Report supporting the Appropriate Assessment Screening of Intensive Aquaculture in Clifden Bay, Co. Galway (T09-127)

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Glossary of Acronyms

AA	Appropriate Assessment
CM	Conservation measure
COs	Conservation Objective(s)
DAFM	Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine
DEHLG	Department of Environment, Heritage, and Local Government
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment report
European site	Natura 2000 site
FCS	Favourable conservation status
IROPI	Imperative reasoning of overriding public interest
Natura 2000	Network of nature protection areas, Including the SACs and SPA designated under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
QIs	Qualifying Interest(s)
SAC	Special Area(s) of Conservation
SCI	Special Conservation Interest(s)
SPA	Special Protected Area(s)

Executive Summary

The Marine Institute has been requested to review an application for a renew and review of an aquaculture licence and a foreshore licence application (site T09-127), for intensive salmon aquaculture activities at Clifden Bay, Co. Galway and to conduct a review of the NIS supplied by the applicant.

The application requests an aquaculture licence to grow salmon using net pens, with a proposed 24-month growth cycle (16 month grow/transfer and 8-month fallow). The applicant is requesting to amend the current licence operating conditions (an annual harvest of 100 t of salmon) to a harvest of 200 t of salmon every 24 months (a 17-month growing period with a 7-month fallow period before the next production cycle begins) and to have a maximum allowable biomass of 420 t. The applicant also requests to increase the boundaries of this site from 3.6 ha to 6.2 ha. The site will have 10 net pens where the maximum stocking density within the pen will be 10 kg/m^3. The site will be accessed by boat from the private Mannin Bay Salmon Company Ltd. pier in Drinagh.

There are 17 SACs and 6 SPAs identified in applicant's report within the zone of influence, due to the more conservative approach to screening utilised in this report, a further 7 SPAs were considered as within the Zone of Influence.

The stage 1 screening process has identified the following QIs and associated conservation features in the SACs that the proposed aquaculture activities spatially overlap with and/or has the potential to significantly affect, so will be carried forward for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

These are:

SAC QIs

- Annex I Habitats
    - Large Shallow Inlets and Bays [1160]
    - Coastal Lagoons [1150]
    - Reefs [1170]
- Annex II Species
    - Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) [1364]
    - Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) [1365]
    - Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355]
    - Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) [1029]
    - Salmon (*Salmo salar*) [1106]
    - Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) [1351]
    - Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) [1349]

SPA QIs

- Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]
- Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) [A179]
- Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]
- Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]
- Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009]
- Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) [A016]
- Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]
- Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]
- Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) [A184]

- Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188]
- Leach's Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]
- Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]
- Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195]
- Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013]
- Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]
- Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200]
- Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A188]
- Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]
- Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]

On the basis that likely significant effects of the proposed activity on the European sites cannot be excluded, these QIs are brought forward in the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

The review of the AA documentation supplied by the applicant highlighted 2 points to be addressed - when addressed, the NIS supplied by the applicant, in combination with the reports supplied by the Marine Institute, will contain the necessary information/data to proceed to the next stage of the licensing process, and support the carrying out of a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment of the proposed activities.

1 Introduction

The Marine Institute has been requested to review an application for a renew and review of an aquaculture licence and a foreshore licence application (site T09-127), for intensive salmon aquaculture activities at a site in Clifden Bay, Co. Galway, and to conduct a review of the NIS information supplied by the applicant.

This is an Appropriate Assessment Screening document supporting that Appropriate Assessment. The report assesses the potential for the proposed aquaculture activities to have significant effects on the Qualifying Interests (QIs) of the Natura 2000 SACs and any adjacent sites. This report also includes a review of the NIS supplied by the applicant, to confirm it contains the necessary information to progress to the next stage of the licensing process.

Intensive fish farming is defined in Aquaculture (Licence Application) Regulations 1998 (as amended[1]) as, "aquaculture activities where the biomass produced is beyond that which could be naturally supported without the provision of additional feed". Fed finfish aquaculture (e.g., salmon, trout) falls within this definition.

This report is to consider if the proposed activities are likely to significantly affect the Qualifying Interests (QIs) of Natura 2000 sites in view of their Conservation Objectives (COs), and any adjacent sites. This is achieved, in the first instance, by following the screening process outlined in this document. If there is potential for the activities considered, to likely significantly affect QIs and their conservation features, they will be carried forward for a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and considered on a cumulative basis with other potentially disturbing activities.

1.1 Structure of AA Screening Report

This 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. **NIS Review** - a review of the NIS supplied by the applicant.
4. **Conclusion** - a summary of the findings from the screening process.

1.2 Legislative Context

Articles 3 - 11 of the European Community (EC) Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna (the Habitats Directive[2]) 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[3].

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*[4], 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

[1] S.I. No. 236/1998 —Aquaculture (Licence Application) Regulations (consolidated version) https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/264584/7c297e21-8bea-4d15-abaa-79ef60ecd1d7.pdf#page=null

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

[4] European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 to 2021 (Unofficial Consolidation) NPWS Link

Natura 2000 sites is used in this report. Natura 2000 sites in Ireland, form part of the Natura 2000 European network of protected sites, include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

SACs are designated under the Habitats Directive, due to their significant ecological importance for habitats and for species protected under Annex I and Annex II respectively of the Habitats Directive. SPAs, designated under EC Directive EC 79/409/EEC (the Birds Directive[5]), are designated for the protection of populations and habitats of bird species. 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 is 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, 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), on 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). Natura 2000 sites have COs which are set out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) - the competent authority for the management of Natura 2000 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 the aquaculture licensing authority under the *Fisheries (Amendment) Act (1997*)[6] and 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)[7]. They determine applications for new, or renewal of, aquaculture and foreshore licences. They are also the competent authority responsible for undertaking AA 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 the Natura 2000 site. DAFM must base its determination on an AA and is also responsible for ensuring that an AA is carried out.

If the AA process finds that the possibility of significant adverse effect cannot be discounted or that there is a likelihood of negative consequence for the conservation features for which a site is designated, then such activities will need to be mitigated further if they are allowed to continue. The assessment reports are not always explicit on how this mitigation might be achieved but rather indicate whether mitigation is required or not and what results should be achieved.

Aquaculture operations existed in coastal areas prior to the designation of areas as SACs and SPAs under the Directives. Ireland is undertaking AAs of existing and proposed aquaculture activities in SACs and SPAs. This is an incremental process, as agreed with the EU Commission in 2009, and will ultimately cover all aquaculture activities in all Natura 2000 sites. AA of aquaculture operations are carried out against the Conservation Objectives for the conservation features of the Natura 2000 site, as defined by the NPWS.

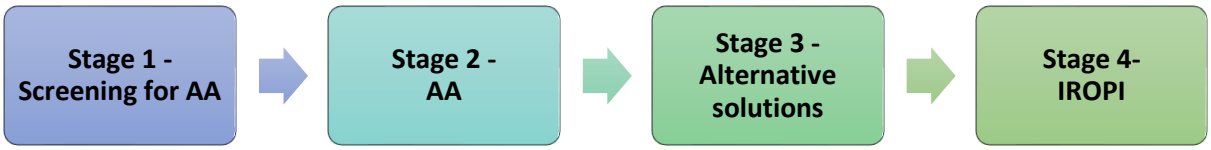
[5] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm
[6] Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1997 Lawreform.ie
[7] Foreshore Act 1933 Revised Acts (lawreform.ie)

This report supporting the AA, informs part of the assessment process – Stage 1 Screening.

1.3 Appropriate Assessment (AA) Process

The requirement for an AA derives directly from Article 6(3), 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 [8]. The *Guidance on Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland* document[9] 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[10], 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 identifies a four-stage process of an 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) are not applicable here.

1.3.1 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. A high level of evidence and justification will be needed in circumstances when the process ends at screening stage on grounds of no effect.

1.3.1.1 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 can consider 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.

[8] EC 2018. Guidance on Aquaculture and Natura 2000 Sustainable aquaculture activities in the context of the Natura 2000 Network Link
[9] DEHLG, 2009. Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. Link
[10] OPR - Office of Planning Regulator (2021). Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management. March 2021. 43pp Link

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 on licensing decisions will be made.

1.4 Data sources

This process and report relies on data and information from a broad range of diverse sources. Some of the key sources of information that are generally viewed, consulted and/or utilised to inform the screening and AA processes are listed below. Others are consulted as required, and relevant sources are cited in the reports.

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

- The Application
- The Environmental Impact Assessment report (EIAR)
- DAFM Aquaculture & Foreshore Management website
- DAFM - Aquaculture viewer – AquaMIS
- National Parks & Wildlife (NPWS) protected site information for NPWS website, including conservation objectives
- NPWS development applications guidance documents
- BIM aquaculture profiling reports
- Targeted scientific studies
- Primary research literature
- Grey literature, reviews and report documents
- Expert opinion
- Direct queries to applicants through DAFM
- Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997
- Aquaculture (Licence Application) Regulations, 1998, as amended
- Ireland's Marine Atlas, Marine Institute
- MI/BIM Inshore fishing reports (from websites)
- DHPLG Foreshore licencing database
- Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA)
- EPA GeoHive
- EPA maps tool
- NPWS Article 17 Reports - Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland
- Birdwatch Ireland website
- Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS)
- EC Article 12 web tool on population status and trends of birds
- Marine Life Information Network
- EPA Catchments.ie dashboard
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI)
- National Biodiversity Data Centre
- European Environmental agency
- OPR, 2021. Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management. March 2021; Office of Planning Regulator.

- Official Journal of the EU. 2021. Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive.
- 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.
- NPWS (2019). The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 1: Summary Overview. Edited by: Deirdre Lynn and Fionnuala O'Neill
- NPWS (2019). The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 2: Habitat Assessments. Edited by: Deirdre Lynn and Fionnuala O'Neill
- NPWS (2019). The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 3: Species Assessments. Edited by: Deirdre Lynn and Fionnuala O'Neill
- 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.
- 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.
- Federal Agency for Nature Conservation for the FFH impact assessment
- MI 2023 a-h, ABPMer. Tools for Appropriate Assessment of Fishing and Aquaculture Activities in Marine and Coastal Natura 2000 Sites
- Marlin.ac.uk
- AMBI Sensitivity Scale
- MarESA
- Marine Institute. 2013. A risk assessment framework for fisheries in Natura 2000 sites in Ireland: with case study assessments. Version 1.3. Galway, 31pp.
- Open Street Maps, Google Earth, Navionics, and Bing aerial photography

1.5 Assumptions made for Appropriate Assessment Reports

Certain assumptions are made for this screening report as it applies to aquaculture licencing, 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:

- The aquaculture site considered in this assessment report is assumed to be fully operational and that the operations (as well as environmental impacts) are occurring across the entire area of the site, according to the stated production plan.
- Any aquaculture applications (for consideration of in-combination effects) which were submitted prior to that being considered here, but still pending decisions (e.g., in process, under appeal, etc.), are also assumed to be fully operational of the relevant sites.
- Other assumptions identified on a case-by-case basis are communicated in the relevant section of the report.

2 Appropriate Assessment Screening

2.1 Assessment of Aquaculture Activities

The Marine Institute has been requested to review an application for aquaculture licence site code T09-127 (review and renewal) and a foreshore licence, for intensive salmon aquaculture activities at Clifden Bay, Co. Galway.

This section identifies, in detail, the proposed aquaculture activities to be considered as part of the screening exercise in this report and then considers whether the proposed activities are likely to significantly affect the QIs of the Natura 2000 sites, in view of their Conservation Objectives (COs).

This is achieved by following the Screening Process as outlined in Section 2. If there is potential for the activities considered to have likely significant effects on the QI and their conservation features, they will be carried forward for a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment. These activities are considered in combination with similar aquaculture practices and on a cumulative basis with other aquaculture activities and other potentially impacting activities (e.g. fisheries).

2.1.1 Details of Proposed Aquaculture Activities

The applicant for this licence is Ardbear Salmon Ltd. The Hawk's Nest site has been operational for more than 35 years. The production will follow MOWI's Standard operating procedures (SOPS). The licence review requests a licence:

- To amend the current licence operating conditions of an annual harvest of 100 t of salmon to a harvest of 200 t of salmon every 24 months (a 17-month growing period with a 7-month fallow period before the next production cycle begins) and to have a maximum allowable biomass of 420 t.
- A maximum allowable biomass of 420 T
- To amend the site size from 3.6 ha of 6.2 ha

A total of 10 pens are being applied for in a 2x5 formation (according to the schematics provided with the application form, the application form itself states 8 pens are being applied for). Pens will have a 90 m circumference and net depth to the cone of 10 m (net mesh size 16-22 mm^2). Total cubic capacity would be approximately 6400 m^3 per pen. The maximum stocking density within the pen will be 10kg/m^3.

The Hawk's Nest site will be used in conjunction with the Ardbear and Curhownagh sites all operated by Ardbear Salmon Ltd and Mannin Salmon Ltd. The overall proposed production operates on a 2-year cycle over the 3 sites as described below.

In October Y1 (month 1), 200,000 smolts (11-month-old MOWI stock from Douglas Valley Hatchery or Lough Altan) will be inputted to the Hawk's Nest site. In month 14, a proportion of the stock (approximately 100 t) will be transferred from the Hawk's Nest site to the Ardbear site. In months 15 and 16 approximately 200 tonnes of fish will be harvested. In month 17 (February Y2), the remaining fish at the Hawk's Nest site (approximately 280 t) will be transferred to the Curhownagh site (T09-140). The site will remain fallow from February until the input of smolt at the start of the next production cycle in October (7 months).

Harvesting will take place after fish have been tested for quality parameters and have been starved for at least 60 degree-days prior to harvest. The harvest boat will be moored in a secure manner and

fish will be transferred to the de-watering table by fish pump and passed into a percussion holding chamber where they are directed towards percussion hammers for stunning. Once stunned, fish are passed through the bleeding unit. Fish are then pumped from the hold for transfer to the bulk tanker. The blood water in the bleeding unit shall be disinfected by adding 50 mL of Virkon to the water prior to discharge. It is then pumped into a tanker which is taken to the processing plant for disposal in accordance with the licenced conditions.

The fish will be fed a dry pellet, produced to organic standards, by feed-barge. The pellet utilises a limited selection of raw materials, mainly comprising trimmings-derived fish meals and marine oils, organic wheat and other organic plant raw materials, natural pigments, natural antioxidants, and only organic-approved vitamins and minerals. The barge is filled by boats from the shore facility. The site will be accessed by boat from the private Mannin Bay Salmon Company Ltd. pier in Drinagh.

2.2 Identification of Relevant Natura 2000 Sites and QIs

Based on NPWS guidance[11], SACs within 15 km are considered as within the zone of influence of the project. The proposed site does not overlap with any SACs or SPAs. A key consideration as to whether or not an activity is likely to significantly affect Natura 2000 QI is if there is a pathway of connectivity between the QI and the sources of potential impacts associated with the activity. The relevant Natura 2000 sites (Table 1 and Table 2) and their QIs or conservation features, as well as their objectives and targets are detailed in the next sections.

2.2.1 SACs

A list of SACs that could be potentially affected by the proposed project have been identified and are listed in Table 1, and displayed in Figure 2. Their details and QIs are listed and tabulated below.

Table 1 List and details of Natura sites adjacent to the area of the proposed activity.

Natura site	Site code	Distance from Natura site at nearest point (km)	Reference
Slyne Head Peninsula SAC	002074	1.6	Link
West Connacht Coast SAC	002998	2.4	Link
The Twelve Bens/ Garraun complex SAC	002031	2.8	Link
Connemara Bog Complex SAC	002034	3.1	Link
Kingstown Bay SAC	002265	3.9	Link
Slyne Head Islands SAC	000328	6	Link
Barnahallia Lough SAC	002118	6.1	Link
Omey Island Machair SAC	001309	7.2	Link
Aughrusbeg Machair and Lake SAC	001228	9.2	Link
Murvey Machair SAC	002129	10.9	Link
Tully Mountain SAC	000330	10.9	Link

[11] DEHLG, 2009. Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. Link

Tully Lough SAC	002130	12.2	Link
Dog's Bay SAC	001257	13.4	Link
Rusheenduff Lough SAC	001311	13.7	Link
Cregduff Lough SAC	001251	13.8	Link
Rosroe Bog SAC	000324	14.3	Link
Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC	000278	14.5	Link

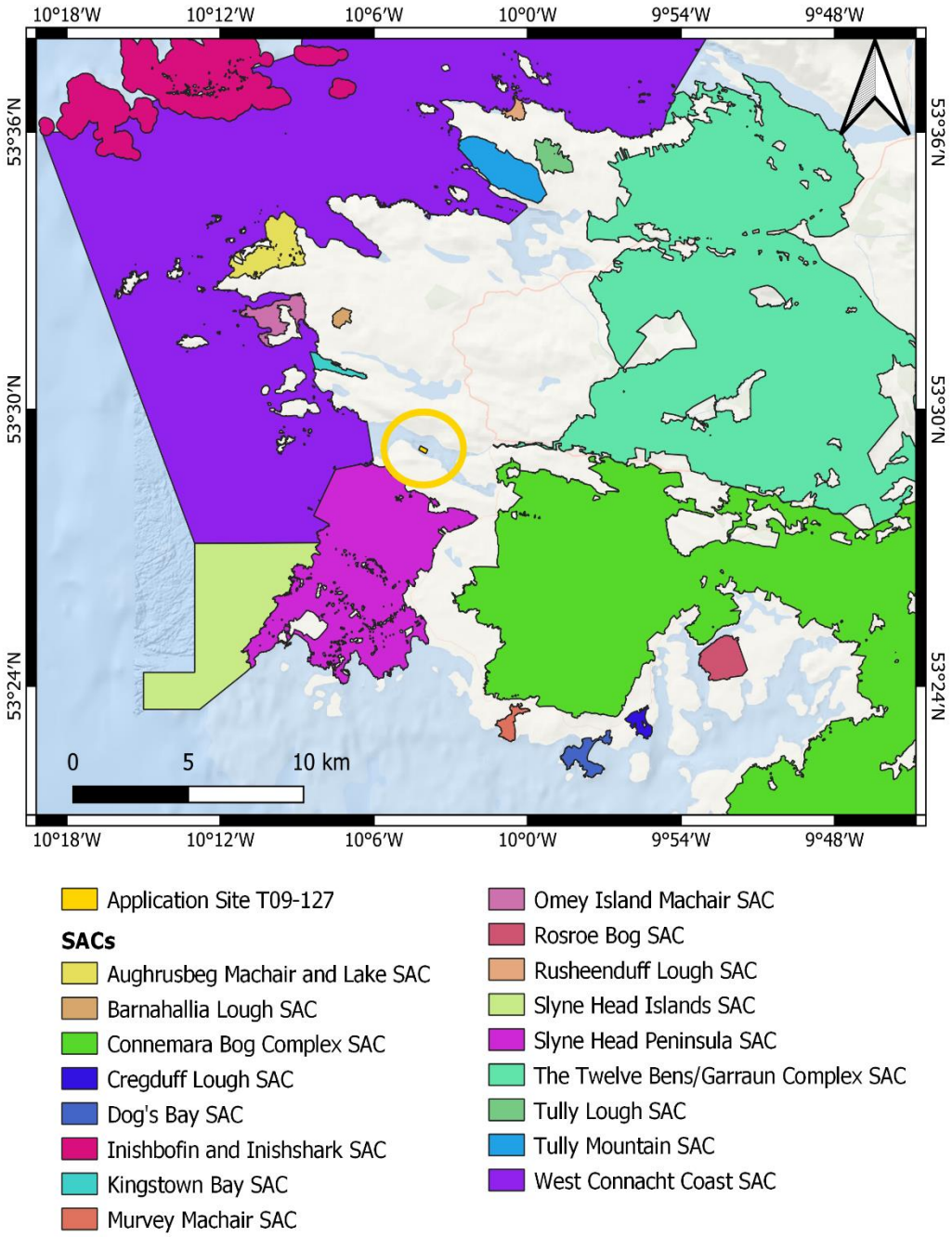


Figure 1 SACs within the zone of influence of the proposed site, Hawk's Nest application site T09-127 in yellow circle.

2.2.1.1 Slyne Head Peninsula SAC

This site comprises the peninsula west of Ballyconneely, Co. Galway. It extends northwards to Errislannan Point to include the shallow waters of Mannin Bay. The peninsula is low-lying and undulating, reaching a maximum height of only 64 m (Doon Hill). The underlying rock is predominantly gneiss, except for schist along the northern shores of Mannin Bay, a granite ridge along the western edge of the peninsula and a conspicuous basalt exposure which forms Doon Hill. The peninsula is fringed with rocky shores and sandy beaches, with some extensive areas of machair and several brackish lakes and lagoons. Inland, the site is a maze of small fields, supporting a mosaic of habitats dominated by grassland and heath, interspersed with numerous lakes and associated swamp, marsh and fen. An important feature of the site is the influence of windblown calcareous sand on these habitats. Mannin Bay is an excellent example of a large shallow bay, with a wide range of sediment types. The islets and rocks at the mouth of the bay give some shelter from Atlantic swells. Conditions become more sheltered towards the head of the bay and are extremely sheltered in Mannin Creek. Tidal streams are weak. Mannin Bay is almost unique as a very large proportion of the bay is dominated by a combination of maerl debris and living maerl. Machair is particularly well developed and forms extensive plains at Mannin Beg and Aillebrack. The machair gives way to bare sand in places with embryonic shifting dunes. Brackish lakes and lagoons are a feature of this site. These include Ballyconneelly Lake, Lough Silverhill, Lough Aillebrack South and Lough Athola. These lakes are shallow, with sandy bottoms and shores, and may be directly connected to the sea. They all receive sea spray and during storms may be flooded by the sea. The largest freshwater lake is Lough Anaserd, a typical oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) lake surrounded by heathland. Lough Aillebrack is considered to be a good example of a hard water lake with Chara formations. Much of the inland peninsula consists of small fields which contain a complex mosaic of habitats ranging from dry grassland, hay meadow and heath, through to wet grassland and marsh.

2.2.1.2 West Connacht Coast SAC

This site consists of a substantial area of marine waters lying off the coasts of Counties Mayo and Galway in the west of Ireland. Comprising two parts, in its northern component the site extends from the coastal waters off Erris Head westwards beyond Eagle Island and the Mullet Peninsula in Co. Mayo. From there it extends southwards immediately off the coast as far as the entrance to Blacksod Bay. In its southern component, the site stretches from Clare Island and the outer reaches of Clew Bay at Old Head and continues southwards off the Mayo coast to the Connemara coast near Clifden and Ballyconneely, Co Galway. Predominantly coastal in nature, the site extends westwards into Atlantic continental shelf waters up to approximately 7-11 km from the mainland, although in its southern component it remains mostly inshore of the main islands: Clare Island, Inishturk, Inishbofin and Inishshark. Its area contains subtidal waters fringing these and other islands, as well as islets and rocky skerries off the Co. Mayo and Co. Galway coasts. The site encompasses a diverse range of shallow marine habitats occurring in waters less than 100 m deep. These include a variety of seabed structures including reefs, islets and sedimentary basins. The site contains physical and hydrographic features believed to be important for Bottle-nosed Dolphin. These features include shallow coastal bays, areas of steep seafloor topography and complex areas of strong current flow adjacent to estuaries, coastal headlands and islands, sandbanks, shoals and reefs. Bottle-nosed Dolphin occurs within the site in all seasons and the area comprises a key habitat for the species both regionally and within Irish waters as a whole.

2.2.1.3 Connemara Bog Complex SAC

The Connemara Bog Complex SAC is a large site encompassing the majority of the south Connemara lowlands in Co. Galway. The site is bounded to the north by the Galway–Clifden road and stretches as far east as the Moycullen–Spiddal road. The site supports a wide range of habitats, including extensive tracts of western blanket bog, which form the core interest, as well as areas of heath, fen, woodlands, lakes, rivers and coastal habitats.

2.2.1.4 Kingstown Bay SAC

Kingstown Bay is a small, narrow bay situated approximately 7 km north-west of Clifden and south of Streamstown Bay, Co. Galway. It is an unusually shallow bay that is about 3 km long and 500 m wide at the mouth. The north-westerly aspect of the bay and the offshore islands of Omey, Inishturk and Turbot at the mouth afford shelter from Atlantic swells. Conditions become even more sheltered towards the head of the bay where the sediment is muddy. Currents within the bay can be moderately strong.

2.2.1.5 Slyne Head Islands SAC

This site comprises a long archipelago of islands, islets, rocks and reefs located off the western shores and south-western tip of the Slyne Head Peninsula in Co. Galway. The surrounding shallow marine areas are also included as part of the site. The islands are mostly low-lying and have a covering of a grassy maritime turf. A few sandy coves occur on the larger islands, along with shingle. The islands are uninhabited apart from an automated lighthouse on Illaunamid. Slyne Head Islands SAC contains excellent examples of reefs, ranging from those extremely exposed to wave action to more sheltered ones. The complexity of the islands helps provide a good range of habitat conditions, and many typical communities are present. The site contains an important breeding colony of Grey Seal, the breeding population is estimated at 238- 306 individuals (in 2005). A one-off moult count in 2007 gave a figure of 162 seals. Waters within the site also support groups of the Annex II species Bottle-nose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) that are likely to be part of a population inhabiting the west and north coasts of Connacht and which numbers at least 177-337 dolphins. Group sizes of up to 12 individual dolphins have been recorded within the site and sighting records have predominantly occurred in September. The islands also support important colonies of breeding seabirds.

2.2.1.6 Barnahallia Lough SAC

This small site is situated about 7 km north-west of Clifden, Co. Galway, and within 2 km of the Atlantic coast. It comprises a small lake, Barnahallia Lough, situated in a depression at the bottom of the steep slope of Barnahallia Hill, immediately to the east, which rises to 106 m. It is surrounded by blanket bog, heath, acid grassland vegetation and exposed rock. The lake is fed by a small stream in the south-west corner. A second stream exits to the west. The bed of the lake is gravelly in places. The lake is a good example of an oligotrophic system. On the western side, the lake merges gradually into reedswamp, fen and blanket bog. Of particular note is the presence of Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*) in the lough.

2.2.1.7 Omey Island Machair SAC

Omey Island lies 9 km north-west of Clifden on the Connemara coast in Co. Galway. An area of sandflats some 300 m wide separates it from the mainland. Most of the northern and western sides of the island support unfenced machair and dry sandy grassland, while the remainder of the island is dominated by small agricultural holdings. Omey Island holds one of the largest remaining areas of machair in Co. Galway. Fahy Lough, in the central area of the island and adjacent to the machair plain,

is a shallow freshwater lake. This is a good example of a hard water lake and supports a very diverse charophyte flora (including *Chara aspera*, a dwarf form of *C. contraria*, C*. globularis*, *C. rudis* and *C. desmacantha*). Other habitats on the site include sandy beaches, boulder beaches and sand dunes. Recently, a population of Petalwort (*Petalophyllum ralfsii*) has been discovered on Omey Island. Between 15 and 20 Chough are regularly seen feeding on the machair and dry grassland.

2.2.1.8 Aughrusbeg Machair and Lake SAC

Aughrusbeg Machair and Lake is located about 2 km west of Cleggan, Co. Galway. It is a large coastal site with a diversity of habitats, including machair and a nutrient-poor lake. Surrounding the lake on its northern, southern and eastern sides are areas of good quality wet heath, intermixed with areas of dry heath associated with rock outcrops. An area of machair separates the lake from the sea. Saltmarsh vegetation occurs in association with the large sea inlet at Aughrus Beg. Here saltmarsh communities merge inland with dry heath vegetation on the higher ground. Other habitats present within the site include rocky shore, sandy beach, shingle beach, intertidal sandflats and open marine areas.

2.2.1.9 Tully Mountain SAC

Tully Mountain is located on the northern side of Ballynakill Harbour, approximately 5 km north-west of Letterfrack, Co. Galway. The principal heath type at Tully Mountain SAC is dry heath which occurs mostly in mosaic with bare vegetation, rocks and upland grassland. A form of dry heath dominated by low Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) is found on steep ground at the south-east of the site. Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) occurs sparsely throughout this area and the heath also supports a carpet of mosses. There are also a number of upland lakes, notably Loughaun Lake which is at an altitude of approximately 290 m and supports abundant aquatic vegetation including Floating Bur-reed (*Sparganium angustifolium*).

2.2.1.10 Tully Lough SAC

Tully Lough is situated in Connemara, Co. Galway, approximately 4 km north-west of Letterfrack and just over 1 km from the coast. Tully Mountain (peak 357 m) towers above the site to the south-west. It is a small to medium-sized oligotrophic lake set in a landscape of bog and pasture. A stream enters at the west end of the lake and another exits at the east end and flows to the sea. The shoreline of Tully Lough is stony in parts but otherwise fringed by swamp or marsh vegetation. The aquatic vegetation is typically oligotrophic. The lake has one large island, Heath Island, and several smaller ones. Mixed scrubby woodland occurs on these islands, mainly Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), willows (*Salix* spp.), the invasive species Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and several exotic conifers. The Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) also occurs. The house which occurs on Heath Island is a roost site for a nationally important breeding colony of Natterer's Bat – 140 bats were counted in 1992. The bats forage amongst the woodland on the island but also visit the mainland.

2.2.1.11 Rosroe Bog SAC

Rosroe Bog is situated in the north-western corner of the largest peninsula in Bertraghboy Bay, Connemara, Co. Galway. It is bounded on both the northern and western sides by the waters of the bay and on the southern and eastern sides by granitic ridges rising to about 50 m above sea level. The site is characterised by gently undulating areas of blanket bog interrupted by scattered rocky ridges, often with heath, and contains two small lakes, Rosroe Lough and White Lough. The wettest and least disturbed areas of the bog at Rosroe Bog SAC have well-developed bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) lawns, though no natural pool systems occur. The bog vegetation grades into dry heath, which is found mostly in the southern and western parts of the site.

2.2.1.12 Cregduff Lough SAC

Cregduff Lough is a small coastal lake located 1 km south-west of Roundstone village in Co. Galway. The lake occupies a hollow in rocky, heath-covered, undulating terrain. The bottom of the lake is unconsolidated muddy material and about 60% of the water surface is covered by a scraw of reedswamp vegetation (i.e. It is floating). Encroachment by vegetation has progressed to such a level that there are virtually no areas of open water remaining in the northern half of the lake. The site contains two Red Data Book plant species that are also legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999 - Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*) and Slender Cottongrass (*Eriophorum gracile*). Cregduff Lough is an excellent example of an infilling lake, and one that supports a good diversity of vegetation types ranging from open water communities, to quaking transition mire, to species-rich freshwater marsh vegetation

2.2.1.13 Dog's Bay SAC

Dog's Bay is located 3.5 km south-west of Roundstone village in Co. Galway. The site includes a granite 'island' which is linked to the mainland by a sandy spit, a feature which is known as a tombolo. Dog's Bay curves along the west side of this tombolo, with Gorteen Bay to the east. The sands are formed of Foraminfera shells, the calcareous remains of tiny, single-celled marine animals. At Dog's Bay SAC, fixed dune vegetation occurs as a relatively narrow strip between the mainland and the small island. Given the amount of ongoing erosion here, the fixed dune is likely to be a remnant of a once larger system. The other sand dune habitats at the site are more typical of embryonic shifting dunes and Marram dunes, and these occur along both sides of the Dog's Bay promontory. Although the habitat stretches for some considerable length (up to 300 m), the width rarely exceeds 25 m and there are considerable amounts of bare sand present. Substantial areas of dry heath occur on the rocky headland in the south-west of the site, where the habitat forms a mosaic with rock outcrops and grassland. The diversity of this site is added to by the presence of wetland areas, including brackish pools and a freshwater marsh.

2.2.1.14 Murvey Machair SAC

Murvey Machair SAC is located on the coast approximately 6.5 km west of Roundstone in Co. Galway. The main habitat at this site is hill machair, with a typically herb-rich sward characterised by species such as Red Fescue (Festuca rubra), Daisy (Bellis perennis), plantains (Plantago *coronopus* and *P. lanceolata*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) and mosses (e.g. *Tortula ruraliformis* and Brachythecium albicans). Seepage zones and damp hollows also occur and support abundant sedges, mosses, Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) and Creeping Bent (Agrostis stolonifera). A population of the rare bryophyte Petalwort (*Petalophyllum ralf*sii) has recently been discovered associated with the machair habitat. The northern part of the site contains two loughs. These lakes contain two rare plant species - Slender Cottongrass (*Eriophorum gracile*) and Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*). Both are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, and listed in the Irish Red Data Book.

2.2.1.15 Twelve Bens/ Garraun Complex SAC

This is an extensive site situated in the north-west of Connemara in Co. Galway and dominated by mountainous terrain. The site is bounded to the south by the Connemara Bog Complex, to the east by the Maumturk Mountains and to the north by Killary Harbour. Included within the site are the Twelve Bens mountain range, the mountains to the north of Kylemore (Doughruagh, Garraun and Benchoona), rivers including the Ballynahinch and Owenglin systems and an area of coastal heath and

machair near Glassilaun. The site also includes some extensive tracts of lowland blanket bog which are continuous with the mountains. Irish Hare, Common Frog, Otter and Freshwater Pearl Mussel and have been recorded from the site. Bird species reported from the site include Raven, Wheatear, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, Red Grouse (a declining species of heather moorland), Snipe, Curlew, Woodcock, Hooded Crow, Twite, Ring Ouzel (the latter two both Irish Red Data Book species) and the E.U. Birds Directive Annex I species: Peregrine, Merlin, Golden Plover and Chough.

2.2.1.16 Rusheenduff Lough SAC

Rusheenduff Lough is a small coastal lake located 3 km north-west of Tully Cross, Co. Galway. It is separated from the sea by a narrow shingle bar which forms part of the site. It is a shallow lake, not exceeding 3 m in depth, and its bed is stony around the edges. Bordering the lake to its south-west is an area that includes a mosaic of habitats including dry grassland, heath, wet grassland and freshwater marsh. Rusheenduff Lough is an important site as it comprises a good example of an oligotrophic to mesotrophic lake and supports populations of the rare plant species Slender Naiad and Hydrilla. The presence of Pipewort in the lake is also of note.

2.2.1.17 Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC

This site is situated off the Co. Galway coast, about 5.5 km from the mainland. It comprises two main islands, Inishbofin and Inishshark, with several islets and stacks. Part of the surrounding marine waters are also included. There are many areas of relatively intact dry heath present on Inishbofin, particularly around the middle and eastern quarter of the island. The largest waterbody, Lough Bofin, has a brackish character and is classified as a lagoon. A small area of sand dune occurs at the eastern side of the island. The site supports a breeding colony of Grey Seal; the breeding population is estimated at 749-963 individuals (in 2005). A one-off moult count in 2007 gave a figure of 270 seals.

2.2.2 SPAs

The MI engaged a consultant (WS Atkins Ireland Limited) to carry out the process for SPAs in the zone of effect of the site. This review considered SPAs within 50 km of the sites within Clifden Bay, and considered the full list of QIs for each SPA, based on the latest NPWS documents. Table 2 gives the list of identified SPAs, with Figure 2 showing their locations in relation to the proposed site.

Table 2 List and details of SPAs overlapping or adjacent to the area of the proposed activity.

Natura site - SPAs	Site code	Distance from Natura site at nearest point (km)	Reference
Bills Rock SPA	004177	43.3	Link
Connemara Bog Complex SPA	004181	4.3	Link
Clare Island SPA	004136	33.7	Link
Cross Lough (Killadoon) SPA	004212	26.5	Link
Cruagh Island SPA	004170	9.6	Link
High Island, Inishshark and Davillaun SPA	004144	13.4	Link
Illaunnanoon SPA	004221	9.6	Link
Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island SPA	004231	4.6	Link
Inishmore SPA	004152	39	Link

Lough Corrib SPA	004042	34.9	Link
Lough Mask SPA	004062	37	Link
Owenduff/Nephin Complex SPA	004098	50	Link
Slyne Head to Ardmore Point SPA	004159	8	Link

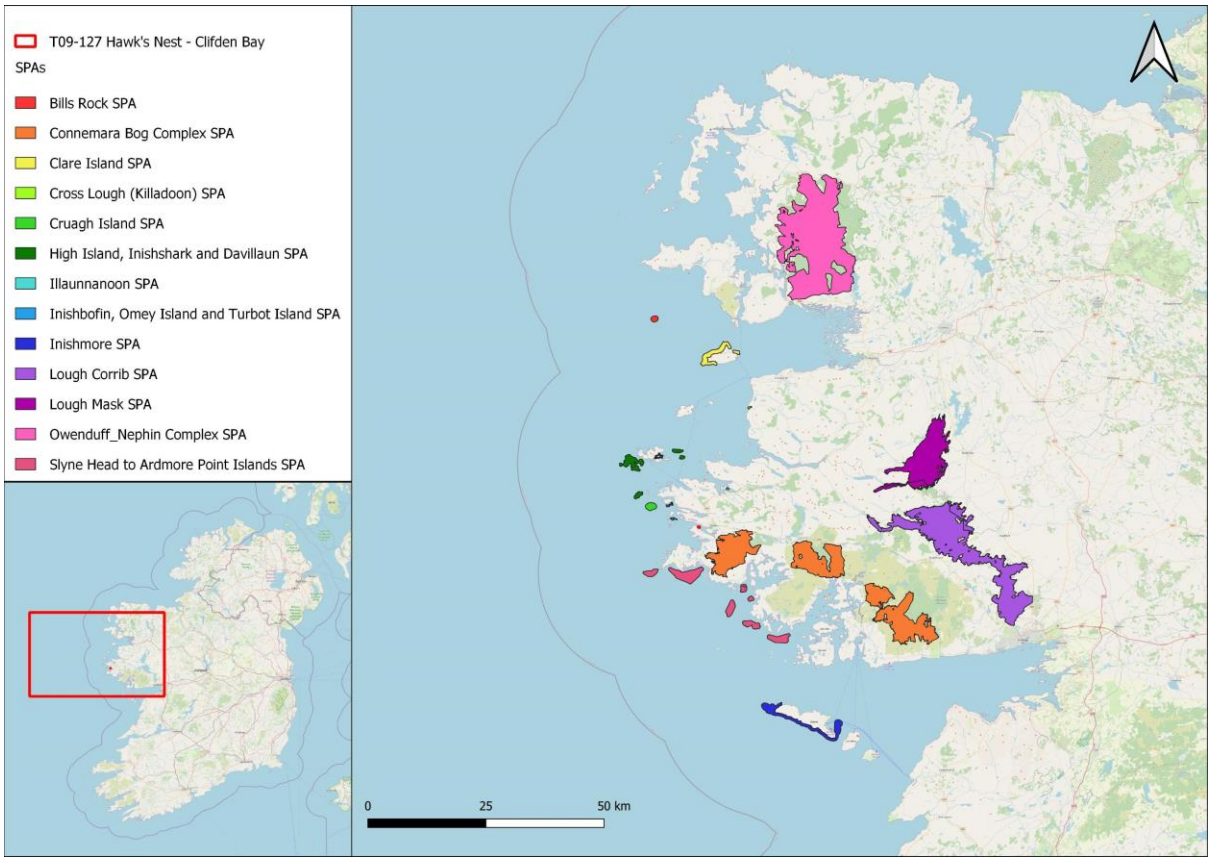


Figure 2 Map of SPAs within 50 km of proposed aquaculture activities at T09-127.

Detail of the process is provided in the full report, which is attached to this report as an Appendix.

2.3 Screening of QIs

A key consideration as to whether or not an activity is likely to significantly affect Natura 2000 QIs, is if there is a pathway of connectivity between the QI and the sources of potential impacts associated with the activity. The QIs could be at risk of effects where a Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) link exists between the proposed activities and the conservation features of the site, and the risk cannot be dismissed (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Example Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) link diagram.

The S-P-R model considers potential ecological links between the proposed activity and the qualifying interest of Natura 2000 site. The link can be direct and facilitated by terrestrial, aquatic and airborne transfer of a particular pressure, or the nature and location of the activity may be indirect and interact at a functional level, and impact on behaviour or resource acquisition of a qualifying interest[12].

The screening for the presence of a S-P-R link and any potential significant effects of the proposed aquaculture activities on the QIs of the Natura will be presented in this Section. A screening assessment is an initial evaluation of the existence of S-P-R links between the proposed activities and any likely significant effects on the QIs. In this assessment, screening of the QIs against the proposed activities is, in the first instance, considered on the basis of direct spatial overlap. Indirect effects are also considered whereby the likely impact of the activity on behaviour or resources required by mobile species (mammals and birds, among others) is considered. Also considered are indirect effects facilitated by hydrological or other potential links (e.g. foraging range).

Where there is spatial overlap and reasonable potential for likely significant effects on QIs to arise, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is warranted. In the instance where there is no spatial overlap between an activity and a QI, and no likely direct or indirect interactions apparent, the activity, therefore, may be screened out. If there is marginal spatial overlap but no reasonable potential for significant effects on QIs to arise then the activity may also be screened out.

The QIs of the adjacent Natura 2000 sites listed above could be at risk of effects where a S-P-R link exists between the proposed activities and the QIs of the site. The screening for the presence of a S-P-R link and any potential significant effects of the proposed aquaculture activities on the QIs of adjacent SACs and SPAs is presented here. The screening is undertaken without the inclusion of any mitigation measures.

2.3.1 Screening of QIs in the Relevant SACs

2.3.1.1 Screening of QIs of Adjacent Natura 2000 Sites

Guidance has indicated that a screening exercise might consider the likely interactions between the QIs of Natura 2000 sites within a standard distance of 15 km from the proposed activity[13]. While this guide value of 15 km can inform for habitats and also, for species with defined ranges, they may not apply to migratory species (e.g. some fishes or mammals) or those with large foraging ranges (e.g.

[12] Office of Planning Regulator, (2021). Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management. March 2021. 43pp
[13] NPWS. 2009 Threat Response Plan: Otter (2009-2011). National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, Dublin.

birds and mammals). Such species may interact with the proposed activity as a result of the structures impacting their migratory route or impacting on their foraging behaviour, among other effects. It is important such species are identified and the potential interactions should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The screening of the QIs of adjacent Natura 2000 SAC sites is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 SAC Natura sites adjacent (within 15km) to the area of the proposed activity, with their QI, CF, objectives, and screening outcomes.

Natura 2000 site	QIs and Conservation Features	Conservation Objective	Screening Outcomes	Screening Outcome
Slyne Head Peninsula SAC (0020074)	Coastal lagoons [1150]	Restore	In	The Slyne Head Peninsula SAC is approximately 1.6 km from the proposed aquaculture activities. Due to the proximity of the aquaculture site to these marine habitats, there is potential for significant effects. Coastal lagoons, Large shallow inlets and bays, and Reefs are carried forward to Stage 2.
	Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]	Maintain	In	
	Reefs [1170]	Maintain	In	
	Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]	Maintain	Out	Given the predominantly terrestrial and/or freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC and these QIs, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and therefore no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220]	Maintain	Out	
	Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) [1330]	Restore	Out	
	Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) [1410]	Restore	Out	
	Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]	Restore	Out	
	Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes) [2120]	Restore	Out	
	Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0]	Restore	Out	
	Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*) [3110]	Maintain	Out	
	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]	Maintain	Out	
	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp. [3140]	Maintain	Out	
	European dry heaths [4030]	Maintain	Out	
	Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]	Maintain	Out	

	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	Maintain	Out	
	Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*) [6410]	Maintain	Out	
	Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*) [6510]	Maintain	Out	
	Alkaline fens [7230]	Maintain	Out	
	Petalophyllum ralfsii (Petalwort) [1395]	Maintain	Out	
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Maintain	Out	
	Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Maintain	In	There is potential for the transient species, *Tursiops truncatus,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Common Bottlenose Dolphin is carried forward to Stage 2.
West Connacht Coast SAC (002998)	*Tursiops truncatus* (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]	Maintain	In	There is potential for the transient species, *Tursiops truncatus,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Common Bottlenose Dolphin is carried forward to Stage 2.
	Phocoena Phocoena (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]		In	There is potential for the transient species, *Phocoena phocoena,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Harbour Porpoise is carried forward to Stage 2.
Slyne Head Islands SAC (000328)	Reefs [1170]	Maintain	In	The Slyne Head Islands SAC is approximately 6 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities and the terrestrial QIs in the SAC. it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are therefore screened out.
	Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]		In	There is potential for the transient species, *Tursiops truncatus,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Common Bottlenose Dolphin is carried forward to Stage 2.
	Halichoerus grypus (Grey Seal) [1364]	Maintain	In	There is potential for the transient species, *Haliochoerus grypus,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Grey Seal is carried forward to Stage 2.

Connemara Bog Complex SAC (002034)	Coastal lagoons [1150]	Maintain	In	The Connemara Bog Complex SAC is approximately 3.1 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. Due to the proximity of the aquaculture site to these marine habitats, there is potential for significant effects, therefore the QIs Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] and Reefs [1170] are carried forward to Stage 2.
	Reefs [1170]	Maintain	In	
	Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*) [3110]	Maintain	Out	These QIs are freshwater features upstream from the aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these terrestrial Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and therefore no significant effects posed by the proposed aquaculture on these QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of *Littorelletea uniflorare* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]	Maintain	Out	
	Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds [3160]	Maintain	Out	
	Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation [3260]	Maintain	Out	
	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]	Restore	Out	Given the predominantly terrestrial and freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these terrestrial Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the proposed aquaculture on these QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	European dry heaths [4030]	Restore	Out	
	Molinia meadows won calcareous, peaty of clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*) [6410]	Maintain	Out	
	Blanket bogs (*if active bogs) [7130]	Restore	Out	
	Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]	Restore	Out	
	Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion* [7150]	Restore	Out	

	Alkaline fens [7230]	Restore	Out	
	Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles [91A0]	Maintain	Out	
	Euphydryas aurinia (Marsh Fritillary) [1065]	Maintain	Out	
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Maintain	Out	
	Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]	Restore	In	There is potential for the migratory species, *Salmo salar,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Salmon is carried forward to Stage 2.
	Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]	Maintain	In	There is potential for the species, *Lutra lutra*, to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Otter is carried forward to Stage 2.
Kingstown Bay SAC (002265)	Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]	Maintain	Out	The Kingstown Bay SAC is approximately 3.9 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities and the terrestrial QIs in the SAC. It is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
Barnahallia Lough SAC (002118)	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]	Maintain	Out	The Barnahallia Lough SAC is approximately 6.1 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities and the terrestrial QIs in the SAC. it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Maintain	Out	
Omey Island Machair SAC (001309)	Machairs (*in Ireland) [21A0]	Restore	Out	The Omey Island Machair SAC is approximately 7.2 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities and the terrestrial QIs in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and therefore no significant effects posed by the aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp. [3140]	Maintain	Out	
	Petalophyllum ralfsii (Petalwort) [1395]	Maintain	Out	
	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the	Maintain	Out	The Aughrusbeg Machair and Lake SAC is approximately 9.2 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely

Aughrusbeg Machair and Lake SAC (001228)	*Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]			interactions identified between aquaculture activities and the terrestrial QIs in the SAC. It is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]	Maintain	Out	
Cregduff Lough SAC (001251)	Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]	Maintain	Out	The Cregduff Lough SAC is approximately 13.8 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities and the terrestrial QIs in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Maintain	Out	
Dog's Bay SAC (001257)	Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210]	Restore	Out	The Dog's Bay SAC is located 13.4 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. There is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC., It is considered that there are not clear SPR links with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of these Natura sites. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Embryonic shifting dunes [2110]	Maintain	Out	
	Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenariae* (white dunes) [2120]	Restore	Out	
	Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]	Restore	Out	
	European dry heaths [4030]	Maintain	Out	
Murvey Machair SAC (002129)	Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0]	Restore	Out	The Murvey Machair SAC is located approximately 10.9 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. Given the predominantly terrestrial and freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Petalophyllum ralfsii (Petalwort) [1395]	Maintain	Out	

The Twelve Bens/ Garraun Complex SAC (002031)	Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*) [3110]	Maintain	Out	The Twelve Bens/ Garraun Complex SAC is located approximately 2.8 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. The freshwater QIs are upstream from the proposed aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly terrestrial and upstream freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]	Maintain	Out	
	Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]	Restore	Out	
	Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]	Restore	Out	
	Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion* [7150]	Restore	Out	
	Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*) [8110]	Restore	Out	
	Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210]	Restore	Out	
	Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]	Restore	Out	
	Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles [91A0]	Maintain	Out	
	Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]	Restore	In	Due to the potential interaction with migrating host fish used by this Annex II Species with proposed aquaculture activities, Freshwater Pearl Mussel is carried forward to Stage 2
	Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]	Maintain	In	There is potential for the migratory species, *Salmo salar,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Salmon is carried forward to Stage 2.
	Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]	Maintain	Out	The proposed aquaculture activities are 10.2 km from the closest boundary of the otter habitat of this SAC. Due to the lack of spatial overlap with the preferred habitat of the otter and the proposed aquaculture activities, there is no SPR link identified for this QI and the proposed activities.
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Maintain	Out	This is an upstream freshwater species with no spatial overlap with the proposed activities. There is no SPR link identified between the proposed activities and this QI.

Rusheen Duff Lough SAC (001311)	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]	Maintain	Out	The Rusheen Duff Lough SAC is located approximately 13.7 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. The freshwater QIs are upstream from the proposed aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly terrestrial and upstream freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Maintain	Out	
Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC (000278)	Coastal lagoons [1150]	Restore	Out	Due to the distance between the proposed aquaculture activity and the Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC, there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between the activities and this marine QI. It is considered that there are no clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QI of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out for this SAC.
	Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*) [3110]	Maintain	Out	The Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC is located approximately 14.5 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. The freshwater QIs are upstream from the proposed aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly terrestrial and upstream freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]	Restore	Out	
	European dry heaths [4030]	Restore	Out	
	Halichoerus grypus (Grey Seal) [1364]	Maintain	In	There is potential for the transient species, *Haliochoerus grypus,* to occur within the vicinity of the proposed project and may be affected by the operations, therefore, Grey Seal is carried forward to Stage 2.
Tully Mountain SAC (000330)	European dry heaths [4030]	Restore	Out	The Tully Mountain SAC is located approximately 10.9 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. The freshwater QIs are upstream from the proposed aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly terrestrial and upstream freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no
	Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]	Maintain	Out	

				significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are therefore screened out.
Tully Lough SAC (002130)	Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea* [3130]	Restore	Out	The Tully Lough SAC is located approximately 12.2 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. The freshwater QIs are upstream from the proposed aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly terrestrial and upstream freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad) [1833]	Restore	Out	
Rosroe Bog SAC (000324)	Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]	Restore	Out	The Rosrose SAC is located approximately 14.3 km from the closest boundary of the proposed aquaculture operation. The freshwater QIs are upstream from the proposed aquaculture activities. Given the predominantly terrestrial and upstream freshwater nature of the QIs (habitats and species) listed here for this SAC, and that there is no spatial overlap or likely interactions identified between aquaculture activities in the SAC, it is considered that there are not clear "source-path-receptor" interactions with these Annex I Habitats or Annex II Species and, therefore, no significant effects posed by the salmon aquaculture on the QIs of this Natura site. These QIs are, therefore, screened out.
	Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rynchosporion*	Restore	Out	

2.3.2 Screening of QIs in the Relevant SPAs

A Technical Review of Screening for Appropriate Assessment for SPA was carried out by WS Atkins Ireland Limited. The full report is attached as an Appendix in this report. The outcomes for this screening process for SPAs are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Screening outcomes for QI in relevant SPAs (by WS Atkins Ireland Limited)

Qualifying Species	Closest SPA	Screened	Comments
Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009]	13.4	In	There is overlap with the study area and feeding and breeding habitat of this species. This species is a breeding resident across Ireland along the coast, feeding on fish, crustaceans, and discards from trawlers. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]	43.3	In	There is no overlap with breeding habitat with a SPA (no suitable nesting habitat in the immediate vicinity of Hawk's Nest), however, breeding of this species occurs close by on Cruagh, Omey, Turbot, and Inishturk Islands. Unlikely to overlap with feeding habitat as this species usually feeds further out to sea. However, the study area does occur within the foraging range (65km) of this species as a QI for Bills Rock SPA, Duvillain Islands SPA, Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island SPA and Cruagh Island SPA. Applicant correctly Screened In
Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]	4.3	In	There is overlap of the study area with feeding habitat. The study area does not directly overlap with potentially suitable breeding areas but is in close proximity (c. 200m). Closest confirmed breeding of this species is on Dauvillaun Islands c.65km from the study area (NPWS, 2019) which lies 30km outside the foraging range of this species (Thaxter *et al*., 2012). Applicant correctly Screened In
Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A018]	33.7	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and breeding habitat. Clare Island SPA (c. 33.7km north) is designated for breeding Shag. Applicant correctly Screened In
Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395]	34.9	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat (nests in western Greenland). Offshore roosting is a feature of Greylag and Barnacle Geese, however, there are no records of this species roosting on islands in proximity to the study area within Clifden Bay. Greenland White-fronted Geese traditionally occurred in peatland areas, but now routinely use intensively managed grasslands to forage. There is no suitable grazing habitat in the vicinity of the Hawk's Bay site. Not a fish-eating species. Review Screened Out.
Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) [A045]	8.1	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Winter visitor to Ireland, breeding in Greenland. Offshore roosting is a feature of Barnacle Geese, however, there is no records of this species roosting on islands in

			proximity to the study area within Clifden Bay. Grazing species on coastal pastures; no suitable grazing habitat in the vicinity of Hawk's Bay site. Review Screened Out.
Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) [A051]	34.9	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Winter visitor to Ireland, breeding in Greenland. Offshore roosting is a feature of Barnacle Geese, however, there is no records of this species roosting on islands in proximity to the study area within Clifden Bay. Grazing species on coastal pastures; no suitable grazing habitat in the vicinity of Hawk's Bay site. Review Screened Out.
Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056]	34.9	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. While there is a historic sighting of a bird during the breeding season in 10km grid square L64 (which includes the south-eastern end of Clifden Bay), there are no current records (Source: BTO online atlases). Gadwall is a freshwater wetland duck species which feeds on a mixed diet of seeds, insects, and aquatic vegetation. Review Screened Out.
Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) [A059	34.9	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Wintering diving duck species with a diet dominated by plant material. Nests on the ground among waterside vegetation. Historic records of this species occur within L65 grid square from 1984; this includes the north-western part of Clifden Bay. No suitable breeding or foraging habitat in the vicinity of Hawk's Nest aquaculture site. Review Screened Out.
Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061]	34.9	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. This species shows a preference for large open freshwater lakes for breeding location; it can occur in estuarine waters during winter. While there are historic winter records from L64 and L65 (mainly from Ballconeely Bay), the environs of the Hawk's Nest site does not hold potential habitat for breeding, nor do any breeding records occur. Feeds predominantly on mussels with a strong preference for freshwater water. Review Screened Out.
Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) [A065]	34.9	Out	No overlap with breeding habitat (Heffernan and Hunt, 2022)[14]. Unlikely to affect summer population as nesting birds feed on freshwater lakes within which they breed. During winter, Common Scoter are largely present in Mayo in The Mullet, Broadhaven & Blacksod Bay SPA and off the north coast of Mayo. Not known to occur in large numbers in Clifden Bay. Depth at site is approximately 10m with gravelly sand to gravelly mud substrate which falls within the range of favoured feeding waters of Common Scoter (<20m). However, negative impacts are not anticipated in the absence of a population of scoter in this area. Review Screened Out.

14 15 Heffernan ML. & Hunt, J. (2022) Breeding Status of Common Scoter in Ireland, 2020. *Irish Wildlife Manuals*, No. 136 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Ireland.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082]	34.9	Out	Terrestrial species with no overlap with breeding habitat or associated feeding areas. Hen Harrier do occur more widely in winter months. While a small number of roving records have been noted from 10km grid square L64 (Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011), the immediate environs of the Hawks Nest application site do not support suitable habitat for winter foraging or roosting Hen Harrier. Review Screened Out.
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) [A098]	4.3	Out	Terrestrial species with no overlap with breeding habitat or associated feeding areas. Merlin do occur more widely in winter months and may occur along the coast where they feed on small birds. Merlin have been noted in 10km grid square L64 & L65 (Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011), but not in the immediate environs of the Hawks Nest application. Review Screened Out.
Corncrake (*Crex crex*) [A122]	4.6	Out	Terrestrial species which feeds on terrestrial invertebrates and plant material; no overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Records of breeding historically recorded within L65 grid square (most recently from 1972). Applicants correct to Screen Out.
Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125]	34.9	Out	No overlap with breeding or feeding habitat. Records exist within Clifden Bay (within L65 grid square from 1984). This species is omnivorous with a clear preference for plants and animals taken from the surface of large-sheltered bodies of water. Demonstrates a strong preference for large bodies of freshwater habitats. Review Screened Out.
Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]	4.3	In	Generally, breed in acidic grasslands, blanket bogs, and heather moors. Wintering birds can also occur on coastal and inland sites, often roosting on large estuaries, flying inland to feed in grassland sites. NBDC (BTO Atlases) – include numerous records of birds from within 10km grid square L64 and L65 – both of wintering birds and possible breeding birds. None of the latter sites are, however, close to Hawk's Nest or its associated land-based sites. There is, therefore, no overlap with breeding or feeding habitat of breeding birds. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) [A179]	34.9	In	No overlap with known breeding sites within an SPA. Potential to overlap with feeding habitat and to attract birds to the pens. Feed on insects in arable fields and will exploit domestic and fisheries waste. Applicant correctly Screened In
Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]	4.3	In	Potential overlap with breeding and feeding habitat. Potential for birds to be attracted to pens, feed on invertebrates, fish, and fisheries waste. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Lesser Blackbacked Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]	37	In	No overlap with known breeding sites / habitat. Overlap with feeding habitat. Potential for birds to be attracted to pens, feed on invertebrates, rubbish, young birds, fish, and fisheries waste. Applicant correctly Screened In.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188	33.7	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and has potential to attract birds to the pens. Feed on fish waste from commercial fishing and invertebrates. There is no overlap with breeding area. This species winters at open sea. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195]	8.1	In	No direct overlap with known feeding or breeding sites / habitats. Currently no known records in the area. Potential breeding habitat lies within close proximity to the site (c. 200m) on the mainland of Errislannan in Clifden Bay, giving rise to potential impacts to this species. Nests on the ground on shingle beaches. Feeds predominantly on marine fish. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]	8.1	In	No overlap with breeding sites. Does overlap with feeding habitat and foraging range (54km) from Illaunnanoon SPA, Cross Lough (Killadoon) SPA[15], and Blacksod Bay/Broad Haven SPA – of which this species is a QI. Feeds on surface-dwelling fish, taken from shallow dive. Potential to attract birds to pens. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]	34.9	Out	No overlap with known breeding sites / within an SPA; this species nests on the ground, breeding on the coast in large colonies and on some occasions on inland islets in freshwater lakes. The habitat surrounding the site is suitable for foraging, however, the site is outside the max foraging range for Common tern from the nearest SPA. As such there is no potential for impact and can be screened out. Applicant correctly Screened out.
Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]	8.1	In	No direct overlap with known breeding sites / habitat; however, recorded in close proximity to the application site (c. 200m, source NBDC 2km square recorded 2007-2011). Distribution does overlap with feeding habitat and foraging range (maximum 30km) from High Island, Inishark and Davillaun SPA, Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island SPA and Slyne Head to Ardmore Point SPA – of which this species is a QI. Slyne Head to Ardmore Point SPA is 8.1km from the site. Given presence of species, due to proximity to breeding and foraging habitat, and diet of fish, there is some potential to attract birds to pens (though application site is on the outer edge of this range). Wider autumnal movements also a consideration. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]	43.3	In	No overlap with breeding habitat. Study area does overlap with feeding habitat, lying within foraging range (200km) from Bills Rock SPA, Blasket Islands SPA, Cliffs of Moher SPA, Puffin Island SPA, Skelligs SPA, of which this species is a QI. Feed on marine fish and crustaceans. Applicant correctly Screened In.

[15] *Cross Lough SPA not currently known to support nesting Sandwich Tern.*

Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]	33.7	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and foraging area; feeds on small fish via surface diving, has the potential to attract birds to pens. No overlap with breeding habitat as the cages do not overlap with land. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200]	33.7	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and foraging area; feeds on small fish via surface diving, has the potential to attract birds to pens. No overlap with breeding habitat as the cages do not overlap with land. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) [A346]	33.7	Out	Licence site does not overlap with breeding habitat. Potential breeding habitat on mainland in proximity to the study area (records exist most recently from 2011). No overlap with feeding habitat (feeds predominantly on subterranean invertebrates in coastal grassland). Unlikely to be attracted to the farm pens due to their generally cautious behaviour. Review Screened Out.
Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013]	9.6	In	Overlap with feeding and foraging habitat. No overlap with breeding sites. Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species. Feed from the sea by diving for small fish, plankton, molluscs and crustaceans; potential for the birds to be attracted to pens. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) [A184]	68.5	In	No overlap with breeding habitat. Overlap with feeding and foraging habitat. Species feeds on marine fish, following fishing boats and uses landfill sites. Potential for birds to be attracted to pens. Identified in review due to long foraging range, Hawk's Nest lies within foraging range (92km) of Inishkea Islands SPA and Inishglora and Inishkeeragh SPA - SPAs of which these species are QIs. Also, likely to nest in the wider landscape outside of SPAs. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Leach's Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]	99	In	Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species. No overlap with breeding habitat. Overlaps with feeding habitat. Feed on small fish, plankton, molluscs, and crustaceans. Generally, feed well offshore, however, some potential to attract birds to pens. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) [A063]	253.7	Out	Not recorded from Clifden Bay. Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by the Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species (80km (Thaxter *et al*., 2012)). Designated as a QI for a single SPA in Ireland - Lough Foyle SPA (ca. 253.7km away) No overlap of breeding or foraging area. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) [A016]	188.8	In	Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species. Overlaps with feeding habitat. No overlap with breeding habitat.

			Note recent declines due to bird flu (Giralt Paradell *et al*. 2023). Applicant correctly Screened In.
Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*) [A176]	279.4	Out	Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by the Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species (foraging range of 20km). No overlap with breeding or foraging habitat. Diet of terrestrial and aquatic insects, marine molluscs and fish. Given distance of SPA, of which this species is a QI, there is no potential for QI populations of this species to be impacted. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*) [A001]	61.7	Out	There is no overlap with breeding or foraging area for this species. Does not breed close to the study area; restricted to breeding further north in Co. Donegal (Crowe *et al*. 2021). Additional information required on potential overlap of foraging ranges with licenced area. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) [A192]	265.7	Out	Greater than 50km from the site. QI of SPAs including Seas off Wexford SPA, all SPAs of which this species is a QI is outside of Thaxter *et al*., 2012 foraging ranges. No overlap with breeding or foraging habitat. No evidence of post breeding dispersal to this area. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Great Blackbacked Gull (*Larus marinus*) [A187]	260.8	Out	Greater than 50km from the site. QI of a single SPA, the North-west Irish Sea SPA outside the foraging range (60km) of this species. No direct overlap with foraging area or breeding for birds using the nearest SPA. Feed on fish, commercial fishing waste, offal, and other birds. Records exist within L64 and L65 grid squares (most recently from 2011). Given distance of SPA, of which this species is a QI, there is no potential for QI populations of this species to be impacted. Applicant correctly Screened Out.

2.3.3 Screening of Potential Effects of Introduction of Non-native Species

The proposed finish aquaculture site (T09-127) will be farming Atlantic salmon, which is native to Ireland. There is the potential to utilise cleaner fish in the control of sea-lice. The species that may be used include 5 wrasse species (Ballan *Labrus bergylta*, Goldsinny *Ctenolabrus rupestrus*, Corkwing *Symphodus melops*, Rockcook *Centrolabrus exoletus*, and Cuckoo *Labrus mixtus*) and lumpfish (*Cyclopterus lumpus*). These are all native species and the cleaner fish will be sourced from Irish suppliers or fished locally.

2.3.4 Consideration of in-combination effects on Natura 2000 site Qualifying Interests

It is important to consider, for those QIs that may screen out during the initial AA screening exercise, if the pressures deriving from the proposed activities acts in-combination with other activities such that additive or synergistic effects are realised on the QIs. It is possible that such combined effects may cause the QI, therefore, to screen in and be considered further in the AA process. It should be noted that, interactions are additive when their combined effect is the sum of each independently, synergistic when the combined effect is greater than the sum of each independently, and antagonistic when the combined effect is less than the sum of each independently.

To this end, existing and proposed licensing activities in the vicinity of the proposed intensive aquaculture activities have been reviewed.

2.3.4.1 Other Aquaculture activities

There is 1 other finfish production licence in the Clifden/Ardbear Bay area. There are 4 shellfish licences (3 blue mussel, 1 blue mussel and great Atlantic scallop) and one fisheries order (for oyster) in Ardbear Bay (east of Clifden Bay) (Figure 4).

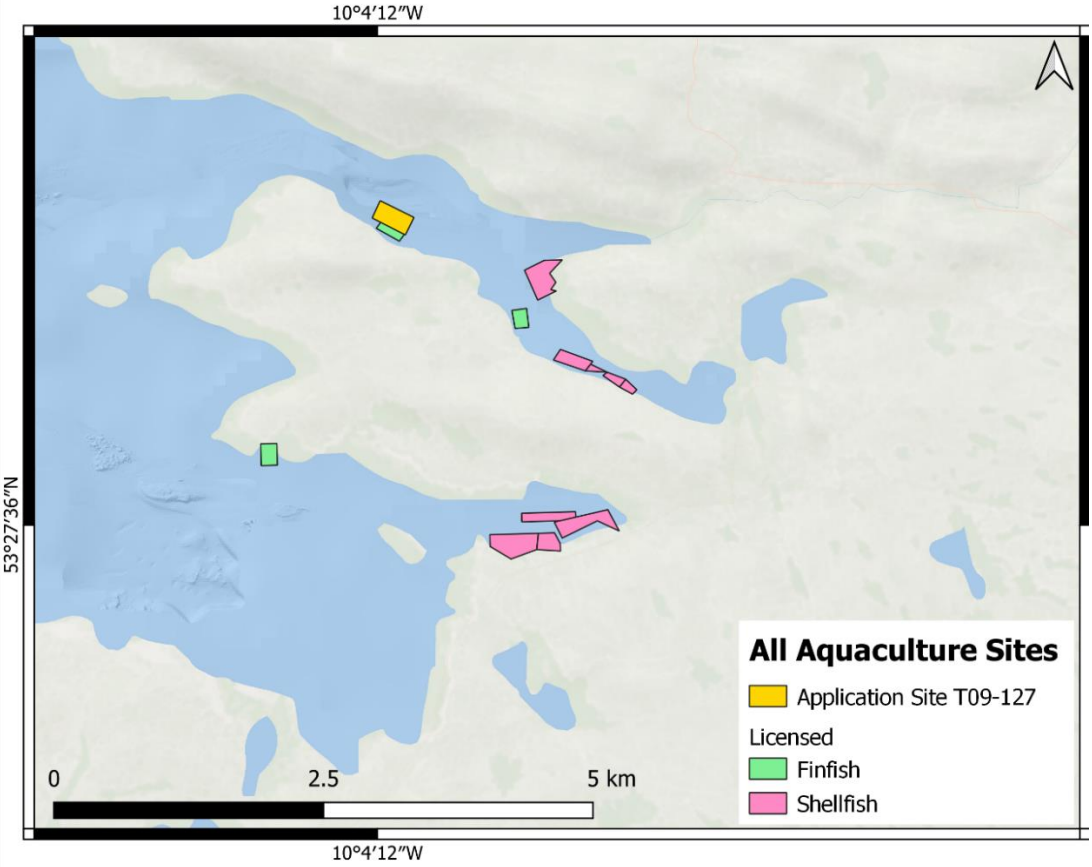


Figure 4 Currently licenced aquaculture activities in Clifden and Mannin Bay.

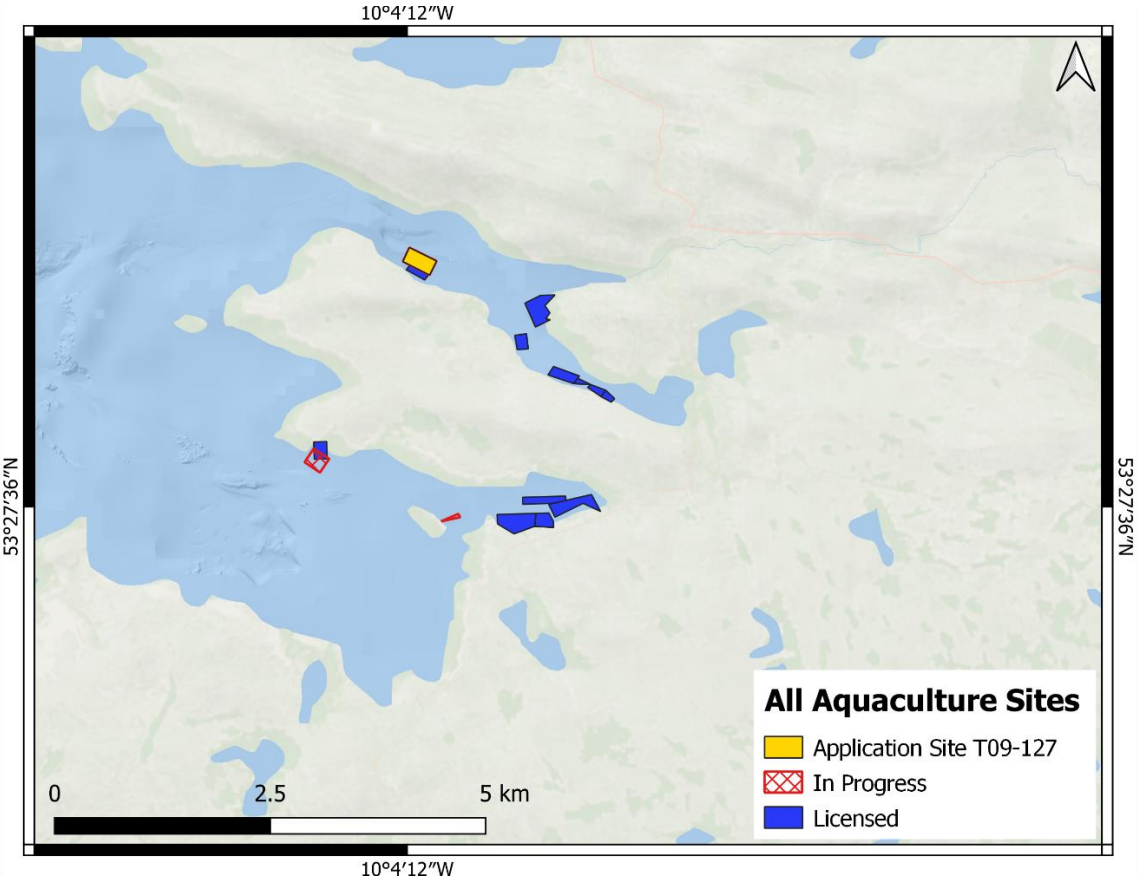


Figure 5 Licensed and applied for aquaculture activities within the vicinity of the proposed activity.

2.3.4.1.1 Salmon Culture

The salmon farming locations are in Figure 4 and Figure 5. The nearest licensed finfish site (T09-140) is approximately 14 km around the headland in Mannin Bay. Potential in-combination risk factors include farm discharge (feed waste, fish excretion, release of chemoterapeutants) and biological dispersion (diseases, sea lice).

All sites are operating according to EU Organic Aquaculture standards, which include low stocking densities (10 kg/m^3) and the use of organically certified food. The nets are made of knotless netting and no anti-fouling treatment is allowed. Nets are checked weekly for integrity and are cleaned by replacing the nets and sending to a specialist independent contractor to clean, repair and test.

The hydrodynamic modelling in the EIAR and supporting the NIS indicate that:

- The settable solids discharge plume from the site and adjacent sites will not overlap and there will not be an in-combination effect.
- The biological oxygen demand (BOD) plumes from the site, and from the Mannin sites, will be within limits for transitional waters and will not have a significant in-combination effect.
- The dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) plumes from the site, and from the Mannin sites, will be within limits for transitional waters and will not have a significant in-combination effect.
- The molybdate reactive phosphorous (MRP) plumes from the site, and from the Mannin sites, will be within limits for transitional waters and will not have a significant in-combination effect.
- There will be no impact from the Mannin Bay site to the Clifden Bay sites (T09-127 and T09-063)
- There will be no in-combination effects from the proposed sea lice treatment (using Slice®) between the Clifden and Mannin Bay sites.

The report indicated that the spatial footprints of discharges from the sites do not overlap. Given the distance and lack of hydrological connectivity, the potential for direct in-combination effects between the proposed site and current and planned finfish sites is minimal.

2.3.4.1.2 Shellfish and Macroalgae Culture

The nearest extensive aquaculture site is approximately 1.7 km from the proposed site. The main cultured species are mussels (*Mytulis edulis*). Four sites in Ardbear Bay (east of Clifden Bay) are licensed for blue mussel. Rope mussels are farmed using a suspended culture system, with a large density of culture organisms in the water column positioned over a relatively small area of seabed. This involves the collection of seed mussels on suspended ropes (within the site) and subsequently grading them and placing the mussel seed into mesh stockings, which are suspended in barrels (at these sites) from floating rope long-lines in the water column of the on-growing areas.

According to the documentation provided by the applicant, the potential for direct in-combination effects between the proposed site and current and planned extensive aquaculture sites is minimal and localised. The application documentation determined there would be no significant effects on the extensive aquaculture. There is not likely to be any in-combination effects with these activities.

2.3.4.2 Commercial fisheries

Pot Fisheries -The main pot fisheries in Clifden Bay are brown crab and shrimp, with lobster fisheries just beginning at the mouth of the bay. The proposed aquaculture site overlaps the brown crab and shrimp fisheries. Fishers avail of the company-owned pier at Drinagh. According to the applicant's documentation, the aquaculture sites and pot fisheries have coexisted for decades without significant effects.

Trawl Fisheries – Trawl fisheries do not overlap with the proposed site in Clifden Bay. These fisheries in the region occur to the north and south and in offshore areas.

Line Fisheries – There are no line fishing operations present in Clifden Bay that overlap with the proposed aquaculture activities in Clifden Bay.

Net Fisheries – There is a net fishery for crayfish just outside of Clifden Bay. There are no net fishery operations present in Clifden Bay, nor is there overlap with the proposed aquaculture activities in Clifden Bay.

Dredge Fisheries – There are razor clam and surf clam dredge fisheries in Clifden Bay. Both of these operations overlap with the proposed aquaculture activities. The ground covered by the aquaculture site is not significant and will unlikely impact the fisheries.

The Owenglin river, which drains into Clifden Bay, is important for salmonids. Salmon, brown trout, and sea trout can be fished (with a licence) from February to October (depending on the species). While Salmon (*Salmo salar*) are a protected Annex II Species, there are no SACs that overlap with Clifden Bay that list salmon. The closest SAC with protected salmon (in the Owenglin River) is the Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex SAC (002031), the SAC being approximately 2.8 km east of the proposed aquaculture site.

Where there is overlap with fisheries, the overlap does not cover a significant amount of the respective areas, and pressures are such that they will not significantly impact. The proposed aquaculture activities will not be significantly increasing the area of the currently licensed sites. The applicant has provided a Single Bay Management Plan to coordinate husbandry practices with the other fish farms in the bay to address parasite control and disease control in the stocks.

2.3.4.3 Other Plans or Projects

Activities reviewed are accessed at the following locations:

- DECCC Foreshore Licencing (https://www.gov.ie/en/foreshore-notices/ accessed 18/09/2024)
- Galway County Council planning (Link Map Viewer - accessed 18/09/2024)
- EPA pressures maps (https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/Water - accessed 18/09/2024)
- MARA – (https://www.maritimeregulator.ie/applications/ - accessed 18/09/2024)

The review of these sources has identified no existing activities on the foreshore, or adjacent to the foreshore, that may interact with the proposed shellfish culture activities, resulting in an additive or, more importantly, synergistic cumulative effects, such that those QIs already screened out may now be included.

The result of this search has meant that screening conclusions identified above (and summarised below) are considered valid and the process can progress to the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

3 NIS Review for T09-127

It is the responsibility of the proponent of the plan or project to have the NIS prepared for submission to the Competent Authority, to provide them with sufficient detail on the project to allow them to undertake a screening for Appropriate Assessment. This information supplied must be of a level sufficient to allow the competent authority to decide on whether or not the plan or project is likely to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Assessments should be undertaken based on the best scientific evidence and methods. Having satisfied itself that the NIS is complete and objective, the Competent Authority carries out the AA based on the statement and any other necessary information.

- The Marine Institute has been requested to review the *Review and Renewal of Marine Finfish Aquaculture Licences at Clifden Bay, Mannin Bay and Ardbear Bay, Co. Galway - Site Refs: T09/127A, T09/140A and T09/96B - Screening for Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statement - Volume 1 - Main Report* and *Volume 2 - Appendices* documents relating to application to renew and review an intensive aquaculture licence at site T09-127 at Clifden Bay, Co. Galway, as to whether it contains the necessary information to progress to the next stage of the licensing process, enabling the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment, and the drafting of a Conclusion Statement. This section gives a review of the applicants AA screening and NIS. The following elements are considered:
- *Description of plan or project*
- *Identification of relevant Natura 2000 sites*
- *Assessment of likely effects*
- *Screening Conclusions (Assessment of the Phase 1 Screening for AA determination)*

[This section is compiled by the Marine Institute, with review elements from WS Atkins Ireland Limited].

3.1 Review of the Applicants AA Screening and NIS

The project proponent must provide sufficient detail on the project to a level sufficient to allow the competent authority to decide on whether or not the plan or project is likely to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The applicant submitted, with their application, a number of AA reports for consideration by the licencing body. The reports submitted are:

- Review and Renewal of Marine Finfish Aquaculture Licences at Clifden Bay, Mannin Bay and Ardbear Bay, Co. Galway - Site Refs: T09/127A, T09/140A and T09/96B - Screening for Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statement - Volume 1 - Main Report
- Review and Renewal of Marine Finfish Aquaculture Licences at Clifden Bay, Mannin Bay and Ardbear Bay, Co. Galway - Site Refs: T09/127A, T09/140A and T09/96B - Screening for Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statement - Volume 2 - Appendices

This Section assesses the comprehensiveness of the information included in these documents to inform the AA process.

3.1.1 Review of Stage 1 - Screening for Appropriate Assessment

AA screening is the first test to establish whether, in relation to a particular plan or project, Appropriate Assessment is required. The purpose is to determine, based on a preliminary assessment and objective criteria, whether a plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans or

projects, could have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site in view of the site's Conservation Objectives (CO).

3.1.1.1 Description of plan or project

A description of the plan or project, including its nature, size and location, and possible or likely effects, and draft policies, objectives, associated strategies in the case of plans, should be provided.

A comprehensive description of the project, its nature and practices are supplied providing:

- Detail of the location of the site, including graphics displaying the current site and proposed new site.
- Detailed description, and graphics, of the infrastructure to be used (pens, moorings, nets).
- Description of the access routes and supporting shore-based facilities and vessels.
- Detail of the production plans and cycles.
- Detail of the husbandry and management practices and methods (feed and feeding, stock delivery, grading, harvesting and processing).
- Detail, tables and graphics on site discharges.
- Details on process and management regarding waste, mortalities, health management, diseases, parasite monitoring and control, predator control, and accidents and emergencies (including escapes).
- Detail on installation and decommissioning.
- Details on the single bay management plan.

3.1.1.2 Identification of relevant Natura 2000 sites

A comprehensive description of receiving environment and the physical and biological characteristics (or aspects) of the marine environment at Inver Bay and surrounds is provided.

This includes:

- Identification of SACs and SPAs within 15 km of the proposed aquaculture sites with ecological group, QI and conservation objective identified for the respective SACs and SPAs

3.1.1.3 Assessment of likely effects

The screening must establish if the plan is likely to have an effect and determine whether there is a risk that the effects could be significant, using a precautionary approach where uncertain. Any element that has the potential to affect the Conservation Objectives (CO) of a site, including structure and function, should be considered likely significant.

- Identification of the pressures/impact mechanisms likely to be exerted from the proposed activities on each QI and SCI (within 15 km) and marine community types that had the potential to be significantly affected by the proposed project activities.
- Identification of the pressures/impact mechanisms likely to be exerted from the proposed activities on QIs and SCIs in areas greater than 15 km from the project. These include marine mammals and seabird species.
- Identification of plans or projects that might act in combination with the proposed project.

3.1.1.4 Screening Conclusions

The findings and conclusions of the Screening process must be documented (with supporting evidence and objective criteria) - especially if the QI is screened out.

- A number of QIs were screened out based on distance and/or no pathway for interaction (S-P-R).
- For the SACs Habitats and Fauna, the following QIs are screened in with impact mechanisms identified:
    - Coastal lagoons [1150]
    - Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]
    - Reefs [1170]
    - Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355]
    - Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) [1349]
    - Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) [1351]
    - Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) [1364]
    - Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) [1365]
    - Salmon (*Salmo salar*) [1106]
    - Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) [1029]
- For the SPAs, the following SCIs are screened in with impact mechanisms identified:
    - Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]
    - Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)
    - Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]
    - Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]
    - Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009]
    - Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) [A016]
    - Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]
    - Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]
    - Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) [A184]
    - Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188]
    - Leach's storm-petrel (*Hydrobates lecorhous)*
    - Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]
    - Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195]
    - Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013]
    - Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]
    - Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200]
    - Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]
    - Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A018]
    - Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]

3.1.2 Application NIS versus MI Report

The Competent Authority must carry out the AA to determine whether or not the proposed project would adversely affect the integrity of Natura sites as defined by COs and status of site, individually or in combination with other factors. The MI have been asked (by the licencing authority DAFM) to review the Screening for AA and Natura Impact Statement provided for completeness, to ensure it contains the necessary information to progress to the next stage of the licensing process. To do this

the MI conducts their own screening process and assessment, on behalf of the Competent Authority, i.e. DAFM.

The MI screening for SAC features agrees the outcomes of the applicant's report, screening in and out almost all the same QIs.

The MI engaged the services of an environmental consultant (with expertise in ornithology) (WS Atkins Ireland Limited) to carry out the AA screening process for SPAs in the zone of effect of the site. The two screening processes agreed substantially on the majority of the QIs considered. The Atkins screening included more SPAs than the applicant. All species screened in by the applicant were also screened in by WS Atkins Ireland Limited.

As part of the review process these points are highlighted as areas where detail may be lacking:

- The potential impacts of the wild wrasse fishery on food availability for species such as Cormorant, Shag, red-throated diver etc. will need to be considered in the NIS. Wrasse, notably Ballan wrasse (*Labrus) bergylta*), is known to frequently occur in the diet of coastal Cormorant[16].

3.1.3 Review of Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment (AA) – Natura Impact Statement

The AA is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of the plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in view of its COs.

3.1.3.1 AA Information Required, Conservation Objectives, and Impact Prediction

An AA report aims to provide information to the Competent Authority to carry out the AA to determine whether or not the proposed project would adversely affect the integrity of Natura sites as defined by COs and status of site, individually or in combination with other factors. The NIS must identify aspects of the plan that will affect the COs and provide adequate information to complete the AA. The predictions of impacts must be addressed, and objective and scientifically bounded conclusions drawn.

In the applicant's NIS:

- The following Annex I Qualifying Features are considered, providing information regarding habitat description:
    - Coastal Lagoons [1150]
    - Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]
    - Reefs [1170]
- Potential impact mechanisms for these habitats are identified as nutrient enrichment.
- Three-dimensional hydrodynamic simulation modelling was used to determine potential impacts. Overlap is considered, with graphics and tables provided.
- The following Annex II Qualifying Features (marine and aquatic mammal) are considered, providing information regarding populations, their foraging ranges, and the SACs located within their potential foraging ranges from the project, on each of these species
    - Grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)

[16] Tierney, N., Lusby, J. and Lauder, A., 2011. A preliminary assessment of the potential impacts of Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo predation on salmonids in four selected river systems. Report Commissioned by Inland Fisheries Ireland and funded by the Salmon Conservation Fund

- Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*)
- Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)
- Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)
- Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

- Potential impact mechanisms with direct effects for these habitats are identified as underwater noise, physical disturbance and collision risk and entanglement on nets from the site.
- Information of potential impact mechanisms on the marine mammals are provided.
- The following Habitats Directive Annex II Species – Migratory Fish Species and Aquatic Molluscs are considered:
  - Freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*)
  - Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar)*
- Of the potential impact mechanisms identified, the introduction of therapeutants, increasing lice infection rate in wild salmon, disease spread and genetic interaction between farmed and wild Atlantic salmon are identified as a main source of potential direct impacts to the diadromous salmon and potential indirect impacts to freshwater pearl mussel.
- Sea lice biology and epidemiology is described, and a 3-D hydrodynamic simulation modelling was undertaken to determine the transport and dispersion of sea lice (*L. salmonis*) larvae from the farm. Graphics and tables of model results are presented. Relevant research on sea lice-induced mortality on wild salmon are presented.
- Information regarding the degradation of chemicals that may be used is provided.
- Information on escapees, disease, and therapeutants is provided.
- Information on potential for indirect effects on the wild salmon population to otter prey availability and foraging success.
- The potential impacts to bird species are identified and detailed, with comment on the risk, for:
  - Disturbance risk (from structures and activity)
  - Entanglement/Mortality
  - Impacts on foraging and habitat suitability
- A comprehensive risk assessment to examine the potential impacts these species is carried out, using criteria for disturbance; population sensitivity; habitat suitability; habitat flexibility; to determine the overall level of impact and the significance of the impact, for each of the listed species.

3.1.3.2 Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures are measures to minimise, cancel, or avoid negative impacts, and can be an integral part of the specifications or an add-on. They must be planned and sufficient to mitigate the risk and be practical and achievable to avoid the risk.

- Mitigation measures to address risks from disease and parasite (lice control) risk, and escapee risk are specified. Mitigation measures for entanglement of birds with farm pens are noted.
- Monitoring plans are described for sea lice.

3.1.3.3 In-Combination Effects

- Projects that could have the potential to give rise to in-combination effects from the three finfish aquaculture sites (Hawk's Nest, Ardbear, Curhownagh).
- Modelling is used to consider effects from the adjacent fish farms, regarding the discharge and dispersion of sea lice larvae, BOD, settleable solids, nitrogen dispersal, and phosphorus dispersal.
- Conclusions are provided.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Appropriate Assessment Screening Conclusions

The stage 1 screening report has identified the following QIs and associated conservation features in the SACs that the proposed aquaculture activities spatially overlap with and/or has the potential to significantly affect, so will be carried forward for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

SAC QIs

- Annex I Habitats
    - Large Shallow Inlets and Bays [1160]
    - Coastal Lagoons [1150]
    - Reefs [1170]
- Annex II Species
    - Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) [1364]
    - Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) [1365]
    - Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355]
    - Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) [1029]
    - Salmon (*Salmo salar*) [1106]
    - Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) [1351]
    - Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) [1349]

SPA QIs

- Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]
- Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) [A179]
- Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]
- Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]
- Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009]
- Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) [A016]
- Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]
- Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]
- Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) [A184]
- Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188]
- Leach's Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]
- Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]
- Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195]
- Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013]
- Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]
- Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200]
- Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A188]
- Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]
- Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]

On the basis that likely significant effects of the proposed activity on the European sites cannot be excluded, these QIs are brought forward for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

Following a review of the NIS supplied by the applicant the following areas require more detail:

- The potential impacts of the wild wrasse fishery on food availability for species such as Cormorant, Shag, red-throated diver etc. will need to be considered in the NIS. Wrasse, notably Ballan wrasse (*Labrus) bergylta*), is known to frequently occur in the diet of coastal Cormorant[17].

When the above points are addressed, the NIS supplied by the applicant, in combination with the reports supplied by the Marine Institute, will contain sufficient information/data to proceed to the next stage of the licensing process, and support the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment of the proposed activities.

[17] Tierney, N., Lusby, J. and Lauder, A., 2011. A preliminary assessment of the potential impacts of Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo predation on salmonids in four selected river systems. Report Commissioned by Inland Fisheries Ireland and funded by the Salmon Conservation Fund

5 Appendix

ATKINS

Member of the SNC-Lavalin Group

Hawk's Nest (T09/127) Finfish Farm

Technical Review of Screening for Appropriate Assessment: SPAs

Marine Institute (MI)

20/09/2024

Notice

This document and its contents have been prepared and are intended solely as information for Marine Institute (MI) and use in relation to Appropriate Assessment Screening.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

AtkinsRéalis have been commissioned by the Marine Institute to carry out a technical review of Appropriate Assessment carried out for Finfish Aquaculture Licence renewal in Clifden Bay, focusing on SPAs (Special Protected Areas). This report deals specifically with the AA Screening for Hawk's Nest (Clifden Bay) (T09/127A) salmon farm operated by Ardbear Seafarms Ltd.

Hawk's Bay finfish farm is located close to the southern shore of Clifden Bay, near Errislannan Co. Galway and will act as an on-growing site for salmon smolts initially reared in Douglas Valley Hatchery in Kilworth, Co. Cork.

The licence renewal requests that the existing boundary of Hawk's Nest (T09/127A) site be amended. An amendment to the licence operating conditions with regards to harvest is being sought to change harvest of Hawk's Nest to 200 tonnes from a net production of 625 tonnes (current annual production conditions of 100 tonnes).

The information used in this review has been taken from the Aquaculture and Foreshore Licence Application for T09/127A (Hawk's Nest) (05/04/2024), EIAR (08/02/2024), and NIS (08/02/2024), along with associated appendices provided to the department by the Applicant.

Figure 1-1 – Hawk's Nest salmon farm with current and proposed licence boundary.

1.2. Legislative Context

1.2.1. Natura 2000

Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ("the Habitats Directive") is a legislative instrument of the European Union (EU) which provides legal protection for habitats and species of Community interest. Article 2 of the Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of such habitats and species at a favourable conservation status, while Articles 3 to 9, inclusive, provide for the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of special areas of conservation (SACs), known as Natura 2000, which also includes special protection areas (SPAs) designated under Article 4 of Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds ("the Birds Directive"). Both SACs and SPAs are commonly referred to as "European sites" or "Natura 2000 sites".

SACs are selected for natural habitat types listed on Annex I to the Habitats Directive and the habitats of species listed on Annex II to the Habitats Directive. SPAs are selected for species listed on Annex I to the Birds Directive and other regularly occurring migratory species. The habitats and species for which a Natura 2000 site is selected are referred to as the "qualifying interests" of that site and each is assigned a "conservation objective" aimed at maintaining or restoring its "favourable conservation condition" at the site, which contributes to the maintenance or restoration of its "favourable conservation status" at national and European levels.

1.2.2. Appropriate Assessment

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive deals with the management and protection of Natura 2000 sites. Articles 6(3) and (4) set out the decision-making process, known as "Appropriate Assessment" (AA), for plans or projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites. Article 6(3) states: -

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

The first sentence of Article 6(3) provides a basis for determining which plans and projects require AA, i.e., those "*not directly connected with or necessary to the management of [one or more Natura 2000 sites] but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects*". In *Waddenzee*

(C-127/02), the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled that significant effects must be considered "likely" if "*it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information*", that they would occur. This clearly sets a low threshold, such that AA is required wherever there is a reasonable possibility of significant effects on a Natura 2000 site. In the same judgment, the CJEU established that the test of significance relates specifically

to the conservation objectives of the site concerned, i.e., "significant effects" are those which, "*in the light, inter alia, of the characteristics and specific environmental conditions of the site*", could undermine the site's conservation objectives. In addition to the effects of the plan or project on its own, the combined effects arising from the plan or project under consideration and other plans and projects must also be assessed.

The last part of the first sentence of Article 6(3) defines AA as an assessment of the "*implications [of the plan or project] for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives*". In the second sentence, Article 6(3) requires that, prior to agreeing to a plan or project, the competent authority must "ascertain" that "*it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned*". In *Sweetman v. An Bord Pleanála* (C-258/11), the CJEU ruled that a plan or project "*will adversely affect the integrity of that site if it is liable to prevent the lasting preservation of the constitutive characteristics of the site that are connected to the presence of a priority natural habitat whose conservation was the objective justifying the designation of the site in the list of sites*". On that basis, EC (2018) described the "integrity of the site" as "*the coherent sum of the site's ecological structure, function and ecological processes, across its whole area, which enables it to sustain the habitats, complex of habitats and/or populations of species for which the site is designated*". As such, the "integrity" of a specific site is defined by its conservation objectives and is "adversely affected" when those objectives are undermined. In *Waddenzee*, the CJEU ruled that the absence of adverse effects can only be ascertained "*where no reasonable scientific doubt remains*".

The "precautionary principle" applies to all of the legal tests in AA, i.e., in the absence of objective information to demonstrate otherwise, the worst-case scenario is assumed. Where the tests established by Article 6(3) cannot be satisfied, Article 6(4) applies (see explanation in Section 1.3).

1.2.3. Competent Authority

The requirements of Articles 6(3) and (4) are transposed into Irish law by, inter alia, Part 5 of the European Communities (Birds and Natura Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended) ("the Habitats Regulations") and Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) ("the Planning and Development Acts"). As per the second sentence of Article 6(3), it is the "competent national authorities" who are responsible for carrying out AA and, by extension, for determining which plans and projects require AA. The competent authority in each case is the authority responsible for consenting to or licensing a plan or project, e.g., local authorities, An Bord Pleanála, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or a Government Minister. In all cases, it is the competent authority who is ultimately responsible for determining whether or not a plan or project requires AA and for carrying out the AA, where required.

1.3. Appropriate Assessment Process

The AA process can be described as being made up of three distinct stages, as described below, the need to progress to each stage being determined by the outcome of the preceding stage.

Stage 1: Screening – This stage involves a determination by the competent authority as to whether or not a given plan or project required AA. As explained in Section 1 above, AA is required in respect of any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site, but for which the possibility of likely significant effects on one or more Natura 2000 sites cannot be excluded. In *People Over Wind* (C-323/17), the CJEU ruled that measures intended to avoid or minimise harmful effects on a Natura 2000

site cannot be considered in making this determination. Consideration of the potential for in-combination effects is also required at this stage.

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment – This stage involves a detailed assessment of the implications of the plan or project, individually and in combination with other plans and projects, for the integrity of the Natura 2000 site(s) concerned. This stage also involves the development of appropriate mitigation to address any adverse effects and an assessment of the significance of any residual impacts following the inclusion of mitigation. In *Kelly v. An Bord Pleanála* (IEHC 400), the High Court ruled that a lawful AA must contain complete, precise, and definitive findings based on examination and analysis, and conclusions and a final determination based on an evaluation of the findings. In the same judgment, the High Court stressed that, in order for the findings to be complete, precise, and definitive, the AA must be carried out in light of best scientific knowledge in the field and cannot have gaps or lacunae. In *Holohan v. An Bord Pleanála* (C-461/17), the CJEU clarified that AA must "*catalogue the entirety of habitat types and species for which a site is protected*" (i.e. the qualifying interests of the site) and assess the implications of the plan or project for the qualifying interests, both within and outside the site boundaries, and other, non-qualifying interest habitats and species, whether inside or outside the site boundaries, "*provided that those implications are liable to affect the conservation objectives of the site*". The proposer of a plan or project requiring AA is furnishes the competent authority with the scientific evidence upon which to base its AA by way of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) or Natura Impact Report (NIR). If it is not possible to ascertain that the plan or project will not adversely affect one or more Natura 2000 sites, authorisation can only be granted subject to Article 6(4).

Stage 3: Article 6(4) – If a plan or project does not pass the legal test at Stage 2, alternative solutions to achieve its aims must be considered and themselves subject to Article 6(3). If no feasible alternatives exist, authorisation can only be granted where it can be demonstrated that there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) justifying its implementation. Where this is the case, all compensatory measures must be taken to protect the overall coherence of Natura 2000.

The three stages described above are illustrated in Figure 1-2 below.

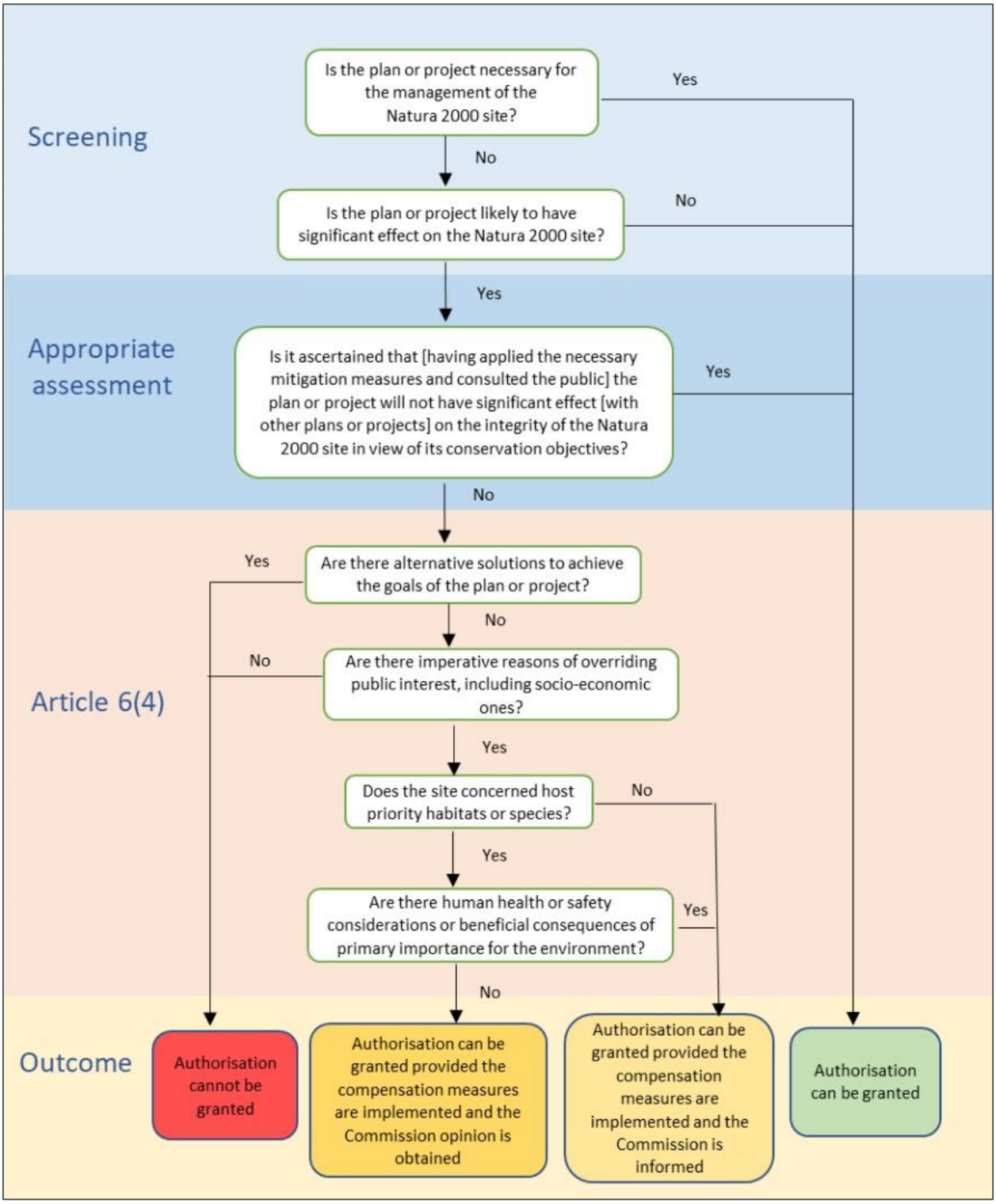

Figure 1-2 - Stages of the Appropriate Assessment process (EC, 2021).

2. Review Methodology

As part of the AA screening process the applicant is required to provide the Competent Authority with sufficient detail on the project to allow them to undertake a Screening for Appropriate Assessment (though note that this assessment deals only with Special Protection Areas for birds). This information must be of a level sufficient to allow the competent authority to decide on whether or not the plan or project is likely to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.

This report includes a review of the robustness of the AA screening carried out by AQUAFACT on behalf of Ardbear Seafarms Co. Ltd. The following elements were considered: -

- Description of the Project and its potential impacts.
- Identification of Natura 2000 sites with the potential to be impacted.
- Assessment of the Phase 1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment determination.

3. Project Description

The Applicant provided details on aspect of the project. This section assesses the completeness on this information and whether or not other aspects have been omitted. The assessment can be seen in Table 3-1 below.

Table 3-1 - Assessment of project description.

Project Element	Assessment
Location and Site Layout	Maps have been included showing both the existing licence area and the proposed area. Coordinates for the licence area have also been given. Detailed schematics have been provided showing all aspects of the pens and mooring layout.
Pen details	The dimensions and components, along with inspection, cleaning and maintenance procedures have been explained thoroughly. Mesh size of nets detailed as well as agenda for net changing as smolts grow. Specified that no net antifouling will be used and measures against bird predation detailed.
Shore based facilities and access	Shore bases are specified and located at Errislannan, Co. Galway, serviced by a private pier at Drinagh which is owned by directors of Mannin Bay Salmon Company Ltd. The location of these piers in relation to the licenced site have been provided on a map. The access roads to the shore base have also been provided. Information on service vessels/vehicles which are involved with the running of the site have been provided along with the aspects of the project they will be involve in. Procedure of vessels travelling between shore bases in relation to IAS, transporting feed, number of employees on site at any one time and mortality removal has been detailed.
Production Model	Detail is provided of numbers and weight of smolts added, modelled estimate of biomass for each month for 17 months at Hawk's Nest of the total 21-month production cycle, maximum biomass, source, and age of smolts, peak stocking density, when transfers to adjacent sites will occur, when harvesting will start, feed conversion ratio (FCR), and fallow periods.
Feed and feeding	Feed is used that meets the EU requirements for organic standards. A breakdown of the main nutritional components of the feed has also been included. The report provides specifics on the feed barge and automatic feed system which allows for efficient observation of feeding fish and minimises waste.
Husbandry	The information provided on smolt delivery, grading, harvesting, and processing is sufficient to allow for an assessment of the

	potential impacts. This section also gives details on monthly discharge totals for BOD, solids, carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus.
Waste Management	This section details the management of fish waste from harvesting and mortalities. The method of disposal/treatment of fish waste to a dedicated ensiling facility before transport to a dedicated biodigester plant in Ballaghdereen and associated wastewater is provided in the report. Sufficient text on procedure to prevent the spread of disease/water contamination is provided.
Health Management	The procedure followed to monitor fish health is provided including the primary goals and actions to be taken. Text is provided on treatment of disease and procedure for determination of appropriate treatments by company veterinarians, as well as procedure to identify and treat unknown diseases that may be present. Methods

Project Element	Assessment
	of treatment for common parasites while at sea are discussed. Pest management documents are also provided. Particular detail is provided on sea lice treatment and monitoring. The source of cleaner fish is detailed, hatchery raised lump suckers at a rate of 10% and locally caught wrasse at a rate of 7%, of the salmon pen population to be used. Details given within appendices on wild caught wrasse include management, introduction and removal from pens, cleaning and biosecurity and supplementary feeding. Use of an oral anti-parasitic, SLICE®, as an infeed therapeutant for young salmon in year 1.
Predator Control	It is stated that bird netting is used to prevent bird predation. This method is used principally as a method of protecting the fish stock as opposed to a mitigation measure to protect birds and so can be considered at the screening stage. Pen netting is weighted to prevent seal predation which is noted to not be a previous or current issue at the Hawk's Bay location. No acoustic deterrents used.
Accidents and Emergencies	Emergency procedure is provided in relation to staff, vehicles, vessels, and fish farm installations including fish mass mortality, fish mass escape and damage due to weather eventualities is provided. It is noted that no farmed escapees have been recorded at Hawk's Nest. Preventative guidelines for fish escapes and mass mortality are also provided.
Single Bay Management	This section summaries the Single Bay Management for Clifden Bay (full plan is included in the Appendices). All finfish farms in the bay are considered in the plan including Hawk's Nest, as well as Ardbear (T09/96B) and Curhownagh (T09/140A). The site at Hawk's Nest within Clifden Bay has an aquaculture licence due for renewal. The renewal application for the licences includes proposals to amend the boundary of the sites attached to the licences and amend the operating conditions of the licences. The plan aims to coordinate aspects of the farms such as disease/ pest monitoring and treatment on a whole bay approach.
Decommissioning	As there are no permanent aspects to the operation at sea, decommissioning involves removal of the farm components to shore. All aspects of decommissioning were explained in the report.
Omitted project detail	Potential ecological impacts of removal of wild wrasse from site location and source of freshwater for freshwater bathing not discussed.

4. Receiving Environment

Details on the receiving environment in the vicinity of the project were included in the AA screening. This section assesses the completeness of the info gathered. As this review is focused on SPAs and bird species unrelated species such as cetaceans or otters have not been assessed in terms of the receiving environment. The assessment can be seen in Table 4-1 below.

Table 4-1 - Assessment of Receiving environment.

Receiving Environment	Assessment
Depth and Hydrography	Detail is provided on depths in the bay and specifically in the farm area within the main report and the Appendices. The tidal range and current speeds at different tidal stages are included in the AA Screening/NIS and EIA reports.
Habitats	Description of habitats in the bay and under the site provided. Results of benthic audits (undertaken in May 2023) are included in full within the appendices and sufficient details given in the EIA report. Process of annual benthic audits also detailed.
Birds	SPAs within 15km of the immediate area of the site briefly discussed in this section. A wider area was then considered for long ranging bird species for which their foraging range overlapped with the site.
Potential Impact	In the EIAR they identify Impacts which included disturbance, entanglement, and mortality risk, foraging impacts, and introduced therapeutants. A risk assessment of impact significance, species population sensitivity, species habitat flexibility and licenced area habitat suitability is provided within this section. It is noted that pest and disease impacts are not identified under bird specific information; inclusion of information regarding this risk would be useful for clarity of reading and given the ongoing avian influenza epidemic.

5. Identification of Relevant SPAs

As part of the AA Screening process all Natura 2000 sites which have the potential of being impacted by the plan or project must be identified. It is important that the criteria used for selection of sites is not overly restrictive leading to site that could be impacted not being assessed. This review is concerned only with the identification of relevant Special Protection Areas for birds (SPAs) with the potential to be impacted by the project. The approach taken by the Applicant was to initially consider all SPAs within 15km of the site. The search was then extended based on 25 seabird species with long foraging ranges. The bird species considered were based on available data from three papers Thaxter *et al*. (2012), Jovani *et al*. (2015) and Wakefield *et al*. (2017). All species with coastal or terrestrial habitats were not considered.

Initially to assess for potentially missed species this review considered SPAs within 50km of salmon farms within Clifden Bay (see Table 5-1 and Figure 5-1).

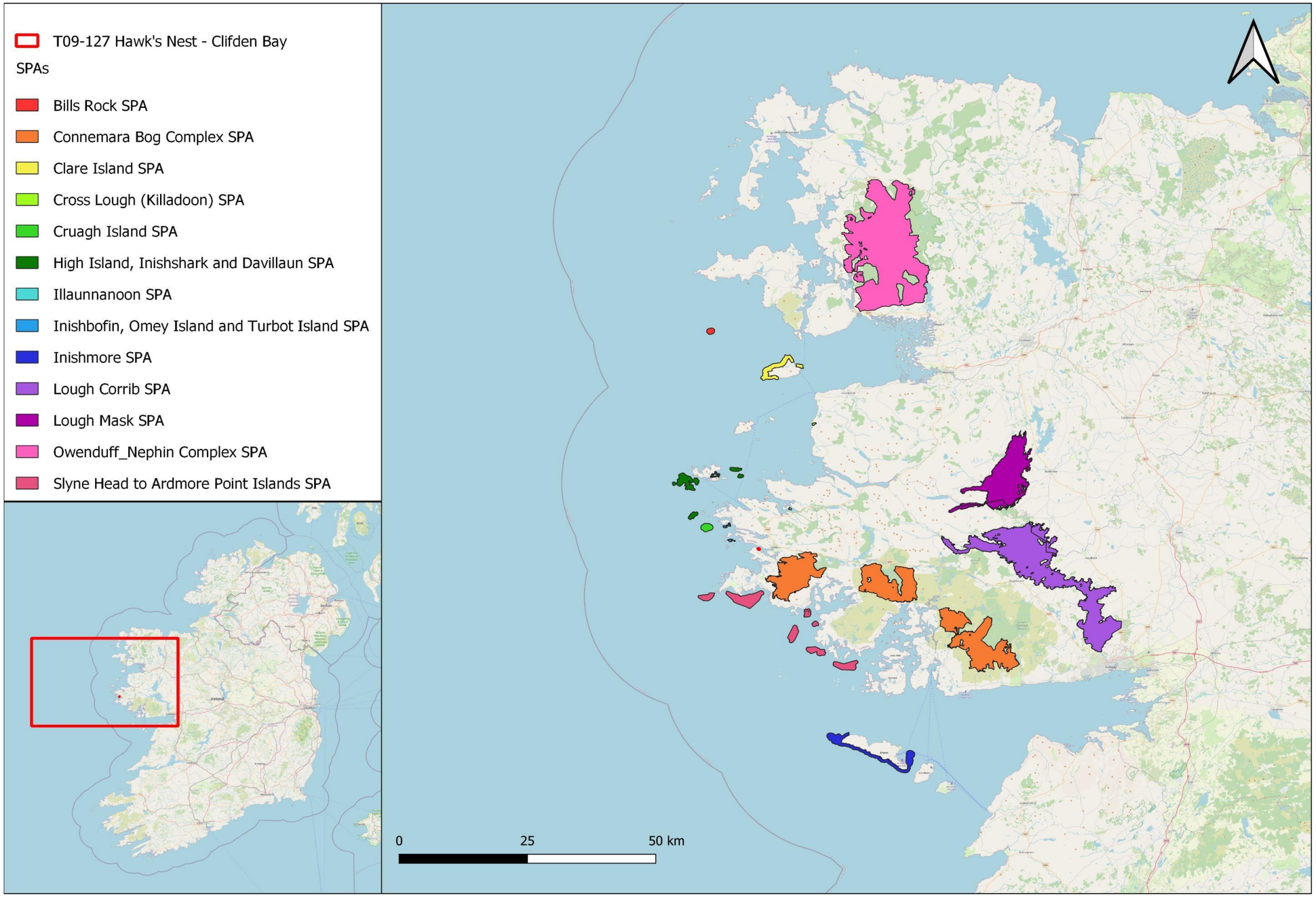

Figure 5-1 - SPAs within 50km of T09-127 (Hawk's Bay) finfish farm.

The full list of qualifying interest for each of the SPAs considered are listed in Table 5-2. In each case the Conservation Objectives documents utilised in this assessment are also referenced. This is important as it can be seen that many of these documents were updated by the NPWS in 2022.

The QI species identified by both methods can be seen in Table 5-3 (NBDC online database1 for records consulted in this section).

Based on the Applicants approach 27 bird species were identified, of which 19 were screened in by the Applicant. Within the Applicant identified species, Black Guillemot was listed; the only species identified which currently is not covered by the SPA network in Ireland (as this species is not a QI of any Natura 2000 site it has been omitted from Table 5-3 assessment below).

Based on the approach taken by this review a further 12 species were identified along with the species identified by the Applicant. Out of the total 38 species considered within the assessment, 19 were screened in (see Table 5-4).

Reasons for screening in of these species can be seen in Table 5-3.

Table 5-1 - SPAs within 50km of Hawk's Nest finfish farm.

SPAs (within 50km)	SPAs (site code)	Distance to Site (km)
Bills Rock	004177	43.3
Connemara Bog Complex	004181	4.3
Clare Island	004136	33.7
Cross Lough (Killadoon)	004212	26.5
Cruagh Island	004170	9.6
High Island, Inishshark and Davillaun	004144	13.4
Illaunnanoon	004221	9.6
Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island	004231	4.6
Inishmore	004152	39
Lough Corrib	004042	34.9
Lough Mask	004062	37
Owenduff/Nephin Complex	004098	50
Slyne Head to Ardmore Point	004159	8.[1]

[1] 1 https://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/Map

Table 5-2 - SPAs within 50km of Hawk's Nest finfish farm and their qualifying interests.

SPAs (within 50km)	Qualifying Interests
Bills Rock SPA[2] IE004177	Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014] Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]
Connemara Bog Complex SPA[3] IE004181	Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017] Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) [A098] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]
Clare Islands SPA[4] IE004136	Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009] Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A018] Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182] Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188] Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199] Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200] Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) [A346]
Cross Lough (Killadoon) SPA[5] IE004212	Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]
Cruagh Island SPA[6] IE004170	Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013] Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) [A045]
High Island, Inishshark and Davillaun SPA[7] IE004144	Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009] Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) [A045] Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]
Illaunnanoon SPA[8] IE004221	Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]

[2] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Bills Rocks SPA [004177]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[3] *NPWS (2023). Conservation Objectives: Connemara Bog Complex SPA 004181. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[4] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Clare Island SPA [004136]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[5] *NPWS (2021). Conservation Objectives: Cross Lough (Killadoon) SAC 000484. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[6] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Cruagh Island SPA [004170]. First Order Sitespecific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[7] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for High Island, Inishshark and Davillaun SPA [004144]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[8] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Illaunnanoon SPA [004221]. First Order Sitespecific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island SPA[9] IE004231	Corncrake (*Crex crex*) [A122]
Inishmore SPA[10] IE004152	Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188] Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194] Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195] Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]
Lough Corrib SPA[10] IE004042	Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) [A051] Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056]

SPAs (within 50km)	Qualifying Interests
	Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) [A059] Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061] Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) [A065] Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082] Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179] Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182] Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193] Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194] Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395]
Lough Mask SPA[11] IE004062	Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179] Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182] Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183] Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193] Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons* flavirostris) [A395]

[9] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island SPA [004231]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.* [10] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Inishmore SPA [004152]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[10] *NPWS (2023). Conservation Objectives: Lough Corrib SPA 004042. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[11] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Lough Mask SPA [004062]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

Owenduff/Nephin Complex SPA[12] IE004098	Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) [A098] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]
Slyne Head to Ardmore Point Islands SPA[13] IE004159	Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) [A045] Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191] Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194] Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195]

[12] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Owenduff/Nephin Complex SPA [004098]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

[13] *NPWS (2022). Conservation objectives for Slyne Head to Ardmore Point Islands SPA [004159]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.*

Table 5-3 - Assessment of identified SPA Qualifying Species.

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments
Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) [A009]	Seabird (br.)	13.4	Yes	Yes	In	In	There is overlap with the study area and feeding and breeding habitat of this species. This species is a breeding resident across Ireland along the coast feeding on fish, crustaceans, and discards from trawlers. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]	Fish, mollusc, and crustacean seabird (s.)	43.3	Yes	Yes	In	In	There is no overlap with breeding habitat with an SPA (no suitable nesting habitat in the immediate vicinity of Hawk's Nest), however, breeding of this species occurs close by on Cruagh, Omey, Turbot, and Inishturk Islands. Unlikely to overlap with feeding habitat as this species usually feed further out to sea, however the study area does occur within the foraging range (65km) of this species as a QI for Bills Rock SPA, Duvillain Islands SPA, Inishbofin, Omey Island and Turbot Island SPA and Cruagh Island SPA.. Applicant correctly Screened In
Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) [A017]	Fish eating diving species (r.)	4.3	Yes	Yes	In	In	There is overlap of the study area with feeding habitat. The study area does not directly overlap with potentially suitable breeding areas, but is in close proximity (c. 200m). Closest confirmed breeding of this species is on Dauvillaun Islands c.65km from the study area (NPWS, 2019) which lies 30km outside the foraging range of this species (Thaxter *et al.*, 2012). Applicant correctly Screened In
Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) [A018]	Fish eating diving species (r.)	33.7	Yes	Yes	In	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and breeding habitat. Clare Island SPA (c. 33.7km north) is designated for breeding Shag. Applicant correctly Screened In

Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395]	Terrestrial goose: grazer (w.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat (nests in western Greenland). Offshore roosting is a feature of Greylag and Barnacle Geese, however there are no records of this species roosting on islands in proximity to the study area within Clifden Bay. Greenland White-fronted Geese traditionally occurred in peatland areas, but now routinely use intensively managed grasslands to forage. There is no suitable grazing habitat in the vicinity of the Hawk's Bay site. Not a fish-eating species. Review Screened Out.

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments
Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) [A045]	Terrestrial goose: grazer (w.)	8.1	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Winter visitor to Ireland, breeding in Greenland. Offshore roosting is a feature of Barnacle Geese, however there is no records of this species roosting on islands in proximity to the study area within Clifden Bay. Grazing species on coastal pastures; no suitable grazing habitat in the vicinity of Hawk's Bay site. Review Screened Out.
Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) [A051]	Wetland duck (r.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. While there is a historic sighting of a bird during the breeding season in 10km grid square L64 (which includes the south-eastern end of Clifden Bay), there are no current records (Source: BTO online atlases). Gadwall is freshwater wetland duck species which feeds on a mixed diet of seeds, insects, and aquatic vegetation. Review Screened Out.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A056]	Wetland duck (r.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. This species predominantly feeds on zooplankton found on ephemeral wetlands, molluscs, insects, and plant material. Records of breeding in Ireland of this species centred around Lough Neagh and mid-Shannon basin. Winters more widely, including on estuarine sites. Not recorded from Clifden Bay. Review Screened Out.
Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) [A059	Diving duck (w.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Wintering diving duck species with a diet dominated by plant material. Nests on the ground among waterside vegetation. Historic records of this species occur within L65 grid square from 1984; this includes the north-western part of Clifden Bay. No suitable breeding or foraging habitat in the vicinity of Hawk's Nest aquaculture site. Review Screened Out.
Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061]	Freshwater duck (r.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. This species shows a preference for large open freshwater lakes for breeding location; it can occur in estuarine waters during winter. While there are historic winter records from L64 and L65 (mainly from Ballconeely Bay), the environs of the Hawk's Nest site does not hold potential habitat for

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments
							breeding, nor any breeding records occur. Feeds predominantly on mussels with a strong preference for freshwater water. Review Screened Out.

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) [A065]	Diving marine duck (w)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with breeding habitat (Heffernan and Hunt, 2022)[14]. Unlikely to affect summer population as nesting birds feed on freshwater lakes within which they breed. During winter, Common Scoter are largely present in Mayo in The Mullet, Broadhaven & Blacksod Bay SPA and off the north coast of Mayo. Not known to occur in large numbers in Clifden Bay. Depth at site is approximately 10m with gravelly sand to gravelly mud substrate which falls within the range of favoured feeding waters of Common Scoter (<20m). However, negative impacts are not anticipated in the absence of a population of scoter in this area. Review Screened Out.
Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082]	Raptor (br.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	Terrestrial species with no overlap with breeding habitat or associated feeding areas. Hen Harrier do occur more widely in winter months. While a small number of roving records have been noted from 10km grid square L64 (Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011), the immediate environs of the Hawks Nest application site do not support suitable habitat for winter foraging or roosting Hen Harrier. Review Screened Out.
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) [A098]	Raptor (br.)	4.3	No	Yes	N/A	Out	Terrestrial species with no overlap with breeding habitat or associated feeding areas. Merlin do occur more widely in winter months and may occur along the coast where they feed on small birds. Merlin have been noted in 10km grid square L64 & L65 (Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011), but not in the immediate environs of the Hawks Nest application. Review Screened Out.

[14] *15 Heffernan ML. & Hunt, J. (2022) Breeding Status of Common Scoter in Ireland, 2020. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 136 National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Ireland.*

Corncrake (*Crex crex*) [A122]	Terrestrial crake (br.)	4.6	Yes	Yes	Out	Out	Terrestrial species which feeds on terrestrial invertebrates and plant material; no overlap with feeding or breeding habitat. Records of

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments
							breeding historically recorded within L65 grid square (most recently from 1972). Applicants correct to Screen Out.
Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125]	Aquatic crake (r.)	34.9	No	Yes	N/A	Out	No overlap with breeding or feeding habitat. Records exist within Clifden Bay (within L65 grid square from 1984). This species is omnivorous with a clear preference for plants and animals taken from the surface of large-sheltered bodies of water. Demonstrates a strong preference for large bodies of freshwater habitats. Review Screened Out.
Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]	Wader (w.)	4.3	Yes	Yes	In	In	Generally, breed in acidic grasslands, blanket bogs, and heather moors. Wintering birds can also occur on coastal and inland sites, often roosting on large estuaries, flying inland to feed in grassland sites. NBDC (BTO Atlases) – include numerous records of birds from within 10km grid square L64 and L65 – both of wintering birds and possible breeding birds. None of the latter sites are, however, close to Hawk's Nest or its associated land based sites. There is therefore no overlap with breeding or feeding habitat of breeding birds. Applicant correctly Screened In.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) [A179]	Coastal (br.)	34.9	Yes	Yes	In	In	No overlap with known breeding sites within an SPA. Potential to overlap with feeding habitat and to attract birds to the pens. Feed on insects in arable fields and will exploit domestic and fisheries waste. Applicant correctly Screened In
Common Gull (*Larus canus*) [A182]	Seabird (br.)	4.3	Yes	Yes	In	In	Potential overlap with breeding and feeding habitat. Potential for birds to be attracted to pens, feed on invertebrates, fish, and fisheries waste. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Lesser Blackbacked Gull (*Larus fuscus*) [A183]	Seabird (br.)	37	Yes	Yes	In	In	No overlap with known breeding sites / habitat. Overlap with feeding habitat. Potential for birds to be attracted to pens, feed on invertebrates, rubbish, young birds, fish, and fisheries waste. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments
Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) [A188]	Seabird (br.)	33.7	Yes	Yes	In	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and has potential to attract birds to the pens. Feed on fish, waste form commercial fishing and invertebrates. There is no overlap with breeding area. This species winters at open sea. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) [A195]	Seabird (s.)	8.1	Yes	Yes	In	In	No direct overlap with known feeding or breeding sites / habitats. Currently no known records in the area. Potential breeding habitat lies within close proximity to the site (c. 200m) on the mainland of Errislannan in Clifden Bay, giving rise to potential impacts to this species. Nests on the ground on shingle beaches. Feeds predominantly on marine fish. Applicant correctly Screened In.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) [A191]	Seabird (s.)	8.1	Yes	Yes	In	In	No overlap with breeding sites. Does overlap with feeding habitat and foraging range (54km) from Illaunnanoon SPA, Cross Lough (Killadoon) SPA[15], and Blacksod Bay/Broad Haven SPA – of which this species is a QI. Feeds on surface dwelling fish, taken from shallow dive. Potential to attract birds to pens. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]	Seabird (s.)	34.9	Yes	Yes	Out	Out	No overlap with known breeding sites / within an SPA; this species nests on the ground, breeding on the coast in large colonies and on some occasions on inland islets in freshwater lakes. The habitat surrounding the site is suitable for foraging, however, the site is outside the max foraging range for Common tern from the nearest SPA. As such there is no potential for impact and can be screened out. Applicant correctly Screened out.
Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) [A194]	Seabird (br.)	8.1	Yes	Yes	In	In	No direct overlap with known breeding sites / habitat; however recorded in close proximity to the application site (c. 200m, source NBDC 2km square recorded 2007-2011). Distribution does overlap with feeding habitat and foraging range (maximum 30km) from High Island, Inishark and Davillaun SPA, Inishbofin, Omey Island and

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments

[15] *Cross Lough SPA not currently known to support nesting Sandwich Tern.*

							Turbot Island SPA and Slyne Head to Ardmore Point SPA – of which this species is a QI. Slyne Head to Ardmore Point SPA is 8.1km from the site Given presence of species due to proximity to breeding and foraging habitat, and diet of fish, there is some potential to attract birds to pens (though application site is on the outer edge of this range). Wider autumnal movements also a consideration. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) [A204]	Seabird (s.)	43.3	Yes	Yes	In	In	No overlap with breeding habitat. Study area does overlap with feeding habitat, lying within foraging range (200km) from Bills Rock SPA, Blasket Islands SPA, Cliffs of Moher SPA, Puffin Island SPA, Skelligs SPA, of which this species is a QI. Feed on marine fish and crustaceans. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) [A199]	Seabird (br.)	33.7	Yes	Yes	In	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and foraging area; feeds on small fish via surface diving, has the potential to attract birds to pens. No overlap with breeding habitat as the cages do not overlap with land. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Razorbill (*Alca torda*) [A200]	Seabird (r.)	33.7	Yes	Yes	In	In	Overlap with feeding habitat and foraging area; feeds on small fish via surface diving, has the potential to attract birds to pens. No overlap with breeding habitat as the cages do not overlap with land. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) [A346]	Coastal terrestrial corvid (r.)	33.7	No	Yes	N/A	Out	Licence site does not overlap with breeding habitat. Potential breeding habitat on mainland in proximity to the study area (records exist most recently from 2011). No overlap with feeding habitat (feeds predominantly on subterranean invertebrates in coastal grassland). Unlikely to be attracted to the farm pens due to their generally cautious behaviour. Review Screened Out.

Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) [A013]	Diving seabird (s.)	9.6	Yes	Yes	In	In	Overlap with feeding and foraging habitat. No overlap with breeding sites. Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species. Feed from the sea by diving for small fish, plankton, molluscs and crustaceans; potential for the birds to be attracted to pens. Applicant correctly Screened In.

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments
Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) [A184]	Seabird (r.)	68.5	Yes	No	In	In	No overlap with breeding habitat. Overlap with feeding and foraging habitat. Species feeds on marine fish, following fishing boats and uses landfill sites. Potential for birds to be attracted to pens. Identified in review due to long foraging range, Hawk's Nest lies within foraging range (92km) of Inishkea Islands SPA and Inishglora and Inishkeeragh SPA - SPAs of which these species are QIs. Also, likely to nest in the wider landscape outside of SPAs. Applicant correctly Screened In.
Leach's Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) [A014]	Fish, mollusc, and crustacean seabird (s.)	99	Yes	No	In	In	Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species. No overlap with breeding habitat. Overlaps with feeding habitat. Feed on small fish, plankton, molluscs, and crustaceans. Generally, feed well offshore however some potential to attract birds to pens. Applicant correctly Screen In.

Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) [A063]	Diving seabird (r.) feeding on molluscs, crustaceans, and echinoderms	253.7	Yes	No	Out	Out	Not recorded from Clifden Bay. Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by the Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species (80km (Thaxter *et al.*, 2012)). Designated as a QI for a single SPA in Ireland - Lough Foyle SPA (ca. 253.7km away) No overlap of breeding or foraging area. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) [A016]	Diving fish eating seabird (r.)	188.8	Yes	No	In	In	Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species. Overlaps with feeding habitat. No overlap with breeding habitat. Note recent declines due to bird flu (Giralt Paradell *et al*. 2023). Applicant correctly Screened In.
Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*) [A176]	Mollusc and fish-eating seabird (w.)	279.4	Yes	No	Out	Out	Greater than 50km from the site. Identified by the Applicant due to long foraging distances of this species (foraging range of 20km). No overlap with breeding or foraging habitat. Diet of terrestrial and aquatic insects, marine molluscs and fish. Given distance of SPA of which this species is a QI there is no potential for QI populations of this species to be impacted. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*) [A001]	Diving fish eating seabird (w.)	61.7	Yes	No	Out	Out	There is no overlap with breeding or foraging area for this species. Does not breed close to the study area; restricted to breeding further north in Co. Donegal (Crowe *et al*. 2021). Additional information

Qualifying Species	Guild	Closest SPA (km)	Applicant Identified	Review Identified	Applicant Screened In/Out	Review Screened In/Out	Comments

							required on potential overlap of foraging ranges with licenced area. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) [A192]	Seabird (s.)	265.7	Yes	No	Out	Out	Greater than 50km from the site. QI of SPAs including Seas off Wexford SPA, all SPAs of which this species is a QI is outside of Thaxter *et al.*, 2012 foraging ranges. No overlap with breeding or foraging habitat. No evidence of post breeding dispersal to this area. Applicant correctly Screened Out.
Great Blackbacked Gull (*Larus marinus*) [A187]	Seabird (r.)	260.8	Yes	No	Out	Out	Greater than 50km from the site. QI of a single SPA, the North-west Irish Sea SPA outside the foraging range (60km) of this species. No direct overlap with foraging area or breeding for birds using the nearest SPA. Feed on fish, commercial fishing waste, offal, and other birds. Records exist within L64 and L65 grid squares (most recently from 2011). Given distance of SPA of which this species is a QI there is no potential for QI populations of this species to be impacted. Applicant correctly Screened Out.

6. Assessment of Screening Determination

6.1. Preliminary Findings

The applicant has provided a detailed description of almost all aspects of the project. Areas where detail has been lacking are as follows: -

- The potential impacts of the wild wrasse fishery on food availability for species such as Cormorant, Shag, red-throated diver etc. will need to be considered in the NIS. Wrasse, notably Ballan wrasse *(Labrus) bergylta*) is known to frequently occur in the diet of coastal Cormorant (Tierney *et al.*, 2011).

The screening assessment carried out in this review has not screened in any additional bird species.

6.2. In-Combination Impacts

Hawk's Nest is one of 2 no. farm applications currently being considered. The full list of sites is as follows: -

- Curhownagh, Mannin Bay
- Hawk's Nest, Clifden Bay
- Ardbear, Clifden Bay[16]

While the potential for cumulative or in-combination impacts must be considered as part of the Appropriate Assessment process, it is clear from the review presented that the proposal to farm finfish at Hawk's Nest must progress to Stage 2 and a Natura Impact Statement should be prepared. It is at this stage that a comprehensive assessment of potential cumulative impacts must also be undertaken.

6.3. Conclusion

It cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt, in view of best scientific knowledge, on the basis of objective information and in light of the conservation objectives of the relevant European sites, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans and projects, would be likely to have a significant effect on European sites as listed above.

As a result, a Stage Two Appropriate Assessment is required, and it is concluded that the Applicant was correct to prepare a Natura Impact Statement.

[16] *17 The Ardbear site in this instance is included for completeness given its location within Clifden Bay; however, it is noted that the Ardbear site is a fish culture licence which will be renewed in 2060 and not currently being considered.*

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