, reptiles, and terrestrial mammals. (Martínez-Vilalta et al., 2020). It's conservation status is not globally threatened (Least Concern). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Grey Heron are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) [A037]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found wintering on low-lying wet pasture, lakes and ponds, feeding on plant material. (Limpert et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Bewick's Swan are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) [A038]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found in "wetlands that are rich in emergent vegetation. However, when grain or root crops are available, agricultural lands may be heavily used". Foraging mostly in marine and aquatic habitats with vegetation no more than 100cm below the surface. Sometimes grain fields and meadows also. (Mlodinow et al., 2025). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Whooper Swan are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) [A048]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found in "coastal mudflats and estuaries, generally occurring in salt or brackish water". Foraging mostly on aquatic invertebrates (Carboneras et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Shelduck are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) [A053]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Mallard breed mostly in ground where hidden in vegetation. Occurs on variety of wetlands within range; "large or small, seasonal or permanent, in fresh, brackish or salt waters, provided they are relatively shallow (typically just meters) and provide some cover, preferably with submerged, floating, emergent and riparian vegetation." Found on "mudflats, ornamental ponds, reservoirs, canals, irrigation networks and sewage farms" (Drilling et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Mallard are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Pintail (*Anas acuta*) [A054]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found in shallow, freshwater marshes, small lakes and rivers, preferably with dense vegetation cover. In winter, also on coastal lagoons with brackish or saline waters. (Clark et al., 2020). Foraging areas consist of different types of fresh, brackish, and marine wetlands.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Pintail are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Scaup (*Aythya marila*) [A062]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found wintering on "almost exclusively marine habitats, usually on extensive, shallow, salt-water bays and brackish river inlets that provide protection from cold winds." Forages on animal and plant matter dependent on availability. (Kessel et al., 2020). The conservation status is not globally threatened (Least Concern). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Scaup are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) [A067]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Outside breeding season, usually found on "coastal lagoons, estuaries, harbours and inshore marine waters, and also inland lakes, reservoirs and rivers that remain ice-free". Foraging mostly in winter on "molluscs and crustaceans, prefers foraging over sandy, gravel, rocky, or boulder substrates in relatively shallow waters where such prey are concentrated" (Eadie et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Goldeneye are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) [A069]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually wintering "at sea, frequenting both inshore and offshore waters, sandy estuaries, sheltered bays and brackish lagoons." Feeds mostly on "Small fish (10-15 cm) and crustaceans; also worms, insects, amphibians, and some plant material." Forages mostly by diving to various depths (Craik et al., 2020). The conservation status is not globally threatened (Least Concern). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Red-breasted Merganser are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	No pathway identified. No adverse impacts anticipated from the project.
Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Outside breeding season, usually found on "quiet estuarine or inshore sea waters, and often occurs on open water of lakes and reservoirs". Omnivorous, but primarily vegetarian (Taylor et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Coot are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) [A130]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Breeds on saltmarshes, sand and shingle beaches, less often on rocky coasts; sometimes alongside agricultural land. Non-breeding season, mostly found on estuarine mudflats, saltmarshes and sandy and rocky shores. Forages on soft coastal substrates and feeds on bivalve molluscs and other invertebrates (Hockey et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Oystercatcher are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Knot (*Calidris canutus*) [A143]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found wintering "on sandy beaches to intertidal feeding areas on sandy mud, where they may feed on bivalves". Foraging mostly by pecking at bivalve molluscs when away from breeding grounds (Baker et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Knot are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) [A149]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Whilst overwintering, Dunlin prefer habitat such as estuaries, bays, seasonal wetlands, flooded fields, and other agricultural lands (Warnock & Gill, 2023). Forages on a variety of invertebrates, and sometimes plant material and small fish.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Dunlin are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	This species typically winters in sheltered estuaries, lagoons with large intertidal mudflats, sandy beaches, salt-marshes, salt-flats, and inland wetlands (Van Gils et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Black-tailed Godwit are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) [A157]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found on intertidal areas, sandy estuaries, and sheltered bays. Foraging usually on molluscs, crustaceans and insects. (McCaffery & Gill, 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Bar-tailed Godwit are not found in the vicinity in significant numbers to this licence area, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) [A160]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	During non-breeding periods, Curlew is typically found on muddy coasts, bays and estuaries (Van Gils et al., 2020b). Forages on wide variety, mainly on invertebrates, sometimes small vertebrates, and plant material. Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Curlew are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) [A162]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076)	Usually found on coastal and inland wetlands, grassy marshes and swampy heathlands. Foraging usually on “wide range of soil, surface-active and aquatic prey, as well as some estuarine invertebrates” such as molluscs, crustaceans and insects (van Gils et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Redshank are not considered likely to use the project area in any

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]	Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (004076) Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA (004063) Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Frequents coastal and inland habitats, likes to feed or roost on estuaries, harbours, lakes, reservoirs and sandy beaches, (Burger et al., 2020). Having regard to the separation distances between the projects and the relevant SPA, as set out in Table 3, Lesser Black-backed Gull are not considered likely to use the project area in any ecologically significant manner, and based on current understanding of threats and risks in this context, no likely significant effects are identified.
Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Fulmar are highly mobile seabirds associated predominantly with offshore and pelagic waters, where they forage over extensive areas for fish, squid and other marine prey (Mallory et al., 2012). Considering its marine habitat preference, Fulmar associated with the cSPA may occur within the wider waters surrounding the aquaculture projects. However, neither project overlaps the cSPA or breeding habitat used by this SCI, and the proposed longline arrays occupy discrete areas of offshore habitat and will not materially restrict access to the wider marine foraging resource. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Manx Shearwater is a highly mobile pelagic species that forages extensively at sea, primarily feeding on small fish and cephalopods (Lee et al., 2023). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within or transit through waters surrounding the projects. Neither project overlaps breeding habitat and the proposed longline arrays will not form a continuous barrier to movement or materially reduce the availability of marine foraging habitat. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) [A016]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Gannet is a highly mobile marine species that forages over extensive areas of continental shelf waters, principally by plunge-diving for fish (Mowbray, 2020). Use of the wider project area by Gannet cannot therefore be excluded. The proposed longline arrays occupy discrete areas of marine habitat, do not overlap breeding habitat and will not prevent access to the surrounding marine foraging resource. No anti-predator netting or other mesh structures are proposed. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		their distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A018]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Shag is predominantly a coastal marine species, foraging by pursuit-diving for fish in relatively shallow coastal waters (Mitchell et al., 2004). Individuals may therefore occur within the wider project area. Neither project overlaps breeding or roosting habitat, and the suspended longline arrays occupy discrete areas within an extensive marine environment. The projects will not form a barrier to movement or materially reduce the availability of marine foraging habitat. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*) [A176]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Mediterranean Gull uses coastal and marine habitats as well as estuaries, lagoons and terrestrial feeding areas, and is an opportunistic feeder on a range of marine and terrestrial prey (Burger et al., 2020). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within the wider project area. The projects do not overlap breeding or roosting habitat and the discrete longline arrays will not materially restrict access to marine foraging habitat. Considering its habitat use, the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) [A192]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Roseate Tern is a marine-foraging species which feeds primarily on small schooling fish captured at or close to the sea surface (Gochfeld & Burger, 2020). Individuals may therefore forage within or transit through the wider waters surrounding the projects. Neither project overlaps breeding or roosting habitat and the longline arrays will not materially reduce the availability of marine foraging habitat or form a continuous barrier to movement. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Common Tern forages in coastal and marine waters, predominantly taking small fish at or close to the water surface (Arnold et al., 2020). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within the wider project area. Neither project overlaps breeding or roosting habitat and the discrete longline arrays will not prevent access to surrounding marine foraging habitat. Considering its foraging behaviour, the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Arctic Tern is a highly mobile marine species that forages principally on small fish and marine invertebrates taken at or near the sea surface (Hatch et al., 2020). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within or transit through waters surrounding the projects. Neither project overlaps breeding or roosting habitat and the longline arrays will not materially restrict access to marine foraging habitat or create a continuous barrier to movement. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Guillemot is a marine pursuit-diving species which forages for fish and other marine prey in offshore and coastal waters (Ainley et al., 2021). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within the wider project area. Neither project overlaps breeding habitat and the longline arrays occupy discrete areas within an extensive marine environment. No anti-predator netting or other mesh structures are proposed and the arrays will not materially restrict access to surrounding foraging habitat. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Razorbill is a marine pursuit-diving species that feeds predominantly on small schooling fish in coastal and offshore waters (Lavers et al., 2020). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within or transit through the wider project area. Neither project overlaps breeding habitat and the proposed longline arrays will not materially restrict access to the wider marine foraging resource or create a continuous barrier to movement. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Puffin is a marine pursuit-diving species that forages predominantly on small fish in coastal and offshore waters (Lowther et al., 2020). Individuals associated with the cSPA may therefore occur within the wider waters surrounding the projects. Neither project overlaps breeding habitat and the discrete longline arrays will not materially reduce the availability of marine foraging habitat or impede movement through the wider area. Considering the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.
Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) [A863]	Seas off Wexford cSPA (004237)	Sandwich Tern is a coastal and marine-foraging species that feeds predominantly on small fish captured by plunge-diving (Shealer et al., 2020). Individuals associated with the cSPA

SCI	Relevant SPAs	Assessment of likely significant effects from projects
		may therefore occur within or transit through the wider project area. Neither project overlaps breeding or roosting habitat and the discrete longline arrays will not materially restrict access to surrounding marine foraging habitat. Considering its foraging behaviour, the nature and scale of the projects and the intervening distance from the cSPA (closest ca. 24.5 km), no likely significant effects are identified.

Having examined, analysed and evaluated, in light of the best scientific knowledge in the field:

- the nature and location of the proposed aquaculture projects, including associated operations and ancillary infrastructure;
- the European sites identified in Section 5.2, together with their SCIs and conservation objectives; and
- the potential pathways by which the projects could affect those SCIs,

it can be ruled out, on the basis of objective scientific information, that T32-1012 and T32-1013, individually or together, will have a significant effect on the European sites identified within the wider 15–50 km search area.

This conclusion is based on the separation between the projects and the relevant European sites, the ecology and habitat requirements of the SCIs assessed, the scale and nature of the proposed suspended longline infrastructure, and the absence of a credible pathway capable of giving rise to a likely significant effect.

5.3. Assessment of Likely Significant Effects of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC (001742)

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition	Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC is located approximately 4.2 km from T32-1012 and 10.0 km from T32-1013. Neither project overlaps the SAC. The proposed infrastructure is wholly offshore and the projects involve no landfall, terrestrial access, shoreline works, dredging or discharge within or adjacent to the SAC. Vessel access will be from Arklow Harbour. Given the nature and location of the projects, no credible pathway has been identified by which either project could affect the extent, distribution, structure, function or supporting coastal processes of the qualifying habitats of Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC. Likely significant effects can therefore be excluded for T32-1012 and T32-1013, individually and together, in view of the site's conservation objectives.	Screened out
Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		QI screened out
Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		QI screened out
Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		QI screened out
Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea) [2150]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		QI screened out

Buckroney-Brittas Dunes and Fen SAC (000729)

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition	Buckroney-Brittas Dunes and Fen SAC is located approximately 7.2 km from T32-1012 and 7.3 km from T32-1013. Neither project overlaps the SAC. The projects involve no works within the terrestrial, dune, wetland or groundwater environment of the SAC and no shoreline works, dredging or discharge capable of affecting its coastal processes or hydrological regime. No credible source–pathway–receptor linkage has been identified between either project and the qualifying interests of the SAC. Likely significant effects can therefore be excluded for T32-1012 and T32-1013, individually and together, in view of the site's conservation objectives.	Screened out
Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		
Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition		
Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		
Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		
Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition		
Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea) [2150]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		
Dunes with Salix repens ssp. argentea (Salicion arenariae) [2170]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition		
Humid dune slacks [2190]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		
Alkaline fens [7230]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition		

Magherabeg Dunes SAC (001766)

Qualifying Interest (QI)	Conservation Objectives	Assessment of Likely Significant Effect	Screening outcome
Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition	Magherabeg Dunes SAC is located approximately 16.0 km from T32-1013 and 13.0 km from T32-1012. Neither project overlaps the SAC. The projects involve no terrestrial or shoreline works and no dredging, discharge or other activity capable of affecting the dune habitats or coastal processes supporting the SAC. No credible source–pathway–receptor linkage has been identified between either project and the qualifying interests of the SAC. Likely significant effects can therefore be excluded for T32-1012 and T32-1013, individually and together, in view of the site's conservation objectives.	Screened out
Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition		
Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120]	Maintain the favourable conservation condition		
Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		
Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]	Restore the favourable conservation condition		

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

The proposed species, Blue Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), is native to Irish waters. Stock will arise through natural settlement of locally occurring spat onto the deployed ropes, and no importation or translocation of seed is proposed. The projects therefore do not provide a pathway for the introduction of a non-native culture species through stocking. No likely significant effect on a European site arising from the introduction of a non-native culture species has been identified.

5.5. Aids to Navigation

5.5.1. Assessment for Aids to Navigation

All aquaculture sites with structures are required to have Aids to Navigation. Aquaculture applications, such as these projects (licence applications T32-1012 & T32-1013), use special marks to indicate the boundaries of the aquaculture activities. Aids to navigation (AtoN) are devices or systems designed to enhance the safe and efficient navigation of vessels. An aid to navigation station may be defined as a point described by geographic coordinates and categorised as: land (a fixed station accessible by land); offshore (a fixed station only accessible by boat or helicopter); and floating (buoys etc.).

Special Marks are used to indicate a special area or feature whose nature may be apparent from reference to a chart or other nautical publication. They may be utilised as a Mobile Aid to Navigation (MatoN) where a mark is attached to a floating object which may constitute a collision hazard. Special marks are yellow, may carry a top mark (single yellow 'X' shape/St. Andrew's Cross), are preferably three-dimensional to be visible from all directions and any light used is also yellow. Special marks do not have any of the rhythms used for white lights (associated with Cardinal marks, Isolated Danger, and Safe Water marks). Special marks for aquaculture sites are typically floating buoys and/or ground marks.

The layout drawings submitted with the projects identify navigational buoys positioned around the perimeter of each proposed aquaculture site and are considered as integral components of the proposed projects for the purposes of this screening assessment.

5.5.2. Descriptions of markers

The application drawings identify navigational buoys around the perimeter of each proposed aquaculture site. These navigational markers will be yellow, distinguishing them from the dark/battleship-grey flotation associated with the mussel longlines. The detailed specification of the navigational buoys, including the lighting characteristics and associated mooring arrangements, is not provided in the application information reviewed and will be determined in consultation with and subject to the requirements of the Commissioners of Irish Lights.

5.5.3. Assessment of pressures

5.5.3.1. Habitats

The anchoring of all types of moorings can cause physical loss and change of habitat in the direct footprint of the moorings (i.e. smothering). This pressure will continue for the entire length of time the structure is in place. For this assessment, we assume that time is the entire length of the aquaculture licenses.

Neither T32-1012 nor T32-1013 overlaps with an SAC and consequently, no direct loss, alteration or abrasion of any marine community type/Qualifying Interest (QI) feature habitat would arise from the navigational buoy infrastructure or its associated moorings. Therefore, **likely significant effects from physical loss, change of habitat or seabed abrasion, on QIs or MCTs can be ruled out.**

5.5.3.2. SPA species

The navigational buoys and associated lights will form a small component of the surface infrastructure associated with each aquaculture site. Potential effects on bird SCIs could arise through attraction to or disturbance from artificial lighting. However, navigational lighting will be limited to that required for safe navigation and will comprise discrete point sources associated with the perimeter markers rather than continuous illumination of the aquaculture sites. No lighting of the longline arrays themselves is proposed.

Given the limited number and spatial extent of the navigational lights, and their location within an existing marine navigation environment, no appreciable disturbance, displacement or alteration of foraging habitat for the SCI species considered in Table 4 is anticipated. **Likely significant effects arising from navigational lighting on SCI species can therefore be excluded.**

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

The QIs 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 QIs are potentially affected, this should trigger a full assessment. In-combination impacts by their nature have the potential to be 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:

- *Water Framework Directive Hydromorphological and Biological Element classifications: https://gis.epa.ie/GetData/Download (Accessed 23/02/2026)*

- *DHLGH Foreshore Licencing (https://www.gov.ie/en/foreshore-notices/ - Accessed: 23/02/2026)*
- *EIA Portal: https://housinggovie.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d7d5a3d48f104ecbb206e7e5f84b71f1 (Accessed 23/02/2026)*
- *Wicklow County Council planning: https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Services/Planning/Planning-Applications/Online-Planning (Accessed 23/02/2026)*
- *EPA Pressures & Activities (www. https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water : Accessed: 23/02/2026)*
- *Inshore Fishing Maps (Ireland's Marine Atlas -* https://atlas.marine.ie/#?c=54.6125:-8.3302:12 *: Accessed: 23/02/2026)*

The proposed projects have 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 proposals, 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 projects, either individually, together or in combination with other plans or projects, are not likely to have a significant effect on those European sites in view of their conservation objectives.

Part B: AA Screening Conclusions and Recommendations

European Sites for which Likely Significant Effects Can Be Excluded

Following AA screening, and pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended, the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended, and the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997, the screening assessment has found that the projects proposed under aquaculture and foreshore licence applications T32-1012 and T32-1013 are not likely to have a significant effect, either individually, together or in combination with other plans or projects, on the European sites considered in this report, for the reasons set out in Part A.

The eight SPA sites identified within the wider 15–50 km search area were assessed having regard to the ecology and mobility of their Special Conservation Interests and the potential pathways associated with the proposed activities. Likely significant effects on these sites can be excluded. Within the main 15 km search area, the following three SACs were identified and screened out from further assessment:

- Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC (001742);
- Buckroney-Brittas Dunes and Fen SAC (000729); and
- Magherabeg Dunes SAC (001766).

As such, the projects do not 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: 24/07/2026

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