



Tionól Réigiúnach an Deiscirt  
Southern Regional Assembly

# Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report

**Southern Regional Assembly (SRA)**

RSK Project no: 603814



Có-mhainithe ag an  
Aontas Eorpach

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## RSK GENERAL NOTES

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## GLOSSARY

<b>TERM</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
AA	Appropriate Assessment
ACP	The Agricultural Catchment Programme
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AQI	Air Quality Index
CBS	Countryside Bird Survey
CLRTAP	Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DCHG	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
DNSH	Do No Significant Harm
EEAC	European Environment and Sustainable Development Councils
EMRA	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ERDF	The European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GLAS	Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme
HPSU	High Potential Start-up
HSE	Health Service Executive
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
IEA	International Energy Agency
LCA	Landscape Character Assessment
LSE	Likely Significant Effects
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
NDP	National Development Plan
NECD	National Emissions Ceilings Directive
NHA	Natural Heritage Area
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NIS	Natura Impact Statement
NMS	National Monuments Service
NPF	National Planning Framework

NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAH	Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons
PO	Policy Objective
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
REPS	Rural Environment Protection Scheme
RFRA	Regional Flood Risk Assessment
RMP	Record of Monument and Places
RPO	Research Performing Organisations
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SDC	Sustainable Development Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SFRA	Strategic Flood Risk assessment
SME	Small and Medium-sized enterprises
SPA	Special Protection Area
SRA	Southern Regional Assembly
TU	Technological Universities
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WHC	World Heritage Convention

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1.1 RSK has been instructed by the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021- 27 (Hereafter referred to as ‘the Regional Programme’). This will sit alongside the existing Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) documents for the two regions in the programme area.
- 1.1.2 The SEA is a systematic process for evaluating the environmental consequences of proposed plans or programmes to ensure environmental issues are fully integrated and addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision making, with a view to promoting sustainable development. The process of SEA was introduced under European Directive 2001/42/EC12 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive), and came into force in 2001.
- 1.1.3 The Directive requires the SRA, as the programming authority, to assess the likely significant effects of its plans and programmes on: *“the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship of the above factors” including “secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium, and long-term, permanent and temporary positive and negative effects”.*
- 1.1.4 In Ireland the enabling legislation is the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (SI 435/2004), as amended in 2011 by SI200/2011, and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 as amended in 2011 (Irish SI 436/2004 and SI 201/2011). Hereafter collectively referred to as ‘the Ireland Regulations’.
- 1.1.5 Scoping is the process of determining the range and level of detail of the environmental issues to be taken forward in the SEA. The scope of the SEA depends on what is being proposed within the programme, its geographical and temporal coverage, and the nature of the receiving environment. The scoping process also identifies the methods to be used, the organisations and/or individuals to be consulted during the assessment, and the timing and length of the consultation period.
- 1.1.6 The aim of this Scoping Report is thus to set the scope of the work to be included in the SEA, and to provide a framework for the Environmental Report which will form the main output of the SEA process.

## 1.2 Structure of this Report

- 1.2.1 The areas considered in this scoping report, and their location in the report, are as follows:
- Summary of the Programme – Section 2;
  - Spatial and temporal scope – Section 3.5;

- Identification of other plans, programmes and conservation objectives to be assessed against the Programme – Section 3.7;
- Summary of baseline environmental data – Chapter 4;
- Identification of key environmental and socio-economic issues within the assembly's regions – Section 4.14.3;
- Setting of draft SEA objectives – Chapter 5;
- Consideration of alternatives – Section 6.1;
- Identification of likely significant impacts – Section 6.4;
- Scoping of topics to be considered in the SEA – Section 6.5; and
- Next steps for the SEA process – Chapter 7.



## 2 THE SOUTHERN, EASTERN AND MIDLAND REGIONAL PROGRAMME 2021-27

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### 2.1 Background and General Principles

- 2.1.1 The cohesion policy (or regional policy) of the European Union provides a framework for financing a range of projects and investments designed to encourage economic growth in EU Member States, their regions, and third countries. The policy is reviewed by the EU Institutions once every seven years. The next round of programmes will cover the period 2021 – 2027.
- 2.1.2 The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) currently includes provision for two Regional Programmes, comprising:
- The Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027 – covering the Northern and Western region.
  - The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 - covering the combined areas of the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region.
- 2.1.3 The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) are two of three Regional Assemblies in the Republic of Ireland. Both assemblies work towards linking local and national policy goals through the implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) aligned to the National Planning Policy Framework – Project Ireland 2040 within their geographical regions.
- 2.1.4 The RSES is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape the future development of the Regions to 2031 and beyond. The Regional Programme is directly linked to the Regional Policy Objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for each of the two regions.
- 2.1.5 An independent Needs Assessment has been completed following public consultation in advance of drawing up the Regional Programme. This Needs Assessment comprises an analysis to help underpin the planning for Ireland’s Partnership Agreement for the next programming period (2021-2027), including the needs for European Regional Development Funding in the Southern and Eastern and Midland Programme area.
- 2.1.6 The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) aims to create jobs and develop competitiveness to reinforce the economic and social structure by investing in areas which will enhance growth.
- 2.1.7 The ERDF is a co-financed programme, meaning that EU funding must be matched by a set percentage of national funding. This co-financing rate varies by region. Ireland has three NUTS2 regions in the 2021-2027 round, with two different rates of co-financing. As ‘more developed’ regions, the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region will

receive 40% in EU financing, while as a 'transition' region the Northern and Western Region will receive 60% in EU financing.

## 2.2 Programme Objectives

2.2.1 The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme is being developed in the framework of the five Policy Objectives as set out in the Common Provision Regulation:

- **Policy Objective 1:** A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity (PO 1)
- **Policy Objective 2:** A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility (PO 2)
- **Policy Objective 3:** A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility (PO 3)
- **Policy Objective 4:** A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO 4)
- **Policy Objective 5:** A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5)

2.2.2 For the programming period of 2021 to 2027, the focus of the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme will be on Policy Objectives 1, 2 and 5 (A smarter Europe, a greener, low-carbon Europe, and a Europe closer to citizens).

2.2.3 The priorities, specific objectives and proposed type of actions are outlined in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1: Priorities, Specific Objectives and Proposed Type of Actions of the Regional Programme**

PO	Priority	Specific Objective
1	Smarter and More Competitive Regions (PO1)	<p>RSO 1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies (ERDF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity building within the new and emerging technological universities (TUs)</li> <li>- Capacity building within both universities and technological universities (TUs)</li> <li>- Accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level</li> <li>- Supporting innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions.</li> </ul>
		<p>RSO 1.3. Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments (ERDF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions.</li> </ul>
2	Low-Carbon Energy Efficient Regions (PO2)	<p>RSO 2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (ERDF).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving the energy efficiency of residential homes.</li> </ul>
5	Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development (PO5)	<p>RSO 5.1. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic, and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas (ERDF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning Phase - Prepare integrated urban regeneration action plans / masterplans (either using procured multi-disciplinary service or short term contract within the Local Authority for required skills) which identify projects and initiatives tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction.</li> <li>- Implementation Phase - Deliver pilot and pathfinder projects for selected towns (priority for Key Towns or other settlements as justified by the Local Authority under selection criteria) tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction. This will involve capital investment and may include public realm improvement projects.</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Target Groups

2.3.1 Target groups for the programme include (but are not limited to):

- Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), with a particular focus on the emerging Technological Universities in the regions, and the research community;
- Large, medium and small enterprises, including microenterprises, with a particular focus on SMEs, new enterprises, and high potential start ups (HPSUs);
- Not-for profit entities, together with public bodies, such as Local Authorities and other agencies of the State, that are involved in a collaborative proposal with enterprise and other local and regional stakeholders;
- National, regional and local organisations involved in the delivery of energy efficiency measures; and
- Civil society including community-based organisations and private citizens.

## 2.4 Community Involvement - Programme Implementation

2.4.1 The ERDF Programmes are developed under an EU Partnership model, with extensive consultation involving social partners and voluntary groups.

2.4.2 The consultation process commenced with a detailed needs assessment which was undertaken by Indecon Consultants<sup>1</sup>, completed in July 2020 and which focused the analysis around future investment priorities in line with national and regional policy objectives and the Cohesion Policy objectives of the EU. The needs analysis was subject to its own detailed stakeholder consultation process.

2.4.3 Regional and national public consultations then took place between July and September 2020 to elicit the views of stakeholders and the wider public, regarding the priorities for ERDF funding in 2021 – 2027, on a regional basis<sup>2</sup>.

2.4.4 Further consultations then took place with Government Departments and State Agencies to identify potential policy alignments with ERDF and regional objectives between January and March 2021.

2.4.5 This included meetings between the Regional Assemblies and:

- Department of Transport
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Department of Further and Higher Education
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Department of Rural and Community Development
- The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
- Relevant Local Authorities

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<sup>1</sup> [https://esif.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Needs-Analysis\\_for-ESF-ERDF-Funding\\_Indecon\\_Final-Report\\_-July\\_2020-1.pdf](https://esif.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Needs-Analysis_for-ESF-ERDF-Funding_Indecon_Final-Report_-July_2020-1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://esif.ie/results/>

- 2.4.6 Following those rounds of meetings, a number of Government Departments and public bodies put forward proposed actions for consideration for ERDF funding.
- 2.4.7 A comprehensive screening process of those proposed actions was conducted by the MAs in consultation with the EU Commission and Member State. From the screening process and following a further round of consultation meetings with the Government Departments and State Agencies between July and November 2021, a list of preferred actions for inclusion on the ERDF co-funded Programme was identified

## 2.5 Geographic Coverage

- 2.5.1 The Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region are two of three NUTS2 regions of Ireland, the other being the Northern and Western Region. The geographical area of the two regions in the programme area covers 63% of the landmass of the Republic of Ireland, comprises almost 80% of the total population and encompasses the following 18 Irish counties:
- Nine counties of Ireland for the Southern Region, comprising Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork, Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, and Wexford;
  - Nine counties of Ireland for the Eastern and Midland Region, comprising Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Louth, Wicklow, Laois, Longford, Offaly, and Westmeath.
- 2.5.2 The area covered by the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme can be seen in the Figure 1 in Appendix C.
- 2.5.3 The regions' priorities for investment are identified in the RSES for the Southern Region and the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region. They each set a 12-year strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of their region in line with vision and objectives for national change in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP).
- 2.5.4 The vision for each region is led by the need for transformative change. The NPF and RSES seeks a 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland Region and the Southern and Northern and Western Region. The cities in the programme area targeted for growth are Dublin to grow by 20-25% and Cork, Limerick and Waterford to grow by 50-60% by 2040. The NPF and RSES also seek employment led compact growth with at least 50% of all new homes that are targeted in the cities to occur within their existing built-up footprints and at least 30% of all new homes targeted in other settlements within their exiting built-up footprints by 2040. Each RSES sets a spatial and economic strategy that focuses on the Cities and Metropolitan Areas (Dublin in the Eastern and Midland Region and Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford in the Southern Region) as primary engines of economic and population growth supported in turn by a network of Regional Growth Centres in the Eastern and Midland Region (Drogheda, Dundalk, Athlone) and Key Towns.
- 2.5.5 The Key Towns in the Eastern and Midland Region are Swords, Bray, Maynooth, Navan, Naas, Wicklow, Mullingar, Longford, Tullamore, Portlaoise and Graigcullen/Carlow. The Key Towns in the Southern Region are Kilkenny, Ennis, Carlow, Tralee, Wexford, Clonmel, Killarney, Mallow, Nenagh, Thurles, Newcastle West, Clonakilty, Dungarvan and Gorey.

The regions' diverse towns, villages and rural areas are also supported for regeneration, economic resilience and sustainable growth.

- 2.5.6 There are several nature conservation, landscape and cultural heritage designations in Ireland. These are designated as either statutory (protected by law) or non-statutory (a material planning consideration), and can be of international, national or local importance. Information on local and/or non-statutory designations is held by individual local authorities and has not been obtained for this strategic level assessment.

## 3 APPROACH TO THE SEA

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### 3.1 Best Practice Guidance

3.1.1 Our SEA approach takes into account the procedures provided under the following guidance documents:

- European Commission (2003), 'Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment';
- Environmental Protection Agency (online), 'Information to assist Planning Authorities in the preparation and implementation of SEA for Plans / Programmes / Strategies in Ireland, required to comply with the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC);
- Department for housing, Local government and Heritage (2021) Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning authorities (Draft for Public consultation).

### 3.2 Screening Statement

3.2.1 Screening is the process for deciding whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects, and would thus warrant SEA.

3.2.2 It has been determined by the SRA as the competent authority that the requirement for SEA should apply and on that basis, the SRA has voluntarily proceeded to the Scoping stage. In making this decision, the SRA had due regard to the SEA Decision Tree toolkit for SEA Screening and the Draft SEA Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities Oct 2021 (including Figure 3.1 Decision Tree setting out the requirements for SEA under SI No 435 of 2004 as amended). The following was taken into consideration:

- In consultation with the European Commission and environmental authorities, it was advised that the objectives of the Regional Programme shall be pursued in full respect of EU environmental assessment requirements and where relevant shall be published with the programme.
- In consultation with the European Commission, the Regional Programme will be designed in a manner that follows the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Principle under the six environmental objectives of the EU Taxonomy Regulation.
- The nature of the Regional Programme is such that it will need to identify priorities for the regions and set out the type of actions to be taken under selected objectives for the European Regional Development Fund. Example actions may include delivery of new regional capital investment projects (e.g. incubation capacity, cluster development, research and innovation), energy efficiency retrofitting in buildings, preparation of action plans and pilot projects to tackle urban vacancy and dereliction.
- There is an extensive network of European sites in the programme area. Within the programme area, actions and co-funding towards projects (subject to required planning and environmental assessment processes) will be supported.
- The AA Screening of the Regional Programme has determined the potential for likely significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment (either alone or in combination) in relation to PO1 SEM1 RSO1.3 and PO5 SEM3 RSO5.1. It is therefore recommended that an Appropriate Assessment is carried

out for these Specific Objectives, and a Natura Impact Statement Report should be prepared.

- The previous Southern and Eastern Regional Programme 2014-2020 was subject to SEA.
- Accordingly, it was determined by the competent authority that SEA is required for the Regional Programme under S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended.

### 3.3 The SEA Process

3.3.1 SEA guides were produced by the Government of Ireland in 2004 and 2011. In October 2021, the Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities Draft was published for public consultation. In common with a number of SEA guidance documents, the below table sets out a five-stage process for carrying out SEA.

**Table 3.1: Stages in the SEA Process**

Stage	Tasks
Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope	A1: Identifying other relevant plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives
	A2: Collecting baseline information
	A3: Identifying environmental problems
	A4: Developing SEA objectives
	A5: Consulting on the scope of SEA
Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects  Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects	B1: Testing the plan or programme objectives against the SEA objectives
	B2: Developing strategic alternatives
	B3: Predicting the effects of the plan or programme, including alternatives
	B4: Evaluating the effects of the plan or programme, including alternatives
	B5: Mitigating adverse effects
	B6: Proposing measures to monitor the environmental effects of plan or programme implementation
Stage C: Preparing the Environmental Report	C1: Preparing the Environmental Report
Stage D: Consulting on the draft plan or programme and the Environmental Report	D1: Consulting the public and Consultation Bodies on the draft plan or programme and the Environmental Report
	D2: Assessing significant changes
	D3: Making decisions and providing information
Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan or programme on the environment	E1: Developing aims and methods for monitoring
	E2: Responding to adverse effects



- 3.3.2 This Scoping Report (Stage A) is intended to provide sufficient information about the Regional Programme and its potential environmental effects to allow the Consultation Authorities to provide an informed response in regard to the environmental topics to be included in the SEA.
- 3.3.3 Comments from the Consultation Authorities on this Scoping Report will be responded to in the draft Environmental Report (the next stage of SEA). Chapter 7 discusses in more detail the subsequent stages and outputs of the SEA process that will be carried out following the conclusion of Stage A.

### 3.4 Sustainability Topics

- 3.4.1 The baseline data, key environmental issues and SEA Objectives have been presented through a series of sustainability topics derived from Annex I(f) of the SEA Directive, namely: biodiversity, flora and fauna; population; human health; soil; water; air; climatic factors; material assets; cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage); landscape; and the inter-relationship between these.
- 3.4.2 The topics considered in the SEA will be in accordance with these requirements, here they have been updated to align more closely with the requirements of the Programme and expanded for clarity; see Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2: Sustainability Topics**

Sustainability Topic	Sub-Topics	Relevant Topic in SEA Directive
Ecology and Nature Conservation	Internationally and nationally designated sites (Including those within the marine environment) Locally designated sites and priority habitats Protected and priority species	Biodiversity Flora and fauna
Health and Quality of Life, Socio-economics	Health and wellbeing Walking and cycling Accessibility to education, employment, housing, community facilities/services and greenspace Deprivation, inequality and exclusion Population size, density and structure Cultural assets	Human health Population
Soil and Land Quality	Geology Soil and agricultural land quality Previously developed and contaminated land Carbon storage and water attenuation	Soil
Water	Water resources and availability Water quality Flooding risk	Water
Air Quality	Air pollution	Air

Sustainability Topic	Sub-Topics	Relevant Topic in SEA Directive
	Travel and transport	
Climate Change	Greenhouse gas emissions Renewable energy Sustainable transport Climate change adaptation and resilience Protection of habitats which act as carbon stores	Climatic factors
Material Assets	Mineral resources Waste and recycling	Material assets
Historic Environment	Designated and non-designated sites and areas Archaeological and cultural assets	Cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage)
Landscape	Quality and character of landscape, townscape and coastal areas Designated and other important sites (including greenspace) Visual aesthetics Access to green space and nature Light pollution	Landscape
Natural capital	Provisioning services that Green Infrastructure (GI) provides, e.g. food, fuel and freshwater Regulating services that GI provides, e.g. control of natural processes such as soil, air and water quality and climate regulation Cultural services that GI provides, e.g. recreational, educational and ethical benefits Supporting services that GI provides e.g. habitat and natural cycles	The inter-relationship between these

### 3.5 Spatial and Temporal Scope

- 3.5.1 The spatial scope for the assessment covers the regions within the programme area: NUTS2 Code: IE05: Southern and NUTS2 Code: IE06 Eastern and Midland.
- 3.5.2 As required by the SEA Directive the assessment will also take into account trans-boundary impacts where it is identified that actions taken under the Regional Programme have the potential to impact on the topic areas identified in other states. Northern Ireland borders the programme area to the north hence will form the main focus of the consideration of trans-boundary effects. Other jurisdictions will be considered as applicable

but it is not currently anticipated that the programme would have potential for significant effects beyond the borders of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

- 3.5.3 Consideration of trans-boundary impacts is likely to be particularly relevant with some of the environmental topics that transcend national boundaries, for example ecology, climate, air, water and landscape.
- 3.5.4 The Regional Programme runs from 2021 to 2027 and this is therefore adopted as the primary temporal scope. However, with certain aspects of the environment such as climate, ecology and landscape, any positive or negative impacts associated with the Regional Programme may take effect over a much longer time period than that of the programme itself. For this reason, a longer-term view will be taken on potential impacts where appropriate.

### **3.6 Assessment of Alternatives**

- 3.6.1 Consideration of alternatives is a key feature of the SEA process as defined by the SEA Directive. In practical terms, it refers to possible alternative mechanisms for delivering the Regional Programme, and the assessment of the impacts of each of these options against the SEA objectives.
- 3.6.2 A number of alternatives are being developed and will be defined & assessed at the ER stage. Further consideration to the assessment of alternatives is given in Section 6.

### **3.7 Other Plans, Programmes and Conservation Objectives**

- 3.7.1 A key part of the SEA process is to assess the relationship of emerging thematic objectives with the existing international, European and national framework of plans and programmes to identify synergies, conflicts and potential gaps. This includes the consideration of statutory and non-statutory environmental protection objectives. Much of the policy environment relating to the Regional Programme is influenced by European Directives and policy.
- 3.7.2 This assessment, and the identification of the relevant plans and programmes in each jurisdiction that requires further assessment is provided in Appendix B.

### **3.8 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening**

- 3.8.1 In addition to the SEA, there is a requirement under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (as transcribed into Irish law) to assess whether the Regional Programme, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will give rise to Likely Significant Effects (LSE)

on any European site. This includes Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

- 3.8.2 There is a degree of overlap between the requirements of both the SEA and AA Screening, and in accordance with best practice an integrated process of sharing gathered data has been carried out.
- 3.8.3 The Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement will be published as a standalone report alongside the SEA Scoping Report. A summary of the findings of the AA Statement can be found in section 6.5.

### **3.9 Do No Significant Harm Assessment**

- 3.9.1 The SEA process identifies measures to prevent and mitigate any significant adverse effects on the environment that may result from the implementation of a plan or programme, however this does not mean compliance with the DNSH principle.
- 3.9.2 A dedicated DNSH assessment at the level of the types of actions in a plan or programme is therefore necessary. This will build on the findings of the SEA and remove actions that would cause significant adverse effects any of the environmental objectives covered in the Taxonomy Regulation.
- 3.9.3 The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) in Recital 10 states that in the context of tackling climate change,  
*“The Funds should support activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and would do no significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852” (“The Taxonomy Regulation”).*
- 3.9.4 A standalone DNSH assessment will be undertaken alongside the SEA Environmental Report.

## 4 BASELINE DATA

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4.1.1 Schedule 2 of the Ireland SEA Regulations specifies that the Environmental Report must contain the following information in respect of baseline conditions:

*“2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.*

*3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.*

*4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds and the Habitats Directive.”*

4.1.2 A description of the current state of the environment in Ireland, in respect of each of the sustainability topics is provided below. Where appropriate, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have been used to assist with analysis of this data; maps have been produced to display relevant spatial information and can be seen in Appendix B.

4.1.3 Analysis of baseline information has been carried out to provide an evidence base for current and likely future environmental conditions without the Regional Programme. Key environmental, sustainability, and socio-economic issues for Ireland, have also been identified.

4.1.4 Much of the baseline data sources that exist are published at a national rather than regional level and that is hence reflected in this section. Where separate regional data sources exist, these are referred to as applicable. Where no regional data exists, reference to national datasets and trends is considered to be the most representative indication available of likely baseline conditions with the programme area.

### 4.2 Characterisation of the programme area

4.2.1 The Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region are made up from the 18 geographical counties of Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork, Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, and Wexford, Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Louth, Wicklow, Laois, Longford, Offaly, and Westmeath. The programme area includes the Cities and Metropolitan Areas of Dublin, Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford, the Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk, a network of 25 Key Towns and an extensive rural hinterland.

4.2.2 It encompasses an area of 44,489 km<sup>2</sup> from the Irish Sea to the north-east to the Atlantic Ocean in the south-west. The diverse natural beauty of both regions the presence of vibrant cities including the Capital City, towns and villages full of unique character along with the regions’ strong cultural and heritage assets, make them largely suitable for tourism. The regions include the nationally designated tourism corridors of the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland’s Ancient East and Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands.

4.2.3 The programme area is the largest ERDF area in Ireland in terms of population size, with over 3.9 million people. This represents almost 80% of the total population. The Eastern and Midland’s region is the largest in population size, with over 2.3 million people while the

Southern Region is the second most populated NUTS2 region, with around 1.6 million people.

- 4.2.4 Population projections for the Southern Region anticipate large increases in the 15–24-year (+26%), 45–64-year (+14%) and 65+year (+56%) age groups between 2016 and 2031. In the Eastern and Midland Region, the age profile is young with 1 in 5 people aged under 14 years of age, rising to 1 in 4 of the population in fast growing areas like Fingal and Laois. By 2031 there will be a significant increase in the number of people in the 15-24 years age cohort, which will lead to greater demand for third level education.
- 4.2.5 Both regions are projected to experience a similar trend in ageing by 2031, with data showing that there will be a significant increase in the population aged over 65. Plans for adequate healthcare, accommodation, and services to enable independent living for as long as possible, encourage active lifestyles and address isolation for older residents will need to be considered in future planning.

### **4.3 Ecology and Nature Conservation**

- 4.3.1 A map showing key nature conservation designations across Ireland can be seen in Figure 6 Appendix B.
- 4.3.2 The counties of Ireland within the programme area, although predominantly urban, has an attractive natural landscape that includes a wealth of biodiversity and a significant range of ecological sites of international and national importance. It has a considerable coastal area and unique mountain ranges.
- 4.3.3 Ireland has a rich natural heritage as outlined in the Actions for Biodiversity 2011 – 2016 report. It is home to over 31,000 species, with only 10% of these being familiar species such as mammals, plants or birds.
- 4.3.4 The strategic plan for Ireland’s biodiversity is:

“That biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored, delivering benefits essential for all sectors of society and that Ireland contributes to efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems in the EU and globally.”
- 4.3.5 In Ireland, the establishment of protected areas is very important for the conservation of biodiversity. As revealed in Ireland’s 2002 National Biodiversity Plan, about 10% of the country is considered to be of prime importance for nature conservation. This comprises 439 SACs covering approximately 1.35M ha of which 222 are located within the SEM regions. Ireland has 165 SPAs covering approximately 597,000 ha of marine and terrestrial habitats of which 85 are located within the SEM regions. Ireland also has 45 Ramsar sites, and 29 of these are located within the SEM regions. Under the OSPAR Convention to Protect the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic, Ireland has also committed to establishing Marine Protected Areas (MPA) to protect biodiversity: nineteen of its SACs are MPAs for marine habitats (NPWS, 2020).
- 4.3.6 The basic designation for wildlife is the Natural Heritage Area (NHA). This is an area considered important for the habitats present or which holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. To date, 75 raised bogs, mainly in the midlands, have been designated as NHAs, covering approximately 23,000 ha. In addition, 73 blanket bogs,

located mostly in western areas, are also designated as NHAs, covering approximately 37,000 ha. Furthermore, there are number of proposed NHAs (630), which were published on a non-statutory basis, but have not yet been statutorily proposed or designated and are afforded limited protection. The pNHAs cover approximately 65,000 ha (NPWS, 2020).

- 4.3.7 Ireland also has Nature Reserves, which are areas of importance to wildlife, and Refuges for Fauna, which are designated to protect habitats of named species.
- 4.3.8 According to the Interim Review of the Implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 (Biodiversity Working Group, 2020) the conservation status of 85% of EU protected habitats in Ireland is unfavourable, while 46% are demonstrating ongoing declines in conservation status with peatlands, grassland and some marine habitats a particular concern. There are 68 Habitats Directive-listed species in Ireland, of which 8 are described as vagrants. Of the remaining 60 species, 57% are in favourable condition and 30% are in unfavourable condition. While 72% demonstrate stable or improving trends, 15% demonstrate a trend of ongoing decline (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG), 2019).
- 4.3.9 Agriculture (and to a lesser extent forestry) has been identified as a key contributor to the declines in conservation status described above. The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland (DCHG, 2019) reports that over 70% of habitats are being impacted by agricultural practices, including:
- inappropriate grazing regimes (over or undergrazing);
  - land abandonment (abandonment of grassland management);
  - activities generating diffuse pollution to surface and groundwaters;
  - activities generating air pollution;
  - activities generating diffuse pollution to surface and groundwaters; and
  - activities generating air pollution.
- 4.3.10 Non-agricultural pressures include primarily alien and problematic species and development, construction and use of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational infrastructure and areas.
- 4.3.11 Ireland has a high proportion of Europe's remaining peatlands, as peat soils cover a large area of the land surface in Ireland (20.6%), occurring as raised bogs, blanket bogs or fens and dry and wet heath. Peatlands are however under threat due to habitat change and exploitation (e.g. through drainage and peat extraction), invasive alien species, nutrient pollution and climate change (An Taisce, 2020).
- 4.3.12 Ireland has undertaken Red List assessments of the threat of extinction of vascular plant, bryophyte and non-marine vertebrate taxa as well as the better known invertebrate groups. Although most are not considered threatened, just over 14% of the taxa were assessed as under threat of extinction (including 30 species of bees, European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), and natterjack toad (*Epidalea calamita*)) (DCHG, 2017). The recent Countryside Bird Survey (CBS) (Lewis, L. et al., 2019) identified that over an 18-year period, population trend analyses indicate that 47% of species are increasing, 27% of species are stable and approximately 26% are in decline.
- 4.3.13 In terms of seabirds, monitoring data identified that over approximately 16 years, 85% of assessed species were increasing while two were showing stable trends and one was decreasing. However, when compared to approximately 32-year period, 68% species were

estimated to have increased, 11% showing stable trends and 21% decreased (Cummins, S. et al., 2019).

- 4.3.14 Ireland's marine environment is particularly biodiverse and is among Europe's richest for cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises). It supports large seabird breeding colonies, a great range of invertebrate species, and its cold-water coral communities are of particular note, which support a diverse array of associated fauna. The aquatic systems and wetlands within Ireland support internationally significant populations of birds, fish and invertebrates. Ireland contains a wealth of freshwater habitats with stocks of game and course fish.
- 4.3.15 In Ireland, some of the pressing issues in the area of the marine environment are the loss of marine biodiversity, marine litter, the risks from overfishing and acidification.

## 4.4 Health and Quality of Life

- 4.4.1 The CSO statistical release 2015-2017 state that life expectancy at birth for Ireland is 80 years for males, which is higher than in the previous census 2012-2015 in which it was 78. Life expectancy for females is 83 years old for females in the period of 2015-2017, which demonstrates no change in comparison to the previous census. Ireland has the highest self-perceived health status in the EU (Department of Health, 2021), at state level 84% of persons reported their health status as being very good or good with little or no difference between males and females in how they view their health, 3% rate their health as bad or very bad, which matches the figures from 2019 survey. Health status reflects income inequality, with fewer low-income earners reporting good health in Ireland.
- 4.4.2 It is established that obesity is a significant problem in Ireland. The National Healthy Ireland Survey (Department of Health, 2019) identified that 37% of the surveyed population are overweight and 23% are obese. However, among those aged 65 and over, 74% are overweight or obese. More people report gaining weight since the start of the Covid-19 restrictions than have lost weight in this period. Almost 3 out of 10 people (29%) report that their weight has increased, with 11% reporting a weight loss (Department of Health, 2021). Higher rate of obesity can negatively impact on the health of a population and the quality of life achievable. There is also a higher proportion of overweight or obese people in deprived areas.
- 4.4.3 Healthy Ireland Survey (Department of Health, 2021) states 17% of respondents report being limited in their everyday activities because of health problems. Two in five (40%) of those aged 75 and older report being limited to some degree by health problems, compared to 9% of those aged under 35. A lack of physical activity can negatively affect health and can lead to increased physical and mental health problems.
- 4.4.4 Mental health illnesses are prevalent in Ireland and the number of people experiencing such problems is expected to increase in the coming years. According to Irish Health Survey (Central Statistics Office, 2019) at state level, 86% of persons aged 15 years and over report having none to minimal depression. Healthy Ireland Survey states 30% of respondents say their mental health worsened since the beginning of necessary public health restrictions in March 2020 (Department of Health, 2021). Approximately 25% of



population are expected to experience a mental health issue at some point in their life. Mental health therefore is a growing health, social and economic problem for Ireland.

- 4.4.5 There is widespread concern about the impact of Covid-19 and associated restrictions on mental health. Evidence to date shows that the combined effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions is that approximately one person in every five in the general population in Ireland has significantly increased psychological distress (e.g. anxiety, depression) (Irish Medical Journal, 2020). Those gaining weight are also more likely to report a worsening in their mental health. Two out of every five people (40%) whose weight has increased report that their mental health has worsened (Department of Health, 2021).
- 4.4.6 Research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions. A large majority of 81% report feeling less socially connected due the Covid-19 restrictions. 15% say that it has not changed, while 4% feel more socially connected. Those aged 75 and older are more likely to identify that their level of social connectedness has not changed at 24%. While most report that they had contact at least once a week with people across these groups, this contact was predominantly by phone, email or any other electronic means (Department of Health, 2021).
- 4.4.7 According to the Healthy Ireland survey (Department of Health, 2021), 28% of respondents report that they currently have a long-standing illness or health condition that will last for 6 months or more. This has decreased from 32% in 2019. Prevalence of long-term illness is significantly higher among older people; 52% of those 65 and older report having a long-standing health problem, compared to 13% of those aged under 35. At a regional level in 2019, the Midland region reported highest levels of respondents dealing with a long-term condition at 31% of those aged 15 and over. Mid-East region reported lowest levels at 22% of persons surveyed dealing with a long-term condition (CSO, 2019).
- 4.4.8 In Ireland there are 3.07 doctors per 1,000 people and the number of nurses is 11.61 per 1,000 people which is favourable to other comparable countries (Nuffield Trust, 2020). The 'Health in Ireland – Key Trends' report (Department of Health, 2021) indicates that hospital activity has been extensively affected by the pandemic, with total discharges falling over 14% in 2020, and ED attendances falling over 15%. The pandemic response is also very evident in the staffing figures reported. There were over 1,700 more nurses, and almost 900 more doctors, working in the Health Service Executive (HSE) by the end of 2020, compared to the end of 2019.

## 4.5 Socio-economics

- 4.5.1 Between 2011 and 2016, the national population of Ireland has increased by 3.8% from 4,588,252 to 4,761,865 (Trinity College Dublin, 2019). Within the Eastern and Midland Region, following a growth trend between 2006 and 2016, the highest rates of population increase were in Dublin which reported a 15% growth rate. The commuter areas near to Cork and Limerick Cities and in areas close to other larger settlements have shown an increase in population growth. Areas associated with the Dublin commuter belt in Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford also saw large population increases.
- 4.5.2 In 2016, the three cities and suburbs of the Southern region accounted for 22% of the region's total population. Growth in the cities and suburbs outpaced overall Regional and State level growth from 2011-2016, showing encouraging signs that these cities are

strengthening their population base. In parallel, there is evidence of significant decline in smaller towns and villages in the Southern Region.

- 4.5.3 In Ireland, nearly 47% of 25-64 year olds have attained a tertiary education, one of the largest shares across the OECD. The attainment rate is higher among women 51% compared with 43% among men (OECD, 2019). The share of tertiary educated adults reached 56% among 25-34 year olds, with 52% of men and 60% of women in this age group holding a tertiary qualification. Ireland's gender gap in tertiary attainment is close to the average across OECD countries. Parts of the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region compare favourably with the State average, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown had the highest percentage of persons with a third level qualification at 61.1%, followed by Dublin City and Fingal at 48.7%. County Longford and Wexford had the lowest percentage of persons with a third level qualification at 32.5%, followed by Offaly at 32.7% (CSO, 2016).
- 4.5.4 The National Deprivation Index for Ireland (Pobal, 2016) demonstrates that within the programme area, Dublin, Cork, Kildare, Meath, Wicklow are the only counties which are marginally above average for Deprivation Index, whereas the other counties within the programme area demonstrate marginally below average Deprivation Index. While deprivation worsened for Ireland between 2006 and 2011, it improved between 2011 and 2016 (Trinity College Dublin, 2019). Please see Figure 2 in Appendix C.
- 4.5.5 According to the Regional Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Ireland 2019, the percentage of Irish people living in consistent poverty in 2018 was 5.6%, down from 6.7% in 2016. Children remain the most vulnerable age group in 2018, with over four times higher chances of being at risk of consistent poverty than those aged 18-64. Out of the NUTS2 regions in the programme area, South-East presents 21.4% for At Risk of Poverty Rate, which is the highest region within Ireland as a whole (CSO, 2019). Dublin had a rate of 9.8% followed by Mid-East with a rating of 11.7%, which were the lowest within Ireland.
- 4.5.6 As of 2021, the number of unemployed persons in Ireland rose by 48.6% (CSO, 2021). The overall employment rate for all persons aged 15-74 increased from 4.7% to 7.1% between 2020 and 2021. For those aged 65-74 years, the rate is as low as 4.4% and as high as 25.3% for those aged 15-19 years. Within the two Regions, in 2016 Carlow demonstrated highest unemployment rate of 17%, while Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown presented lowest 7.4% rate (CSO, 2016). Over a fifth (21%) of unemployed persons report some form of mental ill-health compared to 9% of those in employment (CSO, 2019). See Figure 5 in Appendix C for further details on unemployment.
- 4.5.7 The proportion of owner-occupied households decreased from 69.7% to 67.6% between 2011 and 2016, allied to continued growth in rented accommodation (CSO, 2016). Rented accommodation has continued its upward trend with an increase of 4.7% since 2011. This meant that renting was the tenure status for almost 30% of all of occupied dwellings in the last census. The biggest increases of up to 11.2% in the numbers renting were in Kilkenny. The average number of persons per household recorded an increase for the first time since 1966. In 2011 there were on average 2.73 persons per households, the equivalent figure in 2016 stood at 2.75. Close to half (49.5%) of tenants who are 65 or over are spending

more than 35% of their disposable income on rent. This is just over a third (33.8%) for tenants who are under 30 (CSO, 2021).

- 4.5.8 The number of homeless persons in Ireland is on the rise. According to Homelessness Report (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021), the total number of homeless individuals is 8,475, an increase of 263 (3.2%) on the total for August 2021. The number of homeless persons in Dublin is highest in Ireland, as there are 4,287 homeless persons as of 2021. Homelessness is therefore a growing social problem in Ireland.

## 4.6 Soil and Land Use

- 4.6.1 Land is a finite resource with multiple land use types such as agriculture, housing and forestry requiring space. The value and use of the land will generally depend on its quality and functionality. This section examines soil quality, the role of agri-environment schemes, forest and woodland plantings, and housing completions on greenfield and brownfield land.
- 4.6.2 Irish land cover is primarily agricultural, followed by bogs, wetlands and forestry. Ireland is of international importance for peatlands. Irish raised bogs are the most important remaining in Europe. Ireland is the most important country in Europe for blanket bog and holds 8% of the world's extent of this habitat (Irish Peatland Conservation Council, 2020). There has been significant damage to peatlands within the SEM Region due to peat extraction and agricultural improvement together with the associated drainage and burning related to these land uses.
- 4.6.3 Soil is important in Ireland for the role it plays both in supporting agriculture and in forming important natural habitats. In 2020, approximately 64% of Ireland's land is suitable for agriculture (DAFM, 2020), with a further 11.2% used for forestry (CSO, 2020). Irish soil quality is good overall as it has been protected from the late introduction to the industrial revolution. There is however increasing pressure on soil, particularly from land use changes, intensification of agriculture, erosion and overgrazing, afforestation, industry and urbanisation. Soils are relatively rich in soil organic matter, especially wetter soils and blanket and basin peats.
- 4.6.4 There were 135,037 farms in 2020, a 3.4% reduction on the last Census of Agriculture in 2010, while the average farm size has increased by 0.7 hectares (or 2.2%) in 2020. Of the 135,037 farms, 42% were in the programme area with an average combined farm size of 78.2 hectares, with 40% in the Southern Region and 18% in the Eastern and Midland Region (CSO, 2020).
- 4.6.5 Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) is the latest Agri-environmental scheme in Ireland, following on from Ireland's Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS). The scheme is voluntary and broadly lasts five years from the time of entry. The scheme ceased submission of new applications since 2017 however extensions to existing contracts are running in 2022. The core objectives of GLAS are to promote biodiversity, protect water quality and to help combat climate change.
- 4.6.6 Agri-environment schemes encourage farmers and landowners to manage their land to benefit the environment (specifically to enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, enhance the landscape and heritage features, and help reduce the impact of climate change) by integrating sustainable environmental management into the everyday workings

of the farm. In return for this, farmers and landowners receive a payment, based on the area of habitat and archaeological features present on the farm, and the area/length of habitat enhancement options carried out.

- 4.6.7 Nearly 300,000 ha of private forests were established between 1980 and 2019, with private plantings peaked in the mid-1990s. Since the foundation of the State, forest cover in Ireland has grown from 1.4% of the land area, to the current 11% and is now estimated to be at its highest level in over 350 years at 770,000 ha (DAFM, 2020). Farmers have accounted for 82% of private lands afforested between 1980 and 2018. Over half of forests are in public ownership, with the remainder in private ownership. During 2018, 4,025 ha of new forests were created (DAFM, 2019).
- 4.6.8 Despite its size, Ireland has a notably diverse geology that is prospective for a wide range of mineral deposits.
- 4.6.9 The number of brownfield sites or facilities with contaminated land legacies are significantly less in Ireland than those of most other more industrialised European due to Ireland's comparatively lower level of industrialisation. The number of contaminated land sites is estimated at between 2,000 and 2,500 mostly in the petroleum retail sector, industrial sites, closed landfill, timber treatment yards, scrap yards, railway yards and former gasworks.

## **4.7 Water**

- 4.7.1 Water, including rivers, lakes, estuaries, seas and groundwater is an essential natural resource and plays a vital role in maintaining biodiversity, human health and wellbeing, as well as economic development. This section reports on the quality of inland waters in Ireland, as well as the state of the marine environment.
- 4.7.2 Ireland has a relatively abundant supply of fresh water, which constitutes a key resource in economic, amenity and aesthetic terms. Around 50% of the land area is drained by nine river systems. Water quality in Ireland has deteriorated over the past two decades, sewage and diffuse agricultural sources are the main threat to Ireland's surface water quality.
- 4.7.3 Measures to address wastewater discharges are being implemented through Irish Water's Capital Investment Plan 2020 - 2024 which prioritises investment to deliver the most urgently needed improvements in drinking water quality, leakage reduction, water availability, wastewater compliance, efficiencies and customer service (Irish Water, 2021). In addition, all local authority wastewater discharges must now be authorised by the EPA and conditions may be imposed in order to protect the environment.
- 4.7.4 Diffuse pollution from agriculture is primarily addressed through the Nitrates Action Programme. The Agricultural Catchment Programme (ACP), put in place in 2008, is used to evaluate the impact of Ireland's NAP and the Nitrates Derogation which are implemented under the Nitrates Directive. The current period of this programme will run from 2019- 2023.
- 4.7.5 Ireland's third River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) for Ireland 2022-2027 is currently in the public consultation stages in draft format. The finalised plan is due to be published in 2022. These plans are a blueprint for the protection and improvement of waterbodies and cover approximately 800 groundwater bodies and 5,000 surface water bodies (canals, rivers, lakes, and transitional and coastal waters). The RBMP sets out the actions that Ireland will take to improve overall water quality and achieve 'good' ecological status in

water bodies (rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters) by 2027 in order to protect Ireland's drinking water sources, environment and people's quality of life.

- 4.7.6 The percentage of unpolluted river water decreased from an average annual 77.3% in 1987-1990 to 66.2% in 2016-2018. The percentage of slightly polluted river water has increased from an average annual 12.0% in 1987-1990 to 22.4% in 2016-2018. The proportion of moderately polluted river water increased from an average annual 9.7% in 1987-1990 to 11.2% in 2016-2018. However, the levels of seriously polluted river water has fallen from an average annual 0.9% in 1987-1990 to 0.2% in 2016-2018 (CSO, 2021). Approximately half of the 953 polluted river sites assessed by the EPA in 2010 were polluted due to large point sources such as municipal wastewater treatment plants and the other half mainly due to diffuse agricultural sources. Many wastewater treatment plants are in need of an upgrade in terms of the capacity and nature of treatment.
- 4.7.7 Water quality at bathing sites has generally remained at a high standard. In 2020, 89.2% of bathing water sites surveyed had good water quality and 95.9% had sufficient water quality. In 2020, 76% of groundwater bodies, 57% of rivers, and 56% of lakes were found to be of satisfactory quality. 79% of estuaries and coastal waters were in satisfactory condition for dissolved inorganic nitrogen, while 98% were in satisfactory condition for phosphate (Environmental Protection Agency, 2020). Some rivers are showing evidence of improvement in biological quality however, 43% of rivers are still in unsatisfactory quality. The number of seriously polluted river water bodies nonetheless, has started to decline, from 7 in the period 2016-2018 down to 2 in 2017-2020.
- 4.7.8 Groundwater quality monitoring stations over the period 1995-2020 showed there was an increase in the proportion of samples showing low volumes of nitrates in watercourses. An increase from 16% in 1995-1997 to 29% in 2016, before falling to 22% in 2020. In addition, there was also an increase in the proportion of samples with higher nitrate levels (more than 25 mg/l) also increased from an average annual 20% in 1995-1997 to 24% in 2020 (CSO, 2021).

## 4.8 Air Quality

- 4.8.1 Ireland's air quality is broadly good in comparison with other European states. This is largely due to its position on the fringe of Western Europe, with a relatively mild climate and an almost continuous movement of clean Atlantic air over the country. In the Air Quality Index rankings 2020, Ireland ranked 91<sup>st</sup> out 106 countries, perceived as a 'good' average (AQI, 2020).
- 4.8.2 Monitoring of key pollutants in 2020 shows that Ireland continues to be compliant with the EU air quality standards for most pollutants such as PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, ozone, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) and Dioxins, assisted by the reduction in traffic due to COVID-19 restrictions. There are some localised air quality issues in smaller towns and villages associated with pollutants such as NO<sub>2</sub> and PM, largely elevated due to the combustion of solid fuel for home heating during the pandemic. PM<sub>2.5</sub> is the most problematic pollutant in Ireland from an air quality point of view. Particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) emissions decreased in 2019 after increasing in 2018. Emissions of particulate matter in

Ireland, demonstrate a 41.7% decrease between 1990 and 2019. Generally, these emissions are declining due to reduced coal and peat use across all sectors (EPA, 2021).

- 4.8.3 Ireland has higher than average per capita emissions of CH<sub>4</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> from any of the EU member states, primarily because Ireland demonstrates the highest agriculture emission contribution towards national total emissions (EPA, 2020).
- 4.8.4 Wood and peat burning is emerging as a potentially significant contributor to PAH and PM levels, along with a wide variety of other solid fuel products that are on the market (EPA, 2016). In addition, when compared to the more stringent WHO guidelines and EEA reference level values, ozone, PM and PAH are pollutants of concern in the short term, while NO<sub>2</sub> is projected to increase due to increase in road traffic (EPA, 2016).
- 4.8.5 As a party of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP), Ireland annually reports emission data for a wide range of air pollutants and other substances released into the atmosphere. Previously in 2015, Ireland performed poorly when examined against the emissions of other EU Member States based on their progress towards the 2010 targets set by National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NECD) (CSO, 2018). The EPA's latest Informative Inventory Report 2021 estimated an overall reduction trend in emissions between 1990 and 2019. However, Ireland is still not compliant with the targets set by NECD. This can primarily be attributed to Ireland exceeding its emission ceiling for ammonia for 7 of the years between 2010 and 2019 (EPA, 2021).
- 4.8.6 According to Inventory Report 2021, ammonia emissions are estimated to have increased by approximately 14.4% between 1990 and 2019. Predominantly due to emissions from agriculture, as agriculture accounted for 99.4% of total ammonia emissions in 2019. Ammonia emissions present a significant challenge to meeting the NECD emission reduction target of 5% compared to 2005 levels by year 2030 (EPA, 2021).
- 4.8.7 The 2021 inventory report also predicted that NO<sub>x</sub> emissions would not meet the 2020 emission reduction target set by the National Emissions Ceiling Directive (NECD) (2016/2284), although the 2030 emission reduction target is currently expected to be achieved. The report predicts that NMVOCs would not meet either the 2020 or the 2030 emission reduction targets (EPA, 2021). NO<sub>x</sub> and NMVOCs emissions have both been non-compliant with the emission ceilings from the previous NECD (2001/81/EC) for the period 2010 to 2018 (EPA, 2020).
- 4.8.8 Emissions of SO<sub>2</sub> in Ireland are well within the required EU emission limits and continue to decrease. This positive result is substantially due to the switch to lower sulphur content fuels in electricity generation and transport (EPA, 2021).

## 4.9 Climate Change

- 4.9.1 Mean annual maximum and minimum temperatures have been rising since the end of the 19th Century. The 2005 - 2014 decade was 0.7°C warmer than the 1961-1990 average. Such changes in temperature extremes have implications for agriculture and health. Rainfall is also important for agriculture. There is some evidence of an upward trend in mean annual rainfall, with less rain falling in summer months (ASC, 2016). The 1970s had

lower levels of rainfall but there is no strong trend in more recent years. Growing seasons fluctuate and since the 1980s, there has been a tendency for a longer growing season.

- 4.9.2 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report, Global Warming of 1.5°C, published in October 2018, confirmed that the international community has a limited window for real action to reduce emissions.
- 4.9.3 In 2020, Ireland's GHG emissions are estimated to be 57.70 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO<sub>2</sub>eq), which is 3.6% lower (or 2.14 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>eq) than emissions in 2019 (59.84 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>eq) (EPA, 2021). A 4.0% decrease in emissions has been reported in 2019 compared to 2018 while in 2020, GHG emissions were 3.6% lower than emissions in 2019 (EPA, 2020). Inventory data between the years 2010 and 2020 show that emissions have been reducing in six of the last ten years. In the Programme for Government and the Climate Act 2021, Ireland committed to halving its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050 at the latest (DECC, 2021).
- 4.9.4 The public health measures taken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching impacts on all aspects of society during 2020, including on Ireland's energy use and resulting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (SEAI, 2021). Energy related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (including international aviation) fell by over 11% (4.3 million tonnes) in 2020, which is the most significant annual reduction since the height of the economic recession in 2009.
- 4.9.5 Energy consumption accounted for 59% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions in 2018. Transport, households and industry accounted for the highest shares. CO<sub>2</sub> from burning fossil fuels accounted for 60.9% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland in 2020. The biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland is CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the burning of fossil fuels in the non-ETS sector, for example in homes and cars. These made up 38% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland in 2018, and 50% of all non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is unusual compared to other EU countries because greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture make up a much larger share of emissions. In 2018 agriculture was responsible for 33% of all greenhouse gas emissions, and for 45% of all non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions (SEAI, 2020).
- 4.9.6 Ireland had two binding European targets in 2020 - 16% renewable energy share (RES-Overall) in gross final consumption of energy and a 10% renewable energy share in transport (RES-T). To achieve the 16% binding European target, Ireland set two further national targets - 40% renewable energy share in electricity (RES-E) and 12% renewable energy share in heating and cooling (RES-H) (SEAI, 2021).
- Ireland reached an overall share of 13.6% renewable energy, below its 2020 RES-Overall target of 16%.
  - Ireland succeeded against its 2020 EU RES-T target (10.2% vs. 10%).
  - Ireland just missed its national RES-E target (39.1% vs. 40%).
  - Ireland achieved just half its national RES-H target (6.3% vs. 12%).

## 4.10 Material Assets

- 4.10.1 Ireland has significant natural resources such as water, carbon rich soils and high-quality grassland, whilst natural resources are also available for renewable energy generation e.g. wind, hydro, marine, biomass and solar. Valuable natural resources of commercial importance include natural gas, peat, copper, lead, zinc, silver, barite, gypsum, limestone,

dolomite (IndexMundi, 2020). Key industries based on Ireland's natural resources include fishing, forestry, mining and agriculture.

- 4.10.2 Ireland has a notably diverse geology and a range of rich mineral deposits including zinc, lead, copper and gold-bearing quartz veins for its relatively small size (70,000 km<sup>2</sup>). Ireland is ranked first in the world for zinc discovered per square kilometre and second with respect to lead. The Low Carboniferous carbonate rocks of the Irish Midland are host to one of the great ore fields of the world. Since 1960, 14 significant zinc-lead deposits have been discovered. Large tracts of Ireland are underlain by metasediments and metavolcanics of Proterozoic and Lower Palaeozoic ages, known to contain significant sulphide deposits including copper and quartz veins. This has been the recent focus of exploration efforts across Ireland. Exploration has been undertaken in the last few years for PGM minerals, rare earth and speciality minerals, nickel and chromite and diamonds. Gypsum, dolomite, brick shale, fireclay, marble, granite and limestone are all currently exploited in Ireland (DECC, 2021). The development of Irish mineral deposits is an important component of the economy, providing essential minerals for industry while generating employment and revenue for Ireland.
- 4.10.3 Total waste generated in Ireland in 2019 comprised over 14 million tonnes. Ireland had the sixth highest level of municipal waste generated per capita in the EU at 564kg in 2015 (CSO, 2018). Regardless, Ireland is on track to meet the 2020 recycling target for municipal waste. Municipal waste accounted for over 3.1 million tonnes in 2019, demonstrating a 6% increase from 2018 (EPA, 2019). Ireland's recycling rate for municipal waste declined to 37% in 2019 down from 38% in 2018. Ireland is heavily reliant on export markets, particularly for recycling: In 2019, over 701,000 tonnes of municipal waste were exported for recycling. A further 447,000 tonnes were exported for energy recovery and 90,000 tonnes were exported for composting. This means that altogether 40% of Ireland's municipal waste was exported for recycling or recovery in 2019, 5% higher than in 2018 (EPA, 2019). Generally, landfill disposal has fallen sharply, recycling rates increased steadily in the early 2000s before plateauing, while the share of waste sent for energy recovery has risen markedly since 2011.
- 4.10.4 Ireland has continued to meet all current recycling and recovery targets for packaging waste. According to 'Packaging Waste in Ireland in 2019' report, 1,124,917 tonnes of packaging waste was produced in 2019, demonstrating an increase of 11% compared to 2018 (EPA, 2021). Ireland achieved an overall packaging recycling rate of 62% in 2019. Despite being down 2% since 2018, Ireland is still exceeding the current Packaging Directive recycling target of 22.5%. The revised Packaging Directive sets significantly more ambitious plastic packaging recycling targets of 50% for 2025 and 55% for 2030. This is likely to present a significant challenge for Ireland, considering only 28% of plastic packaging was recycled in Ireland in 2019, down from 31% in 2018 according to 'National Waste Statistics' report 2019. Ireland remains heavily reliant on export markets, particularly for recycling: In 2019, only 182,321 tonnes or 16% of packaging waste generated was recycled in Ireland. A further 508,778 tonnes or 45% was exported for recycling and 370,497 tonnes or 33% was exported for energy recovery, while 63,321 tonnes or 6% was exported for disposal (EPA, 2021).
- 4.10.5 Strong consistent growth in renewable electricity generation since the early 2000's is also evident, although, Ireland did not meet its EU 2020 overall renewable energy target. The overall share of renewable energy was 13.5%, compared to the target of 16%. Ireland



succeeded against its EU 2020 renewable energy target for transport 10.2% vs. 10%, and just missed its renewable energy target for electricity 39.1% vs. 40% (SEAI, 2021). Ireland has the second highest share of wind in electricity generation among IEA member countries in 2018 (IEA, 2020). Wind is the largest source of renewable energy, accounting for 56% of all renewable energy in 2020, up by 15% in comparison to 2019.

- 4.10.6 In 2020, fossil fuels accounted for 86% of Ireland's total primary supply of energy. Oil continues as the dominant energy source, comprising 45% of primary energy in 2020, down from 49% both 2018 and 2019 (SEAI, 2021). Oil use decreased by 16.5%, the largest annual reduction observed to date which can largely be attributed to reduced transport energy use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ireland has improved energy security through an increase in domestic gas production. Natural gas is the next largest energy source and accounted for 34% of primary energy in 2020, increasing from 30% in 2018 and 31% in 2019.

## 4.11 Historic Environment

- 4.11.1 In Ireland historical notable protected buildings are known as protected structures. Registers of protected structures are kept at a county level and are the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority.
- 4.11.2 There are almost 1000 individual monuments at 768 locations under state care, comprising individual or groups of monuments ranging in age from the Neolithic period to the 20th Century. There are many other historical buildings sites and areas of geographical importance. The Record of Monument and Places (RMP) is a statutory list of all known archaeological monuments provided for in the National Monuments Acts. There are 150,800 recorded monuments on the RMP and over 138,800 of these relate to archaeological monuments (NMS, 2020). Please see Figure 3 in Appendix B for details.
- 4.11.3 Ireland has two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, both situated in the SEM regions. Brú na Bóinne, inscribed as a World Heritage Property in December 1993 is situated in county Meath and comprises of Neolithic mounds, chamber tombs, standing stones and henges. The other, Skellig Michael is a Celtic monastery, founded between the 6th and 8th century and situated west of Iveragh Peninsula in County Kerry and was designated in 1996. Please see Figure 4 in Appendix B for details.
- 4.11.4 There are currently seven sites on tentative list: The Burren, The Historic City of Dublin, The Céide Fields and North West Mayo Boglands, Western Stone Forts, The Monastic City of Clonmacnoise and its Cultural Landscape, Early Medieval Monastic Sites and The Royal Sites of Ireland: Cashel, Dún Ailinne, Hill of Uisneach, Rathcroghan Complex, and Tara Complex (WHC, 2021).
- 4.11.5 The DCHG has developed Ireland's new national heritage plan, published in November 2020, serving the purpose of informing decision-making process. Responses from the public consultation on the new plan identified that concerns over built heritage including tourism, derelict structures, demolition of structures, lack of care of historic structures, decline in traditional crafts. In total, 2,156 individuals and organisations made separate written submissions to Heritage Ireland 2030. (DCHG, 2020). Submissions sought that Ireland's heritage is to be valued, made easily accessible, enjoyed and protected for future generations. Many submissions sought increased resources and additional heritage staff should be made available to the NMI, local authorities, Heritage Council, DCHG and OPW

in order to enable the implementation of the objectives of Heritage Ireland 2030. Suggestions were also made that an Irish Heritage Lottery Fund should be established to increase financial support for the conservation of heritage properties on a consistent basis.

- 4.11.6 Climate change is also seen a big threat to Ireland's heritage. The Built & Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaption Plan (DCHG, 2019) has recently been published, which acknowledges the vulnerability of Ireland's built and archaeological heritage to impacts of climate change and includes actions to build adaptive capacity and reduce vulnerability as well as identify and capitalise on various potential opportunities in the sector. The Heritage Council of Ireland produced an 'Annual Report 2019' which sets out objectives in advancing national heritage priorities. One of the key objectives is promoting the sustainability of rural communities by developing policies and programmes that promote the sustainability of rural communities and the landscapes that they inhabit, thus mitigating Climate Change consequences (The Heritage Council of Ireland, 2019).

## 4.12 Landscape

- 4.12.1 There are six areas designated and recognised as nationally important landscapes within Ireland. All of these are National Parks; Ireland has no Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Within the programme area, there are three National Parks: Wicklow Mountains National Park located within County Wicklow; Burren National Park in County Clare; Killarney National Park in County Kerry. The landscapes of these protected areas vary dramatically, from the Burren's limestone rock formations to Killarney's lakes and natural woodland. Please see Figure 4 in Appendix C for details.
- 4.12.2 In recent years, landscape issues have moved up the policy agenda across Europe, particularly since the formation of the European Landscape Convention. The National Landscape Strategy was published in 2015 ongoing to 2025 which will be used to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Convention. A key objective of this is to assist in producing greater consistency in decision making across the country when dealing with issues of landscape, in particular via landscape character assessment.
- 4.12.3 Ireland's land use is predominantly agricultural, and the countryside has become increasingly important for forestry, recreation and tourism. The landscape has been altered by nature and by human practices over the centuries and continues to be subject to change. In 2010 the agricultural census stated that Ireland's land cover consists of around 64% or 4.44 million hectares of agriculture, the 2020 census has been postponed due to Covid-19, however, preliminary results show that the total agricultural land area now consists of 4.51 million hectares (CSO, 2020). Ireland forestry land cover has increased from 6.8% in 1990 to 11.4% in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). Grassland accounted for 59.3% of total land use in Ireland in 2019 down from 61.9% in 1990 (CSO, 2021). The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in Ireland report (Heritage Council, 2006) raised concerns over the unprecedented urbanisation and landscape fragmentation experienced in Ireland due to extensive new housing, major roads and other infrastructure projects, and the affect this may have on Ireland's tourist economy.

## 4.13 Natural Capital

- 4.13.1 This section looks at the inter-relationship between the preceding sustainability topics, as well as natural capital and ecosystem services which are cross-cutting themes of

increasing importance. It also includes information on other over-arching matters such as tourism and environmental knowledge and understanding. The purpose of this section is to link environmental, social and economic issues in a more integrated way, and emphasise that a good quality environment is essential to continuing social and economic prosperity.

- 4.13.2 Ecosystem services can be defined as the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems, or the environment. These include provisioning services such as food, water and raw materials; regulating services such as flood and disease control; cultural services such as health, spiritual, recreational, and cultural benefits; and supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, that maintain the conditions for life on Earth. Ecosystem Services make economic sense as they provide direct or strategic support of all human activities.
- 4.13.3 Comhar Sustainable Development Council (SDC), together with similar councils participating on the network of European Environment and Sustainable Development Councils (EEAC) has made the case that natural capital and ecosystem services should be viewed as critical infrastructure, vital to sustainable development (Comhar SDC, 2010).
- 4.13.4 Comhar SCD created a preliminary map of GI assets throughout Ireland, including designated nature conservation sites (SACs, SPAs and Natural Heritage Areas); watercourses; landcover classes (five 'EcoNet' classes were defined on the basis of "naturalness" and linked to CORINNE landcover types); and recreational assets. The map revealed strong green infrastructure in western counties, uplands and coastal areas, with the water network providing widespread opportunities for connecting features.
- 4.13.5 There are a number of studies being carried out to identify the value of natural assets, those carried out to date have identified the value or importance of freshwater systems, marine systems and animal pollination, to name a few (Feeley, H.B. et al, 2017, Norton, D. et al, 2018 and Stout, J.C. et al., 2019).
- 4.13.6 Natural assets, including landscape and cultural heritage, are a significant draw for tourists. The scenery is seen as the single most important reason why people visit and holiday in Ireland (Heritage Council, 2006). Statistics show that 2019 saw 11.3 million overseas tourists resulting in a revenue of €5.9 billion. Overseas arrivals increased by +1.8% in 2019, over 191,000 more than in 2018. (Tourism Ireland, 2020).

## **4.14 Key Environmental and Sustainability Issues and Likely Future Trends**

- 4.14.1 The Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 - 2020 was published in direct response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to identify and prioritise policy areas and mechanisms where sustainable measures will add value to the lives of current and future generations. The 2030 Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity (UN, 2015) which encourages countries to integrate and focuses on the 17 SDGs, one of which is protection of the environment. Work is now commencing on the development of the next Sustainable Development Goal National Implementation Plan.
- 4.14.2 The CSO conducted the Household Environmental Behaviours - Environmental Concerns Quarter 3 2021. The report analyses the attitudes and concerns of Irish households in relation to the environment. The issue that received the highest proportion of 'Very important' responses was water pollution. Over 79% of Irish households rated this issue

as being very important. Plastic waste was the second most highly rated issue at 74%. Over 69% of Irish households rated climate change as very important. When asked about the best way to tackle problems with air pollution 73% of households support stricter air pollution controls on industry and energy production but only 29% support urban traffic restrictions (CSO, 2021).

4.14.3 From analysis of the baseline data the key sustainability issues facing the Regional Programme areas are thought to be:

### **Ecology and Nature Conservation**

- Unfavourable condition of habitats and species in protected sites due to unsustainable agricultural and fishing practices;
- Continuing declines in species and habitats within protected areas;
- Continuing decline in species and habitats outside of protected areas;
- Threats facing areas outside of protected areas;
- Potential impacts of climate change; and
- Increasing problems of pests, diseases and invasive species.

### **Health, Quality of Life and Socio-economics**

- High levels of obesity, particularly among the older population;
- Impacts of Covid-19;
- High levels of mental health illnesses amongst the population;
- Although the number of people achieving the minimum level of activity recommended by the National Guidelines is increasing, it is still low;
- The percentage of people living in consistent poverty has been rising; and
- The unemployment rate has been rising, which may be partly due to Covid-19

### **Soil and Land Use**

- Increasing pressure on soil, particularly from land use changes, intensification of agriculture, erosion and overgrazing, afforestation, industry and urbanisation.
- Lack of woodland cover.
- The substantial quantities of peatland exist in a degraded state and continue to be disturbed by domestic and industrial peat extraction, afforestation, wind farms, recreational activities and invasive species.

### **Water**

- Poor water quality has been caused by municipal wastewater treatment plants and diffuse agricultural sources.
- Increase in number of slightly and moderately polluted rivers.
- Only 56% of lakes and 57% of rivers were found to be of satisfactory quality.

### **Air Quality, Climate Change and Material Assets**

- Localised air quality issues associated with NO<sub>2</sub> and PM;
- Wood and peat burning contribution to PAH and PM levels;
- Increasing ammonia emissions and non-compliance with the NECD emission targets;
- NO<sub>x</sub> and NMVOC emissions non-compliance with the NECD emission targets;
- Challenge in meeting more stringent WHO and EEA air quality reference guidelines;

## Historic Environment and Landscape

- Vulnerability of built and archaeological heritage to impacts of climate change; and
- Landscapes have been affected by housing and infrastructure development, agricultural intensification, forestry and decline/ loss of natural and cultural features.

### 4.15 Information Gaps

4.15.1 As indicated by the baseline section, a wealth of existing data exists about the state of Ireland's environment. This is necessarily focused on national or regional levels and therefore it is acknowledged that the large-scale trends discussed may not in every case fully represent sub-regional circumstances.

## 5 SEA FRAMEWORK

### 5.1 SEA Objectives

- 5.1.1 The purpose of the SEA Objectives is to ensure that the assessment process is transparent and robust and that the Regional Programme considers and addresses potential environmental effects. SEA Objectives (including more detailed sub-objectives) have been set for each of the ten sustainability topics outlined in Section 3.4.
- 5.1.2 The SEA Objectives are deemed to be appropriate based on the scope of the Regional Programme, the relationship with other relevant plans and programmes, baseline conditions and potential impacts identified in Ireland, but may change as the assessment process develops.
- 5.1.3 The proposed SEA Objectives are detailed in Table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: SEA Objectives**

SEA Objective	Sub-objective (Will the Programme...?)
1. Ecology and Nature Conservation – Protect, enhance and manage biodiversity assets and ecosystems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Maintain and enhance internationally and nationally designated sites</li> <li>b. Maintain and enhance locally designated sites and priority habitats</li> <li>c. Maintain and enhance the amount, variety and quality of ecosystems</li> <li>d. Maintain and enhance the amount and variety of living species</li> <li>e. Benefit protected and priority species</li> </ul>
2. Health and Quality of Life – Improve health and quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Improve long-term health and wellbeing regionally</li> <li>b. Improve social and cultural structures</li> <li>c. Encourage healthy living through travel opportunities such as walking, cycling and other physical activity</li> <li>d. Safeguard from environmental risks to the health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
3. Socio-economic – enhance life opportunities and promote strong community cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Support and facilitate growth of Irish business and enterprise</li> <li>b. Reduce deprivation, inequality and poverty and increase social exclusion</li> <li>c. Improve access to education, training, employment opportunities, community facilities/services and greenspace</li> <li>d. Support post-Covid economic recovery</li> </ul>
4. Soil and Land Use – Protect and enhance soil quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Safeguard and improve the highest quality soil and agricultural land</li> <li>b. Reduce soil pollution and degradation</li> <li>c. Encourage sustainable food production and consumption</li> <li>d. Encourage use of previously developed land</li> <li>e. Support the remediation of contaminated land</li> </ul>
5. Water – Protect, enhance and manage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Support the sustainable management of water resources</li> </ul>

SEA Objective	Sub-objective (Will the Programme...?)
water resources and flood risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Protect, maintain, and improve the status of surface, ground and marine waters</li> <li>c. Avoid development that will increase risk of flooding or mitigate through the use of sustainable water management solutions</li> <li>d. Sustainably manage the risks associated with flooding, accounting for the likely increase in such events due to climate change</li> </ul>
6. Air Quality – Reduce air pollution and ensure continued improvements to air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Facilitate the improvement of air quality in rural and urban areas</li> <li>b. Support increased uptake of sustainable transport</li> </ul>
7. Climate Change – Minimise contribution to climate change and adapt to its predicted effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Support the programme area in reducing its GHG footprint</li> <li>b. Encourage use of renewable energy</li> <li>c. Improve climate change resilience and adaptation capacity</li> <li>d. Improve the resilience of existing infrastructure and housing stock alongside integrating sustainable design into future developments</li> </ul>
8. Material Assets – Conserve natural resources and reduce waste production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Safeguard natural resources (including minerals, soils and natural capital) and minimise unsustainable use</li> <li>b. Increase recycling rates and re-use of materials in line with circular economy</li> </ul>
9. Historic Environment – Protect, enhance and manage archaeological and cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Preserve and enhance designated and non-designated sites and areas</li> <li>b. Preserve and enhance archaeological sites</li> </ul>
10. Landscape - Protect, enhance and manage the character and quality of the landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Maintain and enhance the quality and character of landscape, townscape and coastal areas</li> <li>b. Maintain and enhance designated sites</li> <li>c. Create, maintain and enhance public open space and green infrastructure assets</li> </ul>
11. Natural Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Encourage multifunctionality of greenspace to enhance human health and quality of life, water, soil and air quality, climate regulation and biodiversity simultaneously</li> <li>b. Encourage cultural and outdoor recreational tourism that is landscape and nature based</li> <li>c. Improve knowledge and understanding of and connection with the natural environment.</li> <li>d. Strengthen positive natural connections and interactions between territories</li> <li>e. Encourage biophysical changes such as restoration of degraded land and enhanced connectivity of greenspace</li> </ul>

## 6 ALTERNATIVES AND SCOPE OF THE SEA

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### 6.1 Consideration of Alternatives

- 6.1.1 Consideration of alternatives is a key feature of the SEA process as defined by the SEA Directive and the Ireland SEA Regulations. In practical terms, it refers to possible alternative mechanisms for delivering the Regional Programme, and the assessment of the impacts of each of these options against the SEA objectives.
- 6.1.2 Guidance had been taken from the EPA Research Report, Developing and assessing alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment, 2013.
- 6.1.3 The SEA should focus on the alternative delivery options actually considered in the preparation of the policy document. These have been identified at an early stage within the programme's development by the SRA as the body responsible for writing the plan as detailed in the EPA guidance.
- 6.1.4 With European funded programmes such as this, constraints on what practical alternatives exist are often set by the need to comply with pre-set criteria determined at a European level. This can have the effect of limiting the alternatives that are available to the programme makers. As stated in the EPA research report, a 'do nothing' approach is not a reasonable alternative for mandatory plans/programmes or their revision.
- 6.1.5 The SEA will assess which of the identified options, or combination of options performs the best environmentally.

### 6.2 Alternative Policy Options / Delivery Mechanisms

- 6.2.1 Reg (EU) 2021/1060 ["the Common Provisions Regulation"] sets out five policy objectives that the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund and the EMFAF shall support. These are PO1-PO5 detailed in Section 2.2.2
- 6.2.2 Reg (EU) 2021/0159 ["the ERDF Regulation"] requires that more developed regions allocate at least 85% of ERDF resources to PO1 and PO2 combined and at least 30% of ERDF resources to PO2. This is known as thematic concentration. The ERDF Regulation also requires that at least 8 % of the ERDF resources<sup>3</sup> be allocated to sustainable urban development. Any programme alternatives under consideration need to meet these minimum requirements.
- 6.2.3 The ERDF Regulations also sets out twenty-three specific objectives and the scope of support from the European Regional Development Fund. Given the limited funding, and it is neither practical nor desirable to address too many of these specific objectives. The programme will therefore concentrate funds on a limited number of policy aims, specific objectives and actions, with a well-articulated intervention logic at the outset.
- 6.2.4 The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 is focused on the following key strategic outcomes:

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<sup>3</sup> This 8% minimum allocation is at national level; it has been agreed that this minimum will be met by both ERDF programmes in Ireland.



1. **Developing Smarter More Competitive Regions** through RD&I capacity building within the universities including the new Technological University in our regions, accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level, supporting innovation diffusion and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems in line with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and Regional Enterprise Plans.
2. **Creating Greener More Energy Efficient Regions and a Just Transition** by focusing on scaling up investment in energy efficiency in line with the Climate Action Plan 2021
3. **Supporting Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions** using an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns, empowering Local Authorities to gather data and lead actions on regeneration using a Town Centres First Framework.

### 6.3 Reasonable Alternatives Considered

#### Alternative 1 – The Programme as currently proposed

Table 6.1: Alternative 1

Policy Objective	Specific Objective	Actions	ERDF as % of Total non-TA ERDF Available
PO1	RSO1.1 & RSO1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Capacity building within universities and technological universities (TUs)</li> <li>o Accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level</li> <li>o Supporting innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</li> <li>o Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</li> </ul>	56%
PO2	RSO2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Improving the energy efficiency of residential homes for those at risk of energy poverty</li> </ul>	30%
PO5	RSO5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Supporting an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns</li> </ul>	14%

## Alternative 2 – Alternative actions

- 6.3.1 Alternative 2 addresses the same Specific Objectives under the same Policy Objectives as Alternative 1. It also maintains the same level of investment of ERDF resources under each of the three Policy Objectives.
- 6.3.2 The key difference is that it proposes an alternative set of actions under Specific Objective 2.1. The focus on promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area remains. However, rather than supporting actions that target improvements in energy efficiency of residential homes for those at risk of energy poverty, the programme would support actions to retrofit and improve the energy efficiency of public sector buildings.

**Table 6.2: Alternative 2**

Policy Objective	Specific Objective	Actions	ERDF as % of Total non-TA ERDF Available
PO1	RSO1.1 & RSO1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Capacity building within universities and technological universities (TUs)</li> <li>o Accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level</li> <li>o Supporting innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</li> <li>o Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</li> </ul>	56%
PO2	RSO2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Retrofitting and improving the energy efficiency of public sector buildings</li> </ul>	30%
PO5	RSO5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Supporting an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns</li> </ul>	14%

## Alternative 3 – Reallocation of resources

- 6.3.3 Alternative 3 addresses the same Specific Objectives under the same Policy Objectives as Alternative 1 and the same suite of actions. The difference is that it proposes a reallocation of resources, reducing the allocation of ERDF funding to actions supporting Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development under Policy Objective 5 to 8% of the total available,

the minimum level allowed under the thematic concentration requirements, and increasing the allocation to actions under Policy Objective 1.

**Table 6.3: Alternative 3**

Policy Objective	Specific Objective	Actions	ERDF as % of Total non-TA ERDF Available
PO1	RSO1.1 & RSO1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Capacity building within universities and technological universities (TUs)</li> <li>o Accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level</li> <li>o Supporting innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</li> <li>o Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</li> </ul>	62%
PO2	RSO2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Improving the energy efficiency of residential homes for those at risk of energy poverty</li> </ul>	30%
PO5	RSO5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Supporting an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns</li> </ul>	8%

## 6.4 Likely Significant Effects of the Regional Programme

6.4.1 The potential for significant effects as a result of the Regional Programme is considered in table 6.4 below by Specific Objective and the accompanying list of indicative outputs. The indicative actions referred under each objective are as supplied by the SRA to inform this Scoping Report but are not finalised as they are subject to the iterative process of assessment through the SEA and AA process and may be subject to change.

**Table 6.4: Potential for Significant Effects**

Specific Objectives	Indicative Actions	Likelihood of Significant Environmental Effects
<b>Policy Objective 1: A Smarter Europe</b> - A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity (PO 1).		
<b>Specific Objective RSO1.1</b> Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.	<b>Capacity building within the regions new Technological University (TU).</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish, strengthen and systemise regional research and innovation offices which support their academic staff and researchers and wider enterprise and community stakeholders.</li> </ul>	The four overarching actions associated with this objective relate to funding and research alongside enhancing capacity and technological uptake within existing establishments.

Specific Objectives	Indicative Actions	Likelihood of Significant Environmental Effects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop researcher human capital in TUs, including staff development, recruitment, postgraduate training and supervision, networking, and collaborative knowledge-transfer and mobility schemes.</li> <li>• Provide industry gateways with dedicated staff who work with industry to articulate company problems in a manner that can be addressed by the established expert base in each TU. Gateway staff will manage the interaction between enterprises and the Technological University, help enterprises source funding where necessary, and ensure projects are delivered successfully and in an industry friendly manner.</li> <li>• Install or upgrade specialist capital equipment that supports delivery of collaborative projects.</li> </ul> <p><b>Capacity building within both universities and our Technological university (TU).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain Technology Transfer specialists to help companies and investors to access new knowledge and expertise, to drive innovation through collaboration, and to identify and license new technologies and IP. These specialists will continue to develop the Technology Transfer System in public research institutions and will provide new resources to place a focus on developing spin out company opportunities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a new "Smart Hub" model for regional innovation and entrepreneurial training.</li> <li>• The model will integrate critical elements of a research and innovation (R&amp;I) ecosystem with entrepreneurial approaches, thus accelerating time to market from research concept to HPSUs, new product introduction, licences and innovations.</li> <li>• The new regional Smart Hubs for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation will be established in key thematic areas aligned with the Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and regional strategic priorities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Supporting innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions.</b></p>	<p>SRA has confirmed that none of the actions would lead to new developments (such as buildings/ transport infrastructure).</p> <p><b>There is potential for likely positive significant effects associated with this Specific Objective in relation to the socio-economic oriented SEA objectives.</b></p>

Specific Objectives	Indicative Actions	Likelihood of Significant Environmental Effects
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop new immersive-based, needs-led innovation training programmes, closely aligned to S3 in the regions and capable of attracting high calibre individuals and inter-disciplinary teams who, through their immersion and observation of real needs in their immersive environment and the use of a design methodology, will be supported to generate product and process ideas, new IP and in some cases, the creation of high-potential-start-ups (HPSUs) from research. These programmes will build on existing international and national best practice connecting on multiple levels with the industry sector clusters in the regions.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Specific Objective RSO1.3</b> Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments.</p>	<p><b>Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions.</b></p> <p>Provide appropriate infrastructure and key staff resources to deliver innovative solutions including support programmes to support entrepreneurship, start-ups and scaling companies. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of small to medium scale regional projects (with minimum or no building requirements) or expansion of existing regional ecosystem projects</li> <li>Scoping and preparing new large-scale regional projects, e.g., design and planning, project development, recruitment of key managers.</li> <li>Delivery of large-scale regional capital investment projects that provide key strategic infrastructural solutions to support the regional ecosystem.</li> </ul> <p>Actions will be targeted at strategic regional locations where an identifiable deficit exists in key infrastructure which is necessary to develop functional regional ecosystems which can support this client base.</p>	<p>This Specific Objective has the potential to lead to development in the form of strategic infrastructure through large-scale regional capital investment.</p> <p>It will support job creation and the growth of SME's.</p> <p><b>There is potential for likely positive significant effects on health &amp; quality of life and socio-economic orientated SEA objectives.</b></p> <p><b>Other potential SEA Objectives including landscape, soil and land use, air quality, water, natural capital and ecology and nature conservation may have uncertain or adverse effects in relation to physical development and increased economic output from existing businesses.</b></p>
<p><b>Policy Objective 2: A Greener, Low Carbon Europe</b> - A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility (PO 2).</p>		
<p><b>Specific Objective RSO2.1</b> Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p>	<p>Improving the energy efficiency of residential homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the delivery of energy efficiency renovations free of charge to owner-occupied lower-income households who meet the defined</li> </ul>	<p>This Specific Objective focuses of improving energy efficiency in existing housing stock. The schemes which would arise from this policy aim to deliver a range of energy efficiency measures</p>

Specific Objectives	Indicative Actions	Likelihood of Significant Environmental Effects
	<p>eligibility criteria and who are vulnerable to energy poverty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrofit homes with the aim to achieve, on average, at least a medium-depth level renovation.</li> <li>• Pilot the installation of heat pumps in existing premises, to replace older less efficient heating systems.</li> <li>• Gather evidence from the pilot to inform the appropriate process and approach to increasing the number of B2 upgrades and heat pump installations going forward</li> <li>• Use learnings from similar actions in the 2014-2020 programming period</li> <li>• Provide an evidence base to improve the targeting of energy efficiency schemes</li> <li>• Examine the impact of retrofitting on alleviating energy poverty</li> </ul>	<p>free of charge to lower-income households.</p> <p>SRA has confirmed that this policy would not lead to development outside of footprint of existing dwellings or lead to other renewable energy schemes.</p> <p><b>There is potential for positive and uncertain significant effects through this Specific Objective on health &amp; quality of life, socio-economic, climate, air quality and material assets.</b></p>
<p><b>Policy Objective 5: A Europe Closer to its Citizens</b> - Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5)</p>		
<p><b>Specific Objective RSO5.1</b> Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Planning Phase) Preparing integrated urban regeneration action plans / masterplans (either using procured multi-disciplinary service or short-term contract within the Local Authority for required skills) which identify projects and initiatives tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction.</li> <li>• (Implementation phase) Deliver pilot and pathfinder projects for selected towns (priority for Key Towns or other settlements as justified by the Local Authority under selection criteria) tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction. This will involve capital investment and may include public realm improvement projects.</li> </ul>	<p>This Specific Objective has the potential to lead to development through town centre regeneration and public realm improvements, particularly in the vicinity of the Key Towns identified within the Region.</p> <p><b>There is potential for likely significant uncertain effects resulting from this Specific Objective on all of the SEA Objectives. Particularly from the implementation phase but this would be largely dependent on the size of schemes, materials used, and the use of green infrastructure, SUDS, pedestrian zones etc.</b></p>

## 6.5 Scope of the SEA

6.5.1 The scoping process has revealed that due to the likelihood of the Regional Programme having uncertain or adverse effects on the environment, and/or because key environmental and sustainability issues have been identified in Ireland, the following sustainability topics should be carried forward to Stage B of the SEA process:

- Ecology and Nature Conservation;
- Health and Well-being;
- Socio-Economic;

- Soil and Land Quality;
- Water;
- Air Quality;
- Climate Change;
- Material Assets;
- Historic Environment;
- Landscape; and
- Natural Capital.

## **6.6 Findings of the Appropriate Assessment Screening**

- 6.6.1 On completion of the AA Screening, the following conclusion has been drawn:
- 6.6.2 The potential for likely significant effects can be ruled out (alone and in combination) in relation to PO1 RSO1.1 and PO2 RSO2.1. No further Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of these Specific Objectives is required.
- 6.6.3 The potential for likely significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment (either alone or in combination) in relation to PO1 RSO1.3 and PO5 RSO5.1. It is therefore recommended that an Appropriate Assessment is carried out for these Specific Objectives, and a Natura Impact Statement Report should be prepared.
- 6.6.4 The AA Screening statement has been published as a standalone report alongside the SEA scoping report.

## **6.7 Findings of the Flood Risk Assessment**

- 6.7.1 As part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process, there is a need to do a screening for Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA) and, where required, additional stages of RFRA in accordance with the requirements of sections 4.2 - 4.10 of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Guidelines for Planning Authorities No. 20: "The Planning System and Flood Risk Management".
- 6.7.2 It is recommended that Stage 2 of the RFRA is not progressed until the programme incorporates further details on the priorities' implementation on the ground, including defining and safeguarding areas for development. If strategic areas for development are identified that are located in high or medium flood risk areas, we recommend that the RFRA proceeds to Stage 2A in the first instance. This would involve a review of the 2018 RFRA, the existing Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRAs) and local flood risk information to understand if the information is up to date and relevant to the development area and if any further analysis is required. Stage 2B would be required if there is new flood risk information available for the development area that should be reflected in a RFRA update.
- 6.7.3 The need for a full review of the RFRA would be determined by the extent of updates needed to the 2018 assessment as well as any future revisions to regional policies that could have flood risk implications. Localised updates to flood risk information could be managed by a RFRA addendum or updates to SFRAs.
- 6.7.4 It will be key for the Programme's next stages to ensure that any proposed development is located in areas of low flood risk (following the sequential approach). If this is not possible, the development should address both, onsite and offsite flood risk to reduce flood



risk to the development and not exacerbate flood risk elsewhere. The Justification Test will be required at all levels of the planning process and adequate mitigation measures introduced to manage residual flood risk behind flood defences.



## 7 NEXT STEPS

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### 7.1 Consulting on the Scope of SEA

- 7.1.1 The SEA Directive requires authorities with “environmental responsibilities” (hereafter referred to as the Consultation Bodies) to be consulted on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the Environmental Report (Article 5(4)). The Directive does not require full consultation with the public or bodies other than Consultation Bodies until the Environmental Report on the draft plan or programme is finalised.
- 7.1.2 This Scoping Report has been issued by the SRA as the competent authority for the preparation of the Regional Programme to the Consultation Bodies. In the interest of a robust assessment, although no significant transboundary effects are anticipated the Northern Ireland Environment Agency have also been consulted.
- 7.1.3 Consultation Bodies must provide a view, once consulted by the SRA within four weeks. The SRA seeks feedback on this scoping report and will welcome the views of the Consultation Bodies on the likelihood of significant environmental effects from indicative actions under the Regional Programme as outlined in Table 6.4 above.

### 7.2 Stage B: Developing and Refining Alternatives and Assessing Effects

- 7.2.1 This stage of the SEA process involves the identification and evaluation of the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Regional Programme and its reasonable alternatives. This will be carried out in three stages:
- Prediction of the adverse, beneficial, neutral and uncertain effects of the Regional Programme on the environment. This will be carried out by way of a matrix assessment (Specific Objectives axes and measures measured against SEA Objectives).
  - Prediction of the adverse, beneficial, neutral and uncertain effects of the alternatives and any in-combination effects with other relevant plans or programmes.
  - Evaluation of the likely adverse or uncertain effects identified in the above assessments to determine their significance and assist in the refinement of the Regional Programme. This will be done using a more detailed and descriptive matrix assessment, and will include consideration of short, medium or long-term effects, permanent or temporary effects, secondary, cumulative or synergistic effects, and transboundary effects.
  - The SEA Directive requires that reasonable alternatives be considered in the development and environmental assessment of plans and programmes. The development and refining of realistic strategic alternative approaches will be carried out in consultation with the SRA. The reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, including the chosen option, will be outlined in the Environmental Report, with reference to their likely environmental impacts.

### 7.3 Stage C: Preparing the Environmental Report

- 7.3.1 Stage B of the SEA process will culminate in the production of the Environmental Report (Stage C). The Environmental Report will be structured similarly to this Scoping Report

and will be as required by the SEA Directive and the relevant SEA Regulations. The proposed structure of the Environmental Report is as follows:

- Outline of contents, comments received on the Scoping Report, SEA objectives and relationship with other plans and programmes;
- Environmental protection objectives that are relevant to the Regional Programme, and a description of how these have been accounted for in the preparation of the Programme;
- Description of the current state of the environment, likely future trends in the absence of the Programme, and key environmental and sustainability issues facing Ireland;
- Consideration of Alternatives;
- Matrix assessment of the Regional Programme Specific Objectives axes and measures against the SEA objectives and determination of likely significant effects;
- Schedule of mitigation measures aimed at avoiding, reducing or offsetting any potentially significant environmental effects;
- Acknowledgement of data gaps or technical deficiencies;
- Suggestions of measures to monitor the environmental effects of implementation of the Regional Programme, including success or otherwise of mitigation measures; and
- Non-technical summary.

## **7.4 Stage D: Consultation and Decision Making**

- 7.4.1 The Environmental Report (including NTS) will be presented for public and statutory consultation for a period of four weeks alongside a draft Regional Programme
- 7.4.2 In Ireland the Consultation Bodies are the EPA, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) will also be consulted as transboundary consultees.
- 7.4.3 Members of the public likely to participate in SEA consultation are those affected or likely to be affected by, or having an interest in the decision-making, including relevant non-governmental organisations, such as those promoting environmental protection.
- 7.4.4 The purpose of this stage is to give the public and the Consultation Bodies an opportunity to express their opinions on the findings of the Environmental Report, and to use it as a reference point in commenting on the plan or programme. In line with the SEA Directive, the SRA must take account of the Environmental Report and of any opinions which are expressed upon it as it prepares the Regional Programme for adoption. Therefore, comments received from the Consultation Bodies, members of the public and other

stakeholders during the consultation process must be considered and, if appropriate, addressed in the final Regional Programme documents.

- 7.4.5 Once the Regional Programme has been adopted, an SEA Statement will be produced to provide information on how the Environmental Report and consultees' opinions were taken into account in deciding the final form of the Programme.

## **7.5 Stage E: Monitoring Implementation of the Programme**

- 7.5.1 The SEA Directive requires the SRA, as the Managing Authority, to monitor significant environmental effects of implementing the Regional Programme. This must be done in such a way as to also identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take appropriate remedial action.
- 7.5.2 If significant effects are identified, a monitoring programme will be proposed in the SEA Statement so that the actual impacts of the Regional Programme can be evaluated. Monitoring should commence as soon as the programme is adopted, with annual reporting carried out for the life of the programme. It may be necessary to revise the monitoring programme periodically so that it takes account of new methods and increased understanding of the baseline environment.

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# APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMMES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION OBJECTIVES

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
<p>DCHG (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021</p> <p>Work on drafting Ireland's 4th NBAP is underway which will go for public consultation and launch in 2022.</p>	<p>The NBAP for 2017-2021 demonstrates Ireland's continuing commitment to meeting and acting on its obligations to protect their biodiversity for the benefit of future generations through a series of targeted strategies and actions. The plan has seven objectives;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors</li> <li>2. Strengthen the knowledge base for conservation, management and sustainable use of biodiversity</li> <li>3. Increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystems services</li> <li>4. Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside</li> <li>5. Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine environment</li> <li>6. Expand and improve management of protected areas and species</li> <li>7. Strengthen international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.</li> </ol>	<p>The Specific Objectives of the Regional Programme are not expected to directly affect Biodiversity. However, effects on biodiversity should be considered especially when supporting town centre regeneration and public realm improvements under PO5.</p>
<p>NPWS Conservation Plans and/or Conservation Objectives for SACs and SPAs</p>	<p>Conservation plans are drawn up for several sites and include descriptive details and a management framework component which outlines objectives and strategies. These objectives are site specific but generally aim to maintain and/or restore the favourable conservation condition of the habitats and species of the site.</p>	<p>The Specific Objectives of the Regional Programme are not expected to directly affect SAC's or SPA's. However, effects on protected areas should be considered especially when supporting town centre regeneration and public realm improvements under PO5.</p>
<p>EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030</p>	<p>This strategy aims to ensure that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, the planet, the climate and our economy, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It addresses the five main drivers of biodiversity loss, sets out an enhanced governance framework to fill remaining gaps, ensures the full implementation of EU legislation, and pulls together all existing efforts. It covers three main areas: Protecting and restoring nature in the European Union, Enabling transformative change, and The European Union for an ambitious global biodiversity agenda.</p>	<p>The strategy urges the promotion of healthy ecosystems, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions to be systematically integrated into urban planning, including in the design of buildings, public spaces and infrastructure.</p> <p>Therefore, effects on biodiversity should be considered especially when supporting town centre regeneration and public realm improvements and placemaking under PO5.</p>
<p>Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2021-2030</p>	<p>The National Development Plan (NDP) sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the new National Planning Framework (NPF). The objectives of the National Development Plan match those of the NPF. A fundamental underlying objective of the NDP is, therefore, to focus on continued investment to yield a public infrastructure that facilitates priorities such as high-speed broadband and public transport in better cities and in better communities. The public goods generated through investment in physical infrastructure will be critical to strengthening Ireland's</p>	<p>The Regional Programme alongside the RSES compliment the NDP's Strategic Investment Priorities, in particular in relation to the implementation of the new national strategy for R&amp;I, providing support for talent and research, including research centres especially Technical Universities. PO1.</p>

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
	human capital and to fostering the development of clusters in important growth areas in order to attract new investment.	
National planning Framework	The National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan 2021-2030 combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The NPF sets the vision and strategy for the development of the country to 2040 and the NDP provides the enabling investment to implement that strategy.	The Regional Programme aligns with the NPF through RSO 5.1. An integrated and strategic approach to the regeneration of SEM region's towns as part of ERDF schemes under PO5 has been developed.
SRA Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES)	The RSES sets out the strategic regional development framework for the Region, with a primary aim to implement <i>Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework</i> , at the regional tier of Government and to support the achievement of balanced regional development. The RSES' objectives include protect and enhance the environment; combat climate change; achieve economic prosperity and improved quality of life; assist growth and development in suitable locations.	The Programme Strategy for ERDF in the Southern Region within the Programme Area is directly linked to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the region. The ambition of the SRA is to utilise the funding available in the ERDF Regional Programme to support the delivery of key regional objectives and priorities as set out in the RSES.
EMRA RSES 2019-2031	The RSES main purpose is to support the implementation of <i>Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan 2019-2027</i> . It provides a strategic plan which identifies assets, opportunities and pressures to manage growth; sustain a strong economy; manage the delivery of key enabling infrastructure and services; accelerate climate action.	The Programme Strategy for ERDF in the Eastern and Midland Region within the Programme Area is directly linked to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the region. The ambition of EMRA is to utilise the funding available in the ERDF Regional Programme to support the delivery of key regional objectives and priorities as set out in the RSES.
Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022	The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022 is part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The leading priority of the Irish RDP is restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry. Following the most recent CAP reform, new rural development measures have been set up to enhance the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieve more sustainable management of natural resources and ensure a more balanced development of rural areas.	It is not anticipated that the Regional Programme will have a direct influence on agricultural production but it may support rural and agricultural businesses through RSO 1.3: Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs.
National Broadband Plan	Aligned with the Digital Agenda for Europe, the National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high-speed broadband services to all businesses and households in Ireland.	The Regional Programme will work alongside the National Broadband Plan through actions within Specific Objective 1.3. that will be targeted at strategic regional locations where an identifiable deficit exists in key infrastructure which is necessary to develop functional regional ecosystems. The new regional Smart Hubs for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation under Specific objective PO1 will be established in key thematic areas aligned with the Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and regional strategic priorities.
'Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed	Construction 2020 outlines a series of measures agreed by the Government and is aimed at stimulating activity in the building industry. The total action points	The Regional Programme supports sustainable and integrated urban development through RSO 5.1:

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
Construction Sector' (2014)	set out are 75 which ensure that sensible and necessary development can take place without unnecessary obstacles.	Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas (ERDF).
Food Wise 2025	Food Wise 2025, agreed by a committee of 35 stakeholders from the industry, is a ten-year vision for the growth of the Irish agri-food sector. It was published with the Food Wise Implementation Plan and in the Environmental Analysis as a final strategy in 2015. The strategy aims to create a more strategic and competitive sector within the international marketplace while supporting Ireland's sustainable and high-quality producers by targeting more quality conscious consumers.	The Regional Programme will not have a direct influence on agricultural production and the agri-food sector but may support businesses within rural and agricultural communities through RSO 1.3: Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs.
Europe 2020 Economic Strategy. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010)	Outlines the European Union's ten-year growth strategy and is about addressing the shortcomings of our growth model whilst creating the conditions for a different type of growth that is smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive. Five key targets have been set for the EU to achieve covering employment, education, research and innovation, social inclusion and poverty reduction, and climate/energy. Also it includes seven flagship initiatives providing a framework through which the EU and national authorities mutually reinforce their efforts in areas supporting the Europe 2020 priorities such as innovation, industrial policy and resource efficiency.	The Regional Programme supports the strategy through Specific Objectives RSO 1.1 and RSO 1.3 under Policy Objective 1: A Smarter Europe - A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity (PO 1).
EU Country Report (Ireland) 2019 and 2020	These reports analyse the country's key socio-economic challenges which result in providing a framework for the coordination of social and economic policies across the EU. For 2019, the reports included a specific Annex on Investment guidance for cohesion policy 2021/2027' which was not included before. For 2020, the report focused on the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a new section dedicated to the analysis of Member States' environmental challenges and sustainability.	<p>The 2019 and 2020 European Commission Country Report for Ireland highlighted the need to enhance competitiveness and the growth of Irish owned SMEs. This will be actioned through RSO 1.3: Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs.</p> <p>The 2020 Country Report suggests "there is scope for improvement in...reducing greenhouse emissions, increasing the share of renewables, energy efficiency and poverty reduction". This will be actioned through RSO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p>
EU Regional innovation Scoreboard 2021	<p>The Regional innovation scoreboard (RIS) is a regional extension of the European innovation scoreboard. The RIS 2021 follows the revised methodology of the European innovation scoreboard (EIS) but with a reduced number of indicators due to the lower level of innovation data availability at the regional level providing a comparative assessment of the performance of regional innovation systems across 240 regions of 22 EU countries.</p> <p>The Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region are classified as being "Strong Innovators".</p>	The Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region are classified as being "Strong Innovators". However, the programme area underperforms across a number of key innovation indicators which will be addressed through PO1.
EPA (2018) River	This second River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) outlines the new approach that Ireland will take as it	Development such as town centre regeneration and placemaking



Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
<p>Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021</p> <p>River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 under consultation.</p>	<p>works to protect its rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters over the next four years. The following evidence-based priorities have been adopted for this river basin planning cycle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure full compliance with relevant EU legislation</li> <li>• Prevent deterioration</li> <li>• Meet the objectives for designated protected areas</li> <li>• Protect high-status waters</li> <li>• Implement targeted actions and pilot schemes in focused sub-catchments aimed at (1) targeting water bodies close to meeting their objective and (2) addressing more complex issues that will build knowledge for the third cycle</li> </ul>	<p>funded under the Regional Programme should take into account the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland and its priorities.</p>
<p>Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services)</p>	<p>This Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services over the next years up to 2040. The plan takes into consideration its interaction with other national and regional plans such as the National Spatial Strategy and River Basin Management Plans.</p> <p>There are six strategic objectives that the plan is required to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet Customer Expectations;</li> <li>• Ensure a Safe and Reliable Water Supply;</li> <li>• Provide Effective Management of Wastewater;</li> <li>• Protect and Enhance the Environment;</li> <li>• Support Social and Economic Growth; and</li> <li>• Invest in Our Future.</li> </ul>	<p>Development and regeneration funded under the Regional Programme should take into account the Water Services Strategic Plan.</p>
<p>National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020</p>	<p>The focus of this policy is to create a strong cycling culture in Ireland thus contributing to an improved quality of life, and a stronger economy and business environment. There are a total of 19 objectives developed in the policy which cover: Infrastructure, Communication/Education, Financial Resources, Legislation and Enforcement, Human Resources and Coordination and Evaluation and Effects.</p>	<p>Development such as town centre regeneration and placemaking funded under the Regional Programme are likely to support the objectives of the National Cycle Policy Framework.</p>
<p>Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 'A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020'</p>	<p>Published by the Department of Transport, the policy sets out proposals on how current unsustainable transport and travel patterns can be reversed, how the health and environmental impacts of current trends can be reduced and how our quality of life can be improved.</p>	<p>It is not anticipated that the Regional Programme will directly support sustainable travel through its Specific Objectives. However, town centre regeneration and placemaking funded under the Regional Programme may support more sustainable travel within the Region.</p>
<p>DCCAE (2020) National Energy &amp; Climate Plan 2021-2030</p>	<p>The plan builds on previous national strategies and details the objectives regarding the five energy dimensions together with planned policies and measures to facilitate achievement of those objectives. The energy dimensions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decarbonisation – GHG emissions and removals and renewable energy</li> <li>• Energy efficiency</li> <li>• Energy security</li> <li>• Internal energy market</li> <li>• Research, innovation and competitiveness</li> </ul>	<p>The Regional Programme promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area through Specific Objective RSO 2.1. This objective also aims to reduce energy poverty which will increase energy security within the programme area.</p>

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
DECC (2021) National Climate Action Plan	This plan is the Irish Government's Climate Action Plan which is committed to achieving a net zero carbon energy systems objective for Irish society and in the process, create a resilient, vibrant and sustainable country. The Government will take the lead on this agenda through this Plan in defining a roadmap to this goal and initiating a coherent set of policy actions to get us there. The plan highlights a number of actions relating to targets, governance, carbon pricing, electricity, enterprise, built environment, transport, agriculture, waste, public sector, international action, citizen engagement, and adaptation.	The Regional Programme supports this plan through RSO 2.1 which promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area. This objective also aims to reduce energy poverty which will increase resilience to climate change within the programme area.
DCCAIE (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland	This framework sets out a whole-of-government basis, what Ireland is doing and is planning to do to further their transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. The aim of adaptation is to reduce the vulnerability of our environment, society and economy and increase resilience. Adaptation also brings opportunity through green growth, innovation, jobs and ecosystem enhancement as well as improvements in areas such as water and air quality. Key actions under the framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting in place revised governance and reporting arrangements</li> <li>• Formalising the status of existing guidelines</li> <li>• Formalising long term operational support for key sectors</li> <li>• Facilitating the establishment of regional local authority climate action offices</li> <li>• Increasing awareness around climate adaptation and resilience</li> <li>• Integrating climate adaptation into key national plans and policies</li> </ul>	The Regional Programme promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area through of the Specific Objectives RSO 2.1. This objective also aims to reduce energy poverty which will increase resilience to climate change within the programme area.
DCCAIE (2017) National Mitigation Plan	This plan represents an initial step on the pathway to achieve the level of decarbonisation required by the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals. The main strategic objectives for this plan are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• policy will contribute to reductions in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions and enhancement of sinks in a manner that achieves the optimum benefits at least cost;</li> <li>• a stable and predictable policy and regulatory framework will be underpinned by rigorous analysis and appraisal, supported by strong research and analytical capacity;</li> <li>• the Government will pursue investment, innovation and enterprise opportunities towards building a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy; and</li> <li>• the citizen and communities will be at the centre of the transition.</li> </ul>	The Regional Programme promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area through of the Specific Objectives RSO 2.1
National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012)	The policy contained in this framework provides a strategy for the response to climate change in Ireland and is intended to evolve and adapt over time as planning and implementation progresses. The aim of this plan is to help people deal with disruptions from the impacts of climate change and help them reduce them; comprehend the changes necessary to improve their quality of life; and facilitate economic recovery from possible changes to climate patterns and extreme events.	The Regional Programme promotes climate change mitigation measures in the programme area through the Policy Objective PO 2.

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
<p>EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy</p>	<p>The aim of this long-term strategy is to confirm Europe's commitment to lead in global climate action and to present a vision that can lead to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 through a socially-fair transition in a cost-efficient manner. It is meant to set the direction of travel of EU climate and energy policy, and to frame what the EU considers as its long-term contribution to achieving the Paris Agreement temperature objectives in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals, which will further affect a wider set of EU policies. This strategy involves two main areas which are Transition to a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions economy; and Investing into a sustainable society.</p>	<p>The Regional Programme promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area through of the Specific Objectives RSO 2.1.</p>
<p>EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030</p>	<p>Key Elements of the 2030 framework include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 40%</li> <li>• A renewable energy target at EU level of at least 27%</li> <li>• Energy Efficiency increase of 25% in 2030</li> <li>• Reform of the Emissions Trading System</li> <li>• Ensuring competition in integrated markets</li> <li>• Competitive and affordable energy for all consumers</li> <li>• Promoting security of energy supply</li> </ul>	<p>The Regional Programme promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area through of the Specific Objectives RSO 2.1.</p>
<p>EPA National Waste Prevention Programme</p>	<p>The National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) is a Government of Ireland initiative, led by the EPA, which supports national-level, strategic programmes to prevent waste and drive the circular economy in Ireland.</p>	<p>It is not anticipated that the Regional Programme will directly influence waste but the EPA National Waste Prevention Programme should be considered when funding projects that may produce waste.</p>
<p>DAHG (2015) National landscape strategy for Ireland (2015-2025)</p>	<p>A key objective of this strategy is to implement the European Landscape Convention. It highlights the importance of cultural, social, economic and environmental values within Ireland's landscapes. It aims to both support living landscapes and enhance community identity by understanding, protecting, managing by improving the quality of the landscape in decision making.</p>	<p>The Regional Programme aims to support projects and initiatives tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction within RSO 5.1: Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas (ERDF).</p>
<p>DCCAE (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 – 2020</p>	<p>This Plan aims to provide a framework for how Ireland will implement the Sustainable Development Goals from 2018-2020, to support national policies which contribute to meeting the Goals, and to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation. The strategic priorities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness: Increase public awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, their relevance to Ireland, and national efforts to achieve them.</li> <li>• Participation: Provide stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to contribute to national follow-up and review processes regarding the Goals, and with opportunities to further the development of the national implementation framework.</li> <li>• Support: Support and encourage communities and organisations to make their own contributions to achieving the Goals, and to foster public participation.</li> </ul>	<p>The Specific Objectives of the Regional Programme would contribute to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. Including tackling energy poverty, building economic sustainability and addressing a range of social needs including education, training and job creation.</p>

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme	How it affects, or is affected by the Regional Programme.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Alignment: Support and promote policies and initiatives across government which contribute towards meeting the Goals at home and abroad and identify opportunities for enhancing policy coherence.</li> </ul>	
EU (2019) European Green Deal	The European Green Deal is a roadmap for sustainability in the EU with actions to boost efficient resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, restore biodiversity and cut pollution. Key elements of this include the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Farm to Fork Strategy.	The Regional Programme promotes energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area through of the Specific Objectives RSO 2.1.
EU Sustainable Development Strategy (2009)	A framework for a long-term vision on sustainability in which economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection go hand in hand and are mutually supporting. European Union using this strategy has mainstreamed the objective of sustainable development into a broad range of policies.	The Regional Programme supports sustainable and integrated urban development through RSO 5.1: Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas (ERDF).
Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Taxonomy	<p>The Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) provides that no measure included in a Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) should lead to significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation.</p> <p>The DNSH principle is based on the provisions of the "Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance" adopted to promote private sector investment in green and sustainable projects and help achieve the goals of the Green Deal.</p>	<p>In consultation with the European Commission, the programme will be designed in a manner that follows the Do No Significant Harm Principle under the six environmental objectives of the EU Taxonomy Regulation.</p> <p>A standalone DNSH assessment will be undertaken alongside the SEA Environmental Report.</p>
Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy. (2020)	<p>This document sets out Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy. In order to reduce emissions in line with national and international targets, Ireland's building stock will need to be highly energy efficient and largely decarbonised by 2050. This will require:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ensuring that new buildings are to at least a nearly zero-energy building (NZEB) standard, and</li> <li>2. The retrofitting of the majority of existing buildings.</li> </ol>	The Regional Programme supports the Strategy through Specific Objective 2.1 which will work to improve the energy efficiency of residential homes through delivering renovations free of charge to owner-occupied lower-income households who meet the defined eligibility criteria and who are vulnerable to energy poverty.

## **APPENDIX B: ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE MAPS**

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Figure 1: Location

Figure 2: The National Deprivation Index for Ireland



Figure 3: Cultural heritage

Figure 4: Statutory Designations -Landscape and cultural heritage sites

Figure 5: Unemployment Rate

Figure 6: Ecological Designations



**Legend:**  
 SEMRA regional boundary  
 Counties OSi Ireland

Coordinate System: IRENET95 Irish Transverse Mercator  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Datum: IRENET95  
 Units: Meter



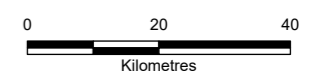
Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	07/02/2022	First Draft	PS	PG	MK

SEA of the Southern and Eastern Midland Regional Assembly

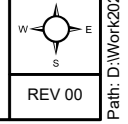


TITLE: Figure 1.0:  
Location Plan

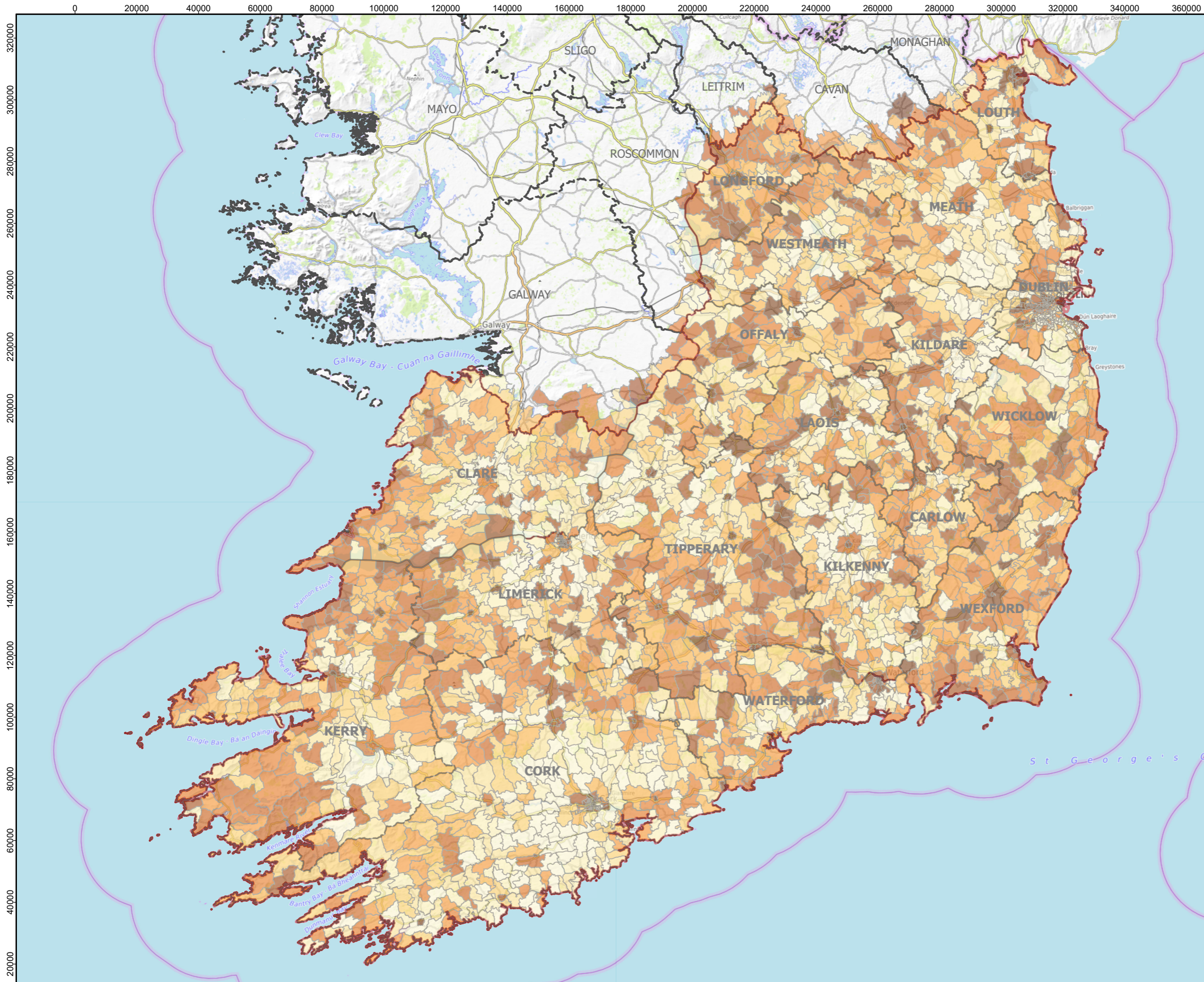
ID:603814 SRA-EMRA Plans\_INF001\_LocationMap\_A3\_L



Scale: 1:1,150,000 @ A3



REV 00



**Legend:**

- 1 - Least Deprived
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 - Most Deprived
- SEMRA regional boundary
- Counties OSi Ireland

Coordinate System: IREN95 Irish Transverse Mercator  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Datum: IREN95  
 Units: Meter



Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	07/02/2022	First Draft	PS	PG	MK

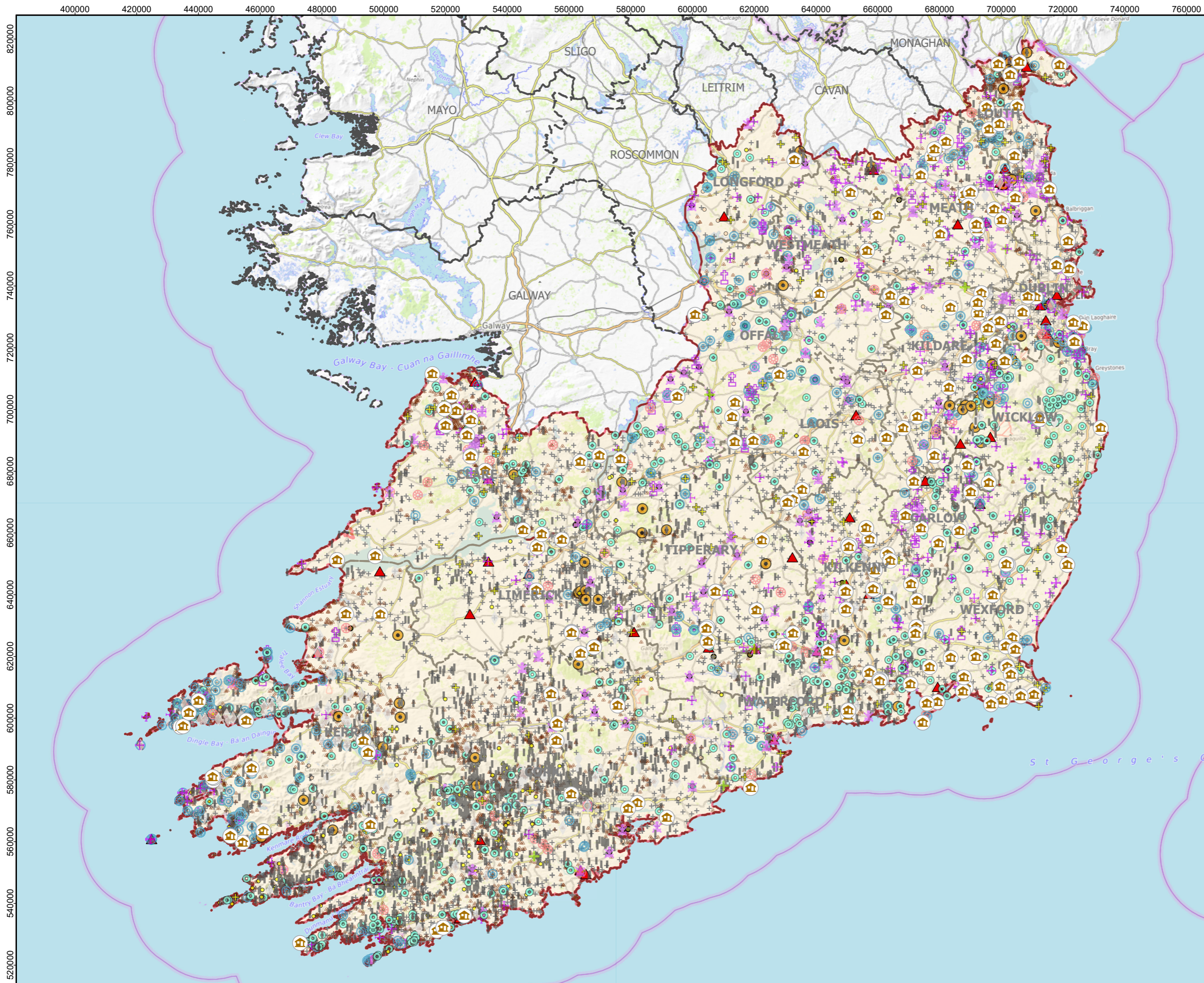
SEA of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly



TITLE: Figure 2.0:  
Deprivation Ranking for Ireland

ID:603814 SRA-EMRA Plans\_SOC001\_Deprivation\_A3\_L

0 20 40  
Kilometres  
Scale: 1:1,150,000 @ A3



- Legend:**
- Castles and Fortified places selection
  - Monuments (DAHG)
  - Megalithic, or Souterrain
  - Ogham stone
  - Stone circle
  - Standing stone
  - Pillar stone
  - High cross
  - Cross
  - Cross-slab/cross-inscribed stone or pillar
  - Market cross
  - Inscribed stone or Decorated stone
  - Bullaun stone
  - Stone sculpture / Sheela-na-gig
  - Memorial or ritual stone
  - Road-related stone monuments (misc)
  - Misc stone monuments
  - SEMRA regional boundary
  - Counties OSi Ireland

Coordinate System: IRENET95 Irish Transverse Mercator  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Datum: IRENET95  
 Units: Meter



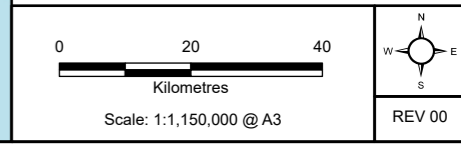
Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
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SEA of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

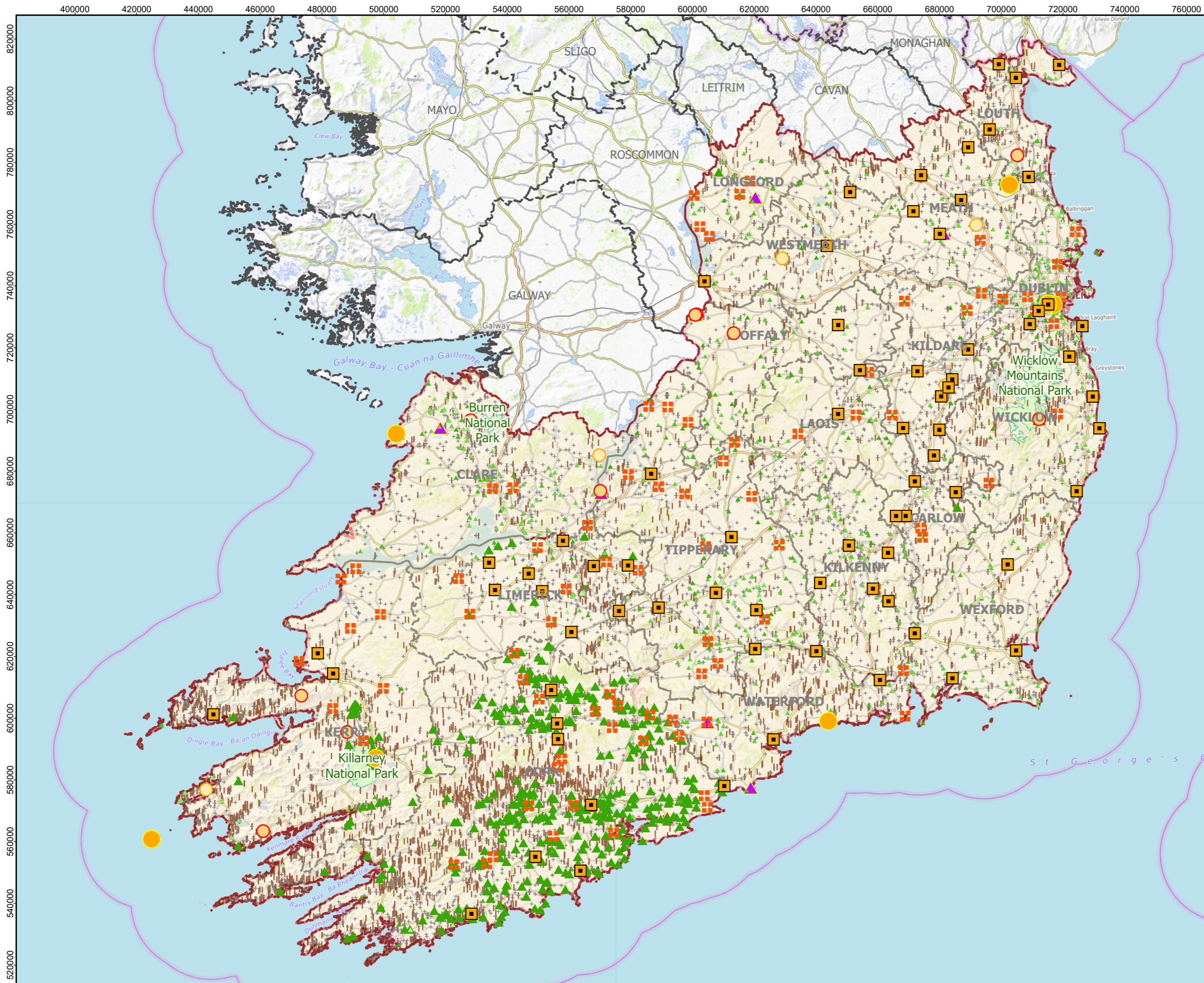


TITLE: Figure 3.0:  
Cultural Heritage

ID:603814 SRA-EMRA Plans\_CH001\_LocationMap\_A3\_L







- Legend:**
- UNESCO Sites
  - UNESCO Tentative List - 2021
  - UNESCO Tentative List - 2010
  - ▲ Country house
  - ▲ House - fortified house
  - ▲ House - 19th century
  - ▲ House - 18th/19th century
  - ▲ House - 18th century
  - ▲ House - 17th/18th century
  - ▲ House - 17th century
  - ▲ House - 16th/17th century
  - ▲ House - 16th century
  - ▲ House - medieval
  - ▲ House - early medieval
  - ▲ House - Iron Age
  - ▲ House - Bronze Age
  - ▲ House - Neolithic
  - ▲ House - prehistoric
  - Castle - Anglo-Norman
  - Walled Town
  - ▲ NMS - (Cathedral)
  - + NMS - (Burial site / grave)
  - | NMS - (Standing stones etc)

Coordinate System: IRENET95 Irish Transverse Mercator  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Datum: IRENET95  
 Units: Meter



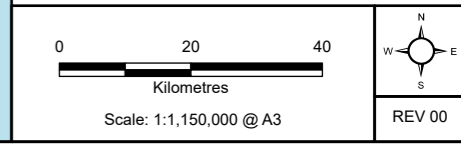
Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	07/02/2022	First Draft	PS	PG	MK

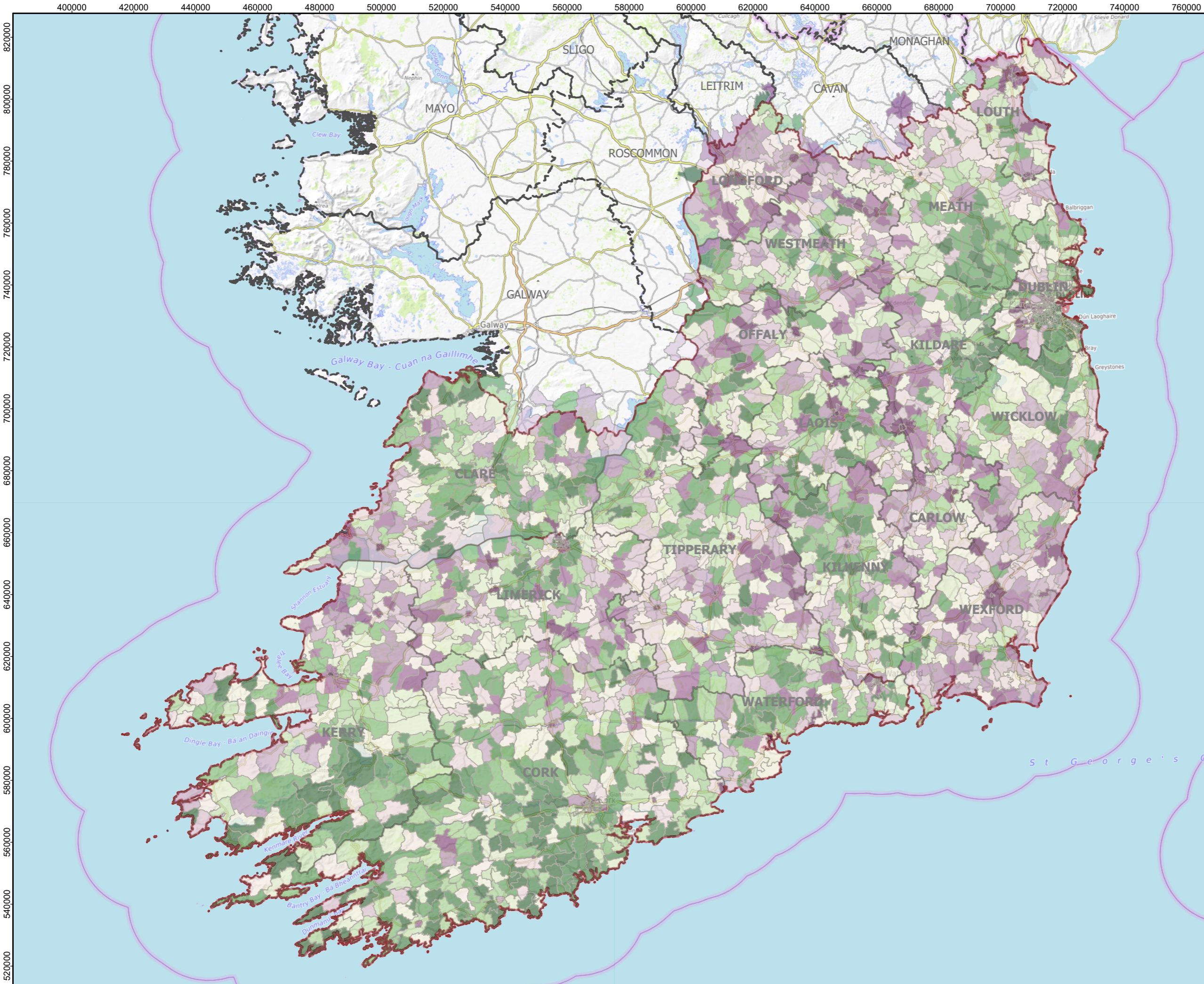
SEA of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly



TITLE: Figure 4.0:  
 Statutory Designations - Landscape  
 and Cultural Heritage Sites

ID:603814 SRA-EMRA Plans\_LAN001\_DesignationMap\_A3\_L





**Legend:**

% Unemployed - Total, Census 2016

- <5
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 10
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- >20

SEMRA regional boundary

Counties OSi Ireland

Coordinate System: IRENET95 Irish Transverse Mercator  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Datum: IRENET95  
 Units: Meter



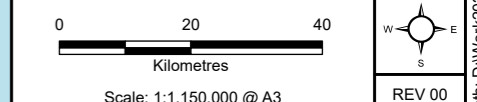
Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	08/02/2022	First Draft	PS	PG	MK

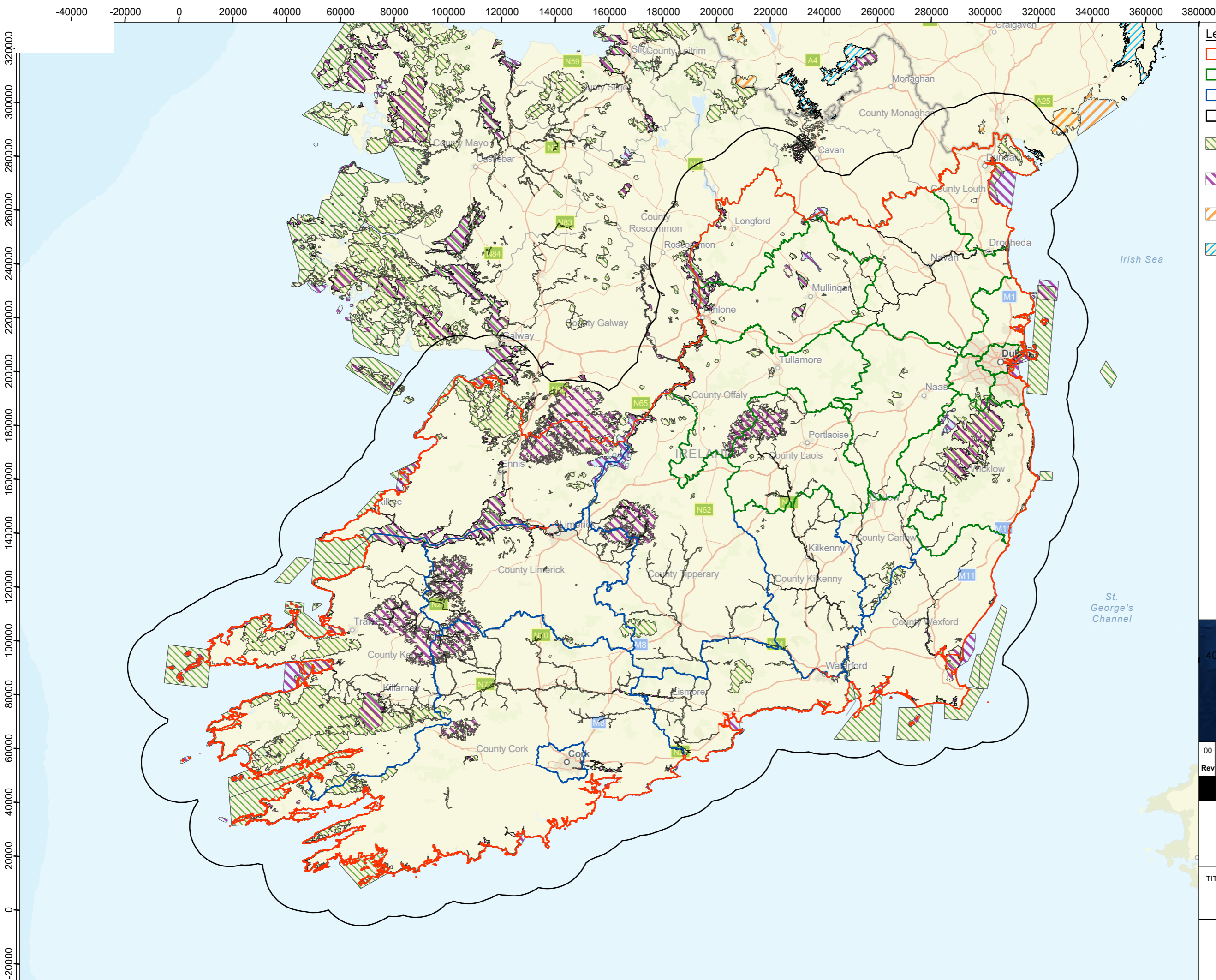
SEA of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly



TITLE: Figure 5.0:  
Unemployment Rate (2016)

ID:603814 SRA-EMRA Plans\_SOC002\_UnemploymentMap\_A3\_L





- Legend:**
- SEMRA Regional Boundary
  - EMRA County Boundaries
  - SRA County Boundaries
  - 15km Buffer
  - Special Areas of Conservation (Ireland)
  - Special Protected Areas (Ireland)
  - Special Areas of Conservation (Northern Ireland)
  - Special Protected Areas (Northern Ireland)



Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	17/01/2022	2483020	ET	SP	LC

**SEMRA HRA**




**RSK**  
**biocensus**  
EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

TITLE: Figure 6: Natura  
2000 sites

0 10,000 20,000 30,000

Metres

SCALE: 1:1,305,759@ A3



REV 00

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World Imagery (Clarity): Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community  
World Street Map: Esri UK, Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS  
Hybrid Reference Layer: Esri UK, Esri, Garmin, FAO, NOAA