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Southern Regional Assembly

Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021 - 2027

Natura Impact Statement

Southern Regional Assembly (SRA)

2483020 – AA Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

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Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AA | Appropriate Assessment |
| CCDP | City and Council Development Plans |
| CAP | Common Agricultural Policy |
| DAERA | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – Northern Ireland |
| DAHG | Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht |
| DCCAE | Department of Communications, Climate Actions and Environment |
| DNSH | Do No Significant Harm |
| DCHG | Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht |
| EC | European Commission |
| EclA | Ecological Impact Assessment Report |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| EMRA | Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly |
| EPA | Environmental Protection Agency |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| ESF+ | European Social Fund |
| EIS | European Innovation Scoreboard |
| EU | European Union |
| HPSU | High Potential Start-up |
| ICT | Information Communication Technology |
| IP | Intellectual Property |
| IROPI | Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| LECP | Local Economic and Community Plan |
| LSE | Likely Significant Effects |
| MA | Managing Authorities |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NBAP | National Biodiversity Action Plan |
| NCPF | National Cycle Policy Framework |
| NED | Natural Environment Division (of NIEA) |
| NI | Northern Ireland |
| NIEA | Northern Ireland Environment Agency |
| NIS | Natura Impact Statement |
| NPF | National Planning Framework |
| NPWS | National Parks and Wildlife Service |
| NWMPCE | National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy |
| NWPP | National Waste Prevention Programme |
| NWSMP | National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan |

| | |
|-------|--|
| NWRP | National Water Resources Plan |
| NWRA | Northern and Western Regional Assembly |
| OPR | Office of the Planning Regulator |
| QI | Qualifying Interest |
| RBMP | River Basin Management Plan |
| RD&I | Research, Development and Innovation |
| RDP | Rural Development Plan |
| REP | Regional Enterprise Plan |
| RIS | Regional Innovation Scoreboard |
| R&I | Research and Innovation |
| RRF | Recovery and Resilience Facility |
| RRP | Recovery and Resilience Plan |
| RSES | Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies |
| SAC | Special Area of Conservation |
| SCI | Special Conservation Interest |
| SEA | Strategic Environmental Assessment |
| SFRA | Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal Screening |
| SME | Small and medium-sized enterprises |
| SPA | Special Protection Area |
| S-P-R | Source-Pathway-Receptor |
| SRA | Southern Regional Assembly |
| SuDS | Sustainable Drainage Systems |
| TOA | Types of Actions |
| TU | Technological University |
| UN | United Nations |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| WSSP | Water Services Strategic Plan |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), in close co-operation with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), is currently preparing the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) co-financed Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027. This will sit alongside the two existing Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies 2020-2032 (RSEs), which were adopted in 2019 and 2020.

The RSEs for the Southern Region and the RSEs for the Eastern and Midland Region support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) for Ireland, and specifically the economic policies and objectives of the Government, by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the two regions. This process has also been replicated in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland.

The ERDF currently includes provision for two Regional Programmes, comprising:

- The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 - covering the combined areas of the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region.
- The Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027 – covering the Northern and Western Region.

RSK Ireland Ltd. has been instructed by the SRA to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening and produce a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) of the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027. This Appropriate Assessment has considered the potential implications of the SRA Regional Programme for European sites within the region and transboundary effects. A separate AA NIS will be produced by RSK Biocensus for the Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027.

The Stage 1 AA Screening looked at each of the Policy Objectives and their associated Specific Objectives to determine the potential for likely significant effects as a result of policy implementation. Using the source-pathway-receptor model, the screening assessment determined that potential for likely significant effects can be ruled out (alone and in combination) in relation to: **PO1** (A Smarter Europe) **SEM1 RSO1.1** (Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies) and **PO2** (A Greener, Low Carbon Europe) **SEM2 RSO2.1** (Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions). No further assessment of these Specific Objectives was required.

Two Policy and Specific Objectives were taken through to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and an NIS was prepared for **PO1** (A Smarter Europe) **SEM1 RSO1.3** (Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments) and **PO5** (A Europe Closer to its Citizens) **SEM3 RSO5.1** (Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas).

The Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment NIS considers whether implementation of the Regional Programme has the potential to adversely affect the integrity of one or more European site(s). The development and implementation of the Regional Programme itself is considered to be largely positive in terms of potential impacts on the environment, with the focus of funding on existing businesses/ universities/ research facilities, sustainable and integrated urban development and implementation of the Town Centre First policy. However, the Regional Programme does have the

potential to impact on European sites given the nature of the Types of Actions (TOAs) set out under Specific Objectives **RSO1.3** and **RSO5.1**. The following potential impacts were identified:

- Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure.
- Disturbance/ displacement to Qualifying interests (QI)/ Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) species.
- Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).
- Changes in air quality where development/ infrastructure is near a European site(s).

The assessment has determined that overall, none of the Policy and Specific Objectives in the Regional Programme are considered to be actively directing new development/ infrastructure in such a location or manner that potential impacts arising from projects receiving funding through **RSO 1.3** and **RSO5.1** could not be avoided or mitigated.

It is not possible at this high level to identify all impacts associated with policy implementation; however, the AA process has determined the types of impacts which are most likely to be encountered and has identified measures for each of the policies which would avoid/ mitigate for such types of impacts (as set out in Section 5.3). These measures (in addition to complying with EU and National policy and legislation) must be adhered to when allocating funding under the Policy and Specific Objectives to ensure that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of European site(s). The Regional Programme would not support any projects where adverse effects on European sites cannot be avoided or mitigated.

The Appropriate Assessment therefore concludes that (assuming the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out within this NIS are implemented), there would be no adverse impacts (alone or in-combination) on the integrity of any European sites a result of implementation of the Regional Programme.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1.1 The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), in close co-operation with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), is currently preparing the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) co-financed Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027. This will sit alongside the two existing Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies 2020-2032 (RSEs), which were adopted in 2019 and 2020.
- 1.1.2 The RSEs for the Southern Region and the RSEs for the Eastern and Midland Region support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) for Ireland, and specifically the economic policies and objectives of the Government, by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the two regions. This process has also been replicated in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland.
- 1.1.3 The ERDF currently includes provision for two Regional Programmes, comprising:
- The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 - covering the combined areas of the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region.
 - The Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027 – covering the Northern and Western Region.
- 1.1.4 RSK Ireland Ltd. has been instructed by the SRA to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening and produce a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) of the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027. This NIS has been produced by RSK Biocensus, an RSK Group Company. A separate AA NIS will be produced by RSK Biocensus for Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027.
- 1.1.5 The purpose of this AA is to provide evidence to determine the potential for the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 (hereafter referred to as 'The Regional Programme') to give rise to potential impacts on any European site(s). This will enable the competent authority (in this instance the SRA) to make the Appropriate Assessment decision, in accordance with European Union (EU) and National legislation, as set out in Section 2 below.

1.2 Overlap with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- 1.2.1 An SEA of the Regional Programme is also being carried out concurrently with the AA process. The purpose of the SEA is to evaluate, at an early stage, the broader range of environmental consequences that may occur as a result of implementing the Regional Programme, and to give interested parties an opportunity to comment upon the perceived or actual environmental impacts of the Regional Programme. There is a degree of overlap between the requirements of both the SEA and AA, and in accordance with best practice an integrated process of sharing gathered data has been carried out.

1.2.2 It should also be noted that there are issues relevant to the Habitats Directive that are not strictly related to AA. These include Article 10 and 12 of the Directive, which relate to the protection of species and the management of the landscape to encourage their movement and dispersal. In these cases, the issues have been brought forward to the biodiversity, flora and fauna section of the SEA, and have been addressed in that context as part of the wider environmental assessments informing development of the Regional Programme.

2.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

2.1 Legislative context for AA

- 2.1.1 The Habitats Directive provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as the Natura 2000 Network (also known as ‘European sites’).
- 2.1.2 Natura 2000 sites form a network of areas designated to conserve natural habitats and species that are rare, endangered, vulnerable or endemic within the European Community. This includes Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (designated under the Habitats Directive) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (classified under Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds; the ‘Birds Directive’).
- 2.1.3 Article 6 of the Directive obliges member states to undertake an ‘appropriate assessment’ of any plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, that is likely to have a significant effect on any European site.
- 2.1.4 Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive establishes the general approach and key principles for AA, and states the following:
- ‘3. Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.’*
- ‘4. If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.’*
- 2.1.5 The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the associated Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) are transposed into Irish legislation by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011. The legislative provisions for AA Screening for planning applications are set out in Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

2.2 AA guidance

2.2.1 This NIS has been prepared in accordance with the following guidance:

- Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Commission notice (European Commission, 2021).
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission, 2018).
- OPR Practice Note PN01. Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021).
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Departmental Circular guidance documents.

2.3 Stages of the Appropriate Assessment process

2.3.1 As set out in the guidance documents above, Appropriate Assessment is split into four distinct stages:

2.3.2 **Stage 1:** Screening is the first stage of the process and identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a plan or project (either alone or in combination). Consideration of likely significant effects should be based on the Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) risk assessment principle. Mitigation cannot be taken into consideration at this stage of the AA process. If the screening exercise concludes that likely significant effects cannot be ruled out, then Stage 2 of the process (see below) must be undertaken. It is important to note that the burden of evidence is to demonstrate, on the basis of objective information, that there will be no significant effect; if the effect may be significant, or is not known, that would trigger the need for Stage 2 of the process.

2.3.3 **Stage 2:** Appropriate Assessment looks at the implications of the effects of the proposals for the site's conservation objectives (alone and in combination). At this stage, it needs to be determined, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, whether or not there will be adverse effects on the integrity of the site. This stage also includes the development of mitigation measures to avoid or reduce any possible impacts.

2.3.4 **Stage 3:** Should the avoidance or mitigation measures detailed at the Appropriate Assessment stage (Stage 2) be insufficient to cancel out adverse effects, Stage 3 of the process must be undertaken. Assessment of alternative solutions is the process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the plan or project that would avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of a European site. EU guidance on this stage of the process states that, '*other assessment criteria, such as economic criteria, cannot be seen as overruling ecological criteria*'. If alternative solutions exist that do not have adverse impacts on European sites, they should be adopted regardless of economic considerations. This stage of the AA process should result in the identification of the least damaging options for the plan or project.

- 2.3.5 **Stage 4:** Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain. An assessment is made as to whether or not the development is necessary for Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI). If it is, this stage also involves detailed assessment of the compensatory measures needed to protect and maintain the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network. Where a European site include in their qualifying features 'priority' habitats or species (Special Areas of Conservation), as defined in Annex I and II of the Habitats Directive, the demonstration of 'over-riding public interest' is not sufficient and it must be demonstrated that the plan or project is necessary for 'human health or public safety considerations'. Where plans or projects meet these criteria, they can be allowed, provided adequate compensatory measures are proposed.
- 2.3.6 The NIS document includes Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Appropriate Assessment process.

3.0 THE REGIONAL PROGRAMME

3.1 Background

3.1.1 In May 2018, the European Commission (EC) adopted a proposal for the next multi-annual financial framework for the period 2021-2027. Following this, in March 2021, the EC published a package of Regulations on Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027, which included the provision for ERDF Operational Programmes.

3.1.2 Two ERDF co-financed Regional Programmes have since been developed, with the SRA and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) acting as Managing Authorities.

3.1.3 The two Regional Programmes comprise:

- The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 – covering the combined areas of the Southern Region and the Eastern and Midland Region.
- The Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027 – covering the Northern and Western Region.



3.1.4 The Eastern and Midland Region includes eleven Local Authority areas (see above), split into three sub-regions (Eastern, Midland and Dublin). The region's main population centre and economic engine is Dublin City and Metropolitan Area supported in turn by the three Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda, Dundalk, Athlone and the Key Towns of Swords, Bray, Maynooth, Navan, Naas, Wicklow, Mullingar, Longford, Tullamore, Portlaoise and Graigcullen.



- 3.1.5 The Southern Region includes nine Local Authority areas (see above) and the three Strategic Planning Areas of the South-West, Mid-West and South-East. The Region has the three Cities and Metropolitan Areas of Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford as the main centres of population and employment growth supported in turn by a network the Key Towns of Kilkenny, Ennis, Carlow, Tralee, Wexford, Clonmel, Killarney, Mallow, Nenagh, Thurles, Newcastle West, Clonakilty, Dungarvan and Gorey.
- 3.1.6 This NIS covers the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 only. A separate NIS will be produced for the Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027.

3.2 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

- 3.2.1 The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme strategy for ERDF is directly linked to the two existing RSESs.
- 3.2.2 The RSES for the Southern Region was adopted in January 2020. It sets a 12-year strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of the Southern Region in line with vision and objectives for national change in the NPF and the National Development Plan (NDP). It is prepared and implemented through the regional tier of Government to achieve balanced regional development. It will be implemented in partnership with Local Authorities and state agencies to deliver on this vision and build a cohesive and sustainable region.
- 3.2.3 The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region was adopted in June 2019 with the same primary aims as outlined above. The RSES of both Regions will be implemented by way of a review by Local Authorities of all City and County development plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). Key state agencies and sectoral bodies also need to align their strategies and investment plans to support the achievement of National and Regional Strategic Outcomes set out in the NPF and RSES.

- 3.2.4 The ambition of the SRA and EMRA is to utilise the funding available in the ERDF co-financed Regional Programme to support the delivery of key regional objectives and priorities as set out in the two existing RSEs. Consequently, the formulation of the Regional Programme has been grounded in the implementation of the RSEs, along with the Needs Analysis and the EU Commission's Country Specific Reports.
- 3.2.5 Both existing RSEs were subjected to SEA (RPS, 2019b and RPS, 2020b) and AA (RPS, 2019a and RPS, 2020b) and therefore will in part be used to inform the current assessment of the Regional Programme.

3.3 Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional ERDF Programme – Themes and Objectives

3.3.1 In order to support future growth, the EU Regulations on Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 sets out the following Policy Objectives:

- **Policy Objective 1: A Smarter Europe** - A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional Information Communication Technology (ICT) connectivity (PO 1).
- **Policy Objective 2: A Greener, Low Carbon Europe** - 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: Connected Europe** - A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility (PO 3).
- **Policy Objective 4: Social inclusion** - A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO 4).
- **Policy Objective 5: A Europe Closer to its Citizens** - Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5).

3.3.2 For this Regional Programme period of 2021 to 2027, the SRA's primary focus will be on PO 1, 2 and 5 of the ERDF.

3.3.3 As detailed in Section 3.2, the Regional Programme assists the Government's aim of promoting balanced regional development by supporting the implementation of the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies in each of the two regions in the programme area and is focused on the following key strategic outcomes:

- **Developing Smarter More Competitive Regions** by building RD&I capacity within the public research institutions in our regions, by accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level, by supporting innovation diffusion and by strengthening regional innovation ecosystems in line with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Regional Enterprise Plans.
- **Creating Greener More Energy Efficient Regions and a Just Transition** by taking an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns using a Town Centres First Framework.

- **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.

3.3.4 The ERDF Regulation also sets out twenty-three Specific Objectives and the scope of support from the ERDF. Table 1 shows the Policy Objectives and their associated Specific Objectives chosen to be included in the Regional Programme.

Table 1 Policy Objective/ Regional Programme Priority and Specific Objectives

| Policy Objective/ Regional Programme Priority | Specific Objective |
|--|---|
| <p>EU 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).</p> <p>Regional Programme Priority: SEM1. Smarter and More Competitive Regions</p> | <p>RSO1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.</p> <p>RSO1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments.</p> |
| <p>EU Policy Objective 2: A Greener, Low Carbon Europe - 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>Regional Programme Priority: SEM2. Low-Carbon Energy Efficient Regions</p> | <p>RSO2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p> |
| <p>EU Policy Objective 5: A Europe Closer to its Citizens – A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5).</p> <p>Regional Programme Priority: SEM3. Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development</p> | <p>RSO5.1 Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas.</p> |

3.4 Consultation

- 3.4.1 The ERDF Programmes are developed under an EU Partnership model, with extensive consultation involving social partners and voluntary groups.
- 3.4.2 The consultation process commenced with a detailed needs assessment which was undertaken by Indecon Consultants, 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.
- 3.4.3 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.
- 3.4.4 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.
- 3.4.5 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.
- 3.4.6 Following those rounds of meetings, a number of Government Departments and public bodies put forward proposed actions for consideration for ERDF funding.
- 3.4.7 A comprehensive screening process of those proposed actions was conducted by the Managing Authorities (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.

AA Screening

- 3.4.8 Following completion of the AA Screening (refer to Section 4), a four-week consultation exercise was carried out in March/ April 2022. Consultation responses (relevant to the AA Screening) were received from the following organisations:
- Geological Survey Ireland (a division in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications).
 - Environmental Protection Agency.
 - Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

- Environmental Protection Division (a division of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications).
- Office of Public Works.

3.4.9 A summary of the consultation responses and how these have been addressed is set out in Table B1, Appendix B.

NIS

3.4.10 Following completion of the NIS (refer to Section 5), a public consultation exercise was carried out in August/ September 2022. Consultation responses (relevant to the NIS) were received from the following organisations:

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) including the following:
 - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Natural Environment Division (NED) (Via NIEA).
 - Marine Fisheries Division (Via NIEA).
 - Marine Plan Team (Via NIEA).

3.4.11 A summary of the consultation responses and how these have been addressed is set out in Table B2, Appendix B.

4.0 STAGE 1 – AA SCREENING

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The purpose of AA screening is:

'to assess, in view of the best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the sites, if that plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the site.'

4.1.2 Screening is the process that addresses and records the reasoning and conclusions in relation to the first two tests of Article 6(3), that is:

- whether a plan or project is directly connected to or necessary for the management of the site; and
- whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site in view of its Conservation Objectives.

4.1.3 Under the first test, plans that are directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site do not require AA. For this exception to apply, management is required to be interpreted narrowly as nature conservation management in the sense of Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive. This refers to specific measures to address the ecological requirements of annexed habitats and species (and their habitats) present on a site(s). The relationship should be shown to be direct and not a by-product of the plan, even if this might result in positive or beneficial effects for a site(s).

4.1.4 In this context, the purpose of the Regional Programme is not the nature conservation management of any European site(s); and it is not therefore considered to be directly connected with, or necessary to the management of, any European site(s), consequently AA Screening is required.

4.1.5 The diagram below, taken from 'OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management' (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021), sets out the steps and matters to be considered in the AA Screening process to address the second test of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Steps and matters to be considered:



1. Describe the proposed development and local site characteristics.



2. Identify the relevant European sites and compile information on Qualifying Interests and conservation objectives.

- (a) Identify all European sites that might be affected using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.
- (b) Identify the Qualifying Interests of the site concerned and the conservation objectives.
- (c) Determine which of those Qualifying Interests/conservation objectives could be affected by the proposed development.



3. Assess the likely significant direct and indirect effects on the conservation objectives of the site(s) in relation to:

- (a) the project alone, *and*
- (b) In-combination with other plans and projects.



4. Screening determination: In the absence of mitigation measures, determine if the project alone or in-combination with other plans and projects could undermine the conservation objectives of the site(s) and give rise to likely significant effects.

4.2 Identification of European sites

4.2.1 As detailed in Section 2.1, European sites comprise SACs and SPAs, which together comprise the pan-European 'Natura 2000' network of protected areas.

Source-Pathway-Receptor

4.2.2 Likely significant effects on a European site will only exist where there is a source-pathway-receptor link. Therefore, identifying potential impact pathways to sensitive habitats and species associated with European sites is a vital component of the AA screening process. If there is no ecological pathway or functional link between the actions likely to result from the Policy Objectives and any European sites, there is no potential for impact and the Policy Objective can be 'screened out'.

4.2.3 Given the high-level and strategic nature of the Regional Programme, determining the source-pathway-receptor links, and therefore the potential for likely significant effects, can be difficult. No allocations, nor specific spatial elements (other than naming Key Towns within the Regions), have been included in the Policy Objectives and/or Specific Objectives; the precautionary principle has therefore been applied when identifying any potential source-pathway-receptors.

4.2.4 Taking into consideration the potential impacts identified in the AAs of the RSEs (RPS, 2019a and RPS, 2020b), and the themes of the Policy Objectives chosen to be included in the Regional Programme (refer to Section 3), the following potential impact pathways (to QI/ SCIs associated with the European sites) have been identified:

- Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure.
- Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species.
- Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).
- Changes in air quality where development/ infrastructure is near a European site(s).

Zone of Influence

4.2.5 The zone of influence is the geographical area over which a plan/ project could affect the receiving environment in a way that could have significant effects on the QI/ SCI of a European site(s). Whilst for projects with a spatial element this can more easily be established on a case-by-case basis, a broader precautionary approach is more appropriate for high-level plans, such as the Regional Programme.

4.2.6 Based on the themes within the Regional Programme, and the potential impact pathways outlined above, a zone of influence of 15km from the boundary of the region has been identified. This distance is precautionary, and it is likely that the zone of influence for the majority of the projects which come forward for funding as a result of the actions under the Policy Objectives set out in the Regional Programme will be more localised.

4.2.7 In accordance with current guidance, the AA Screening should also take account of transboundary effects. In this instance, sites within Northern Ireland (at the northern boundary of the region) will be included in the assessment where they fall within the 15km

zone of influence described above. This will include SACs and SPAs which now form part of the United Kingdom (UK) National Site Network (as per the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019). For the purposes of this NIS, the term 'European site' will refer to all SPAs and SACs within Ireland as well as those within Northern Ireland which form part of the UK National Site Network.

European sites within the zone of influence

4.2.8 Table 2 shows the number of European sites within or partially within the Southern, Eastern and Midland region, including the 15km zone of influence buffer. A list of the sites is presented in Appendix 1 and are shown on Figure 1.

Table 2 Number of European sites within the Southern, Eastern and Midland Region (including 15km zone of influence buffer)

| European site | Number of sites | |
|---------------|---|-----|
| SAC | Southern, Eastern and Midland Region (only) | 253 |
| | Additional sites within the 15km zone of influence buffer | 14 |
| SPA | Southern, Eastern and Midland Region (only) | 99 |
| | Additional sites within the 15km zone of influence buffer | 3 |

Conservation Objectives

4.2.9 Site-specific conservation objectives are prepared for all European sites. They aim to define the favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site. The maintenance of habitats and species within European sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

4.2.10 Site-specific conservation objectives specify whether the objective is to maintain or to restore favourable conservation condition of the habitat or species, and they set out attributes and targets that define the objectives. For example, favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

4.2.11 The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and

- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

4.2.12 QI/ SCIs are annexed habitats and species of community interest for which an SAC or SPA has been designated. The site-specific conservation objectives are set out to ensure that the QIs/SCIs of that site are maintained or restored to a favourable conservation condition/conservation status.

4.2.13 A full listing of the conservation objectives and QIs/SCIs that each European site is designated for, as well as the attributes and targets to maintain or restore the QIs/SCIs to a favourable conservation condition, are available from the NPWS website.

4.3 Assessment of likely significant effects

4.3.1 The key test in AA Screening is to establish whether any likelihood of significant effects on a European site(s) can be ruled out.

4.3.2 The first sections of the Regional Programme include introductory text and provide contextual information regarding the development of the document. This part of the Regional Programme is factual and does not in itself lead to change or development. These sections cannot conceivably have any effects on European sites and have therefore been scoped out of the AA screening assessment.

4.3.3 The remainder of the Programme document sets out the Policy Objectives and associated Specific Objectives. These have been assessed (alone) in Table 3 below and in combination with other plans and projects within Section 4.4.

Table 3 The Regional Programme Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives screening assessment

| Objectives | Types of Action | Screening Assessment |
|---|--|---|
| <p>EU 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).</p> <p>Regional Programme Priority: SEM1. Smarter and More Competitive Regions</p> | | |
| <p>RSO1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.</p> | <p>The following TOAs will be taken under this priority to develop and enhance research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies in the programme area.</p> <p>Capacity building within the regions new Technological University (TU)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO1.1.1: Establish, strengthen and systemise the technological universities' research and innovation offices which support their academic staff and researchers and wider enterprise and community stakeholders within their regions. This will include developing researcher human capital in the technological universities, including staff development, recruitment, postgraduate training and supervision, networking, and more structured collaborative knowledge-transfer and mobility schemes. • Action RSO1.1.2: 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. <p>Capacity building within both universities and our Technological Universities (TUs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO1.1.3: 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. <p>Accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO1.1.4: Establish a new "Smart Hub" model for regional innovation and entrepreneurial training. The model will integrate critical elements of a research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem with entrepreneurial approaches, thus accelerating time to market from research concept to spin-outs, new product introduction, licences and | <p>The actions associated with this policy all relate to funding, investment and enhancing capacity within existing establishments.</p> <p>The SRA have confirmed that none of the TOAs under RSO1.1 would lead to the development of new buildings or transport infrastructure.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links can be ruled out and no further assessment is required of this Specific Objective.</p> |

| Objectives | Types of Action | Screening Assessment |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>innovations. 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.</p> <p>Supporting innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO1.1.5: 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. | |
| <p>RSO1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments.</p> | <p>The following types of action will be taken under this priority to enhance sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investment, in the regions and sub-regions of the programme area.</p> <p>Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO1.3.1: 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivery of small to medium scale regional projects (with minimum or no building requirements) or expansion of existing regional ecosystem projects. ▪ Scoping and preparing new large-scale regional projects, e.g., design and planning, project development, recruitment of key managers. ▪ Delivery of large-scale regional capital investment projects that provide key strategic infrastructural solutions to support the regional ecosystem. <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 particular in relation to job creation and delivery of regional capital investment projects and strategic infrastructure.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment and therefore further Appropriate Assessment of this Specific Objective will be required.</p> |

| Objectives | Types of Action | Screening Assessment |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>Projects must be collaborative in nature, they must be innovative, viable and sustainable with metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which provide additionality to the existing regional infrastructure.</p> <p>Projects will complement the solutions provided by the existing regional providers including higher education institutions, state agencies and private sector entities at a regional level.</p> | |
| <p>EU Policy Objective 2: A Greener, Low Carbon Europe - 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>Regional Programme Priority: SEM2. Low-Carbon Energy Efficient Regions</p> | | |
| <p>RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p> | <p>The following types of action will be taken under this priority to promote energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the programme area.</p> <p>Improving the energy efficiency of residential homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO2.1.1: Support the delivery of energy efficiency renovations free of charge to owner-occupied lower-income households who meet the defined eligibility criteria and who are in, or are vulnerable to, energy poverty. This action will use learnings from similar actions in the 2014-2020 programming period and will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ retrofit homes with the aim to achieve, on average, at least a medium-depth level renovation ▪ pilot the installation of heat pumps in existing premises, to replace older less efficient heating systems ▪ 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 ▪ provide an evidence base to improve the targeting of energy efficiency schemes ▪ examine the impact of retrofitting on alleviating energy poverty | <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 free of charge to lower-income households.</p> <p>The SRA have confirmed that this policy would not lead to development outside of footprint of existing dwellings or lead to other renewable energy schemes.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links can be ruled out and no further assessment is required of this Specific Objective.</p> |
| <p>EU Policy Objective 5: A Europe Closer to its Citizens - Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5)</p> <p>Regional Programme Priority: SEM3. Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development</p> | | |
| <p>RSO5.1. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental</p> | <p>The following types of action will be taken under this priority to foster integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas within the programme area.</p> | <p>This Specific Objective has the potential to lead to development, in particular within the Key Towns and Regional</p> |

| Objectives | Types of Action | Screening Assessment |
|--|---|---|
| <p>development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas.</p> | <p>Supporting locally lead and locally selected projects that take an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns, using a Town Centre First Health Check framework to gather data, develop action plans and lead actions on regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO5.1.1: 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. • Action RSO5.1.2: Deliver pilot and pathfinder projects for selected towns (priority for Key Towns and Regional Growth Centres listed in the RSEs) tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction. This will involve capital investment and may include public realm improvement projects. | <p>Growth Centres identified within the Region.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment and therefore further Appropriate Assessment of this Specific Objective will be required.</p> |

4.4 In-combination effects

4.4.1 It is a requirement of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive that the potential for in-combination effects with other plans or projects are considered. Given the high-level nature of the Regional Programme, and the lack of allocation sites or specific spatial elements (other than naming Key Towns within the Regions), only similarly high-level and strategic documents have been included in the in-combination assessment, as listed in Table 4.

Table 4 Polices/plans/programmes/strategies to consider in the in-combination assessment

| Relevant polices/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | |
|---|--|
| European Union/ National | |
| EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 | Europe 2020 Economic Strategy. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010) |
| EU Country Report (Ireland) 2019 and 2020 | EU Regional innovation Scoreboard (2021) |
| EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges | EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European Strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern competitive and climate neutral economy |
| EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020-2030 | EU (2019) European Green Deal |
| EU Sustainable Development Strategy (2009) | Roadmap for Resource Efficient Europe 2011 |
| EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) 2021 | EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges |
| EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy | EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 |
| Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) 2020-2032 | Indecon Needs Analysis (2020) |
| National Smart Specialisation Plan | DCHG (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021 |
| NPWS Conservation Plans and/or Conservation Objectives for SACs and SPAs | DAHG (2015) National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) |
| Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan (NDP) and National Planning Framework (NPF) 2021-2030 | Future Jobs Ireland (2019) |
| DCCAE (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018–2020 | Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022 |
| National Broadband Plan 2022 | Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector (2014) |

| Relevant polices/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | |
|---|--|
| Food Wise 2025 | EPA (2018) River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 |
| Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services) | National Water Resources Plan |
| EPA National Waste Prevention Programme | Regional Waste Management Plans |
| National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan | National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020 |
| Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 'A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020' | DCCAE (2020) National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030 |
| DCCAE (2021) National Climate Action Plan | DCCAE (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland |
| DCCAE (2017) National Mitigation Plan | National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012) |
| Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Taxonomy | Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy (2020) |
| National Retrofit Plan | Regional Enterprise Plans |
| Housing for All 2021 a new Housing Plan for Ireland | Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy |
| Northern Ireland¹ | |
| Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 | Draft Environment Strategy |
| Draft NI Peatland Policy | Draft Green Growth Strategy |
| Northern Ireland Energy Strategy 2050 | |

Policy Objectives/ Specific Objectives screened out

4.4.2 Taking into consideration the actions associated with the Specific Objectives (as detailed in Table 3), and the potential impact pathways identified in Section 4.2, no likely significant source-pathway-receptor links have been identified in combination with the documents set out in Table 4 and the following Specific Objectives:

- **PO1 SEM1 RSO1.1** Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.
- **PO2 SEM2 RSO2.1** Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

4.4.3 The potential for likely significant in combination effects associated with these Specific Objectives can therefore be ruled out and no further Appropriate Assessment (in relation to in combination effects) of PO1 SEM1 RSO1.1 and PO2 SEM2 RSO2.1 will be required.

¹ Added in response to consultation with NIEA, March 2022, refer to Appendix B.

Policy Objectives/ Specific Objectives screened in

4.4.4 The following Specific Objectives have been screened in for further in combination assessment:

- **PO1 SEM1 RSO1.3** Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments.
- **PO5 SEM3 RSO5.1** Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas.

4.4.5 As detailed in Table 3, both PO1 SEM1 RSO1.3 and PO5 SEM3 RSO5.1 have the potential to lead to development, and as such, the potential for likely significant effects (in combination) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links (identified in Section 4.2) cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment. Further Appropriate Assessment (in relation to in combination effects) of PO1 SEM1 RSO1.3 and PO5 SEM3 RSO5.1 will therefore be required.

4.5 Screening determination

Screening Summary

4.5.1 Given the strategic nature of the Regional Programme and the current stage of preparation, it has not been possible to rule out the potential for likely significant effects for all Policy Objectives. Table 5 summarises the Specific Objectives which have been screened in and out of the assessment.

Table 5 The Regional Programme Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives screening summary

| Objectives | Screening Conclusion |
|---|---|
| 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) Regional Programme Priority: SEM1. Smarter and More Competitive Regions | |
| RSO1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies. | Screened out (alone and in combination) |
| RSO1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments. | Screened in (alone and in combination) |
| Policy Objective 2: A Greener, Low Carbon Europe – 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) Regional Programme Priority: SEM2. Low-Carbon Energy Efficient Regions | |
| RSO2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. | Screened out (alone and in combination) |
| Policy Objective 5: A Europe Closer to its Citizens - Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5) Regional Programme Priority: SEM3. Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development | |

| Objectives | Screening Conclusion |
|---|---|
| RSO5.1 Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas. | Screened in (alone and in combination) |

Screening Conclusion

- 4.5.2 On completion of the AA Screening, the following conclusion has been drawn.
- 4.5.3 The potential for likely significant effects can be ruled out (alone and in combination) in relation to PO1 SEM1 RSO1.1 and PO2 SEM2 RSO2.1. No further assessment of these Specific Objectives is required.
- 4.5.4 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.

5.0 STAGE 2 – NATURA IMPACT STATEMENT

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This NIS considers whether implementing the Regional Programme has the potential to adversely affect the integrity of one or more European site(s), including the consideration of transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland. Current EC guidance (MN2000) states that the integrity of a site is related to its ecological functions, and therefore the decision as to whether it may be adversely affected should focus on, and be limited to, the site's conservation objectives as set out in Section 4.2 above.
- 5.1.2 For project-level NIS, full details of the proposals are normally available and can be used to make an informed assessment of whether a site's conservation objectives would be affected. However, since the Regional Programme is, by its nature, aimed at a regional strategic level, no specific projects or proposals are included, and the full scope of potential impacts and their pathways cannot be fully identified at this stage. Nevertheless, every effort has been made to identify potential impacts based on our current understanding of the Policy Objectives/ Specific Objectives within the Regional Programme, those generic impacts outlined in the AA guidance (EC 2001 *Methodological Guidance on the Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites*) and professional judgement, where appropriate.
- 5.1.3 In addition, the Regional Programme will be supported by the robust planning process within Ireland which will ensure further focused assessment will be carried out, where necessary, to inform decision-making as requests for funding come forward (refer to Section 5.3).
- 5.1.4 The development of the Regional Programme has been a collaborative process, with the SEA being carried out concurrently with the AA, thereby identifying any potential issues at an early stage. This is in line with the Habitats Directive, which promotes a hierarchy beginning with avoidance before considering mitigation.

Assessment Approach

- 5.1.5 As detailed in the AA guidance (refer to Section 2.2), this NIS will comprise the following:
- **Impact Prediction** – Identify the types of impacts, such as: direct and indirect impacts; short and long-term impacts; construction and operational impacts; transboundary and in-combination impacts. The source-pathway-receptor model (set out in Section 4.2) has been used to identify potential impacts.
 - **Assessment of Effects** – Once the impacts of the Regional Programme have been identified and predicted, it will be necessary to assess whether there will be adverse effects on the integrity of the European site(s) as defined by the conservation objectives and status of the site(s). The precautionary principle will be applied when determining the potential for adverse effects.
 - **Mitigation Measures** – These are measures aimed at minimising, cancelling out or avoiding the negative effects of the Regional Programme before, during or after its

completion or implementation. If required, mitigation measures may be an integral part of the specifications of the Regional Programme.

Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives assessed in the NIS

5.1.6 Table 6 set out the Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives screened into the NIS, refer to Section 4.

Table 6 The Regional Programme Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives considered in the NIS

| Objectives | Types of Action |
|---|---|
| <p>EU 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). Regional Programme Priority: SEM1. Smarter and More Competitive Regions</p> | |
| <p>RSO1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments.</p> | <p>The following types of action will be taken under this priority to enhance sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investment, in the regions and sub-regions of the programme area.</p> <p>Strengthening and developing functional regional ecosystems that support innovation diffusion, enterprise innovation and entrepreneurship in the regions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO1.3.1: 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivery of small to medium scale regional projects (with minimum or no building requirements) or expansion of existing regional ecosystem projects. ▪ Scoping and preparing new large-scale regional projects, e.g., design and planning, project development, recruitment of key managers. ▪ Delivery of large-scale regional capital investment projects that provide key strategic infrastructural solutions to support the regional ecosystem. <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>Projects must be collaborative in nature, they must be innovative, viable and sustainable with metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which provide additionality to the existing regional infrastructure.</p> <p>Projects will complement the solutions provided by the existing regional providers including higher education institutions, state agencies and private sector entities at a regional level.</p> |
| <p>EU Policy Objective 5: A Europe Closer to its Citizens - Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5) Regional Programme Priority: SEM3. Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development</p> | |
| <p>RSO5.1. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental</p> | <p>The following types of action will be taken under this priority to foster integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas within the programme area.</p> |

| Objectives | Types of Action |
|---|--|
| development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas. | <p>Supporting locally lead and locally selected projects that take an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns, using a Town Centre First Health Check framework to gather data, develop action plans and lead actions on regeneration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action RSO5.1.1: 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. • Action RSO5.1.2: Deliver pilot and pathfinder projects for selected towns (priority for Key Towns and Regional Growth Centres listed in the RSEs) tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction. This will involve capital investment and may include public realm improvement projects. |

5.2 Prediction of effects

5.2.1 In line with relevant guidance, the first stage of the assessment is to identify the types of impacts which could lead to potential effects on one or more European site(s). The source-pathway-receptor model has been used to identify potential impacts. In this instance:

- The **source** is the Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives set out within the Regional Programme.
- The **pathway** relates to how implementation of the Regional Programme could potentially lead to adverse effects on a European site(s).
- The **receptor** is any European site(s), including those outside of Ireland, where a potential pathway has been identified.

5.2.2 The development and implementation of the Regional Programme is considered to be largely positive in terms of potential impacts on the environment, with the focus of funding on existing businesses/ universities/ research facilities, sustainable and integrated urban development and implementation of the Town Centre First policy. However, given the nature of the TOAs (Types of Actions) set out under Specific Objectives RSO1.3 and RSO5.1 (refer to Table 6) the Regional Programme does still have the potential to impact upon European sites.

Impact identification

5.2.3 A summary of the main potential impacts that could arise from the implementation of the Regional Programme and the TOAs arising from it are set out in Table 7 below.

5.2.4 The SRA have confirmed that none of the types of projects which would come forward for funding as part of the implementation of the Regional Programme would lead to new development/ infrastructure within the boundary of a European site(s), and therefore direct habitat and/or species loss within a European site(s) has been scoped out of further assessment. In addition, although projects could be located in coastal towns/ settlements; impacts on coastal processes and the wider marine environment have not been considered in the assessment due to the size, scale and nature of such projects (i.e. focusing funding on urban regeneration and smart specialisation, as set out in Section 3).

Table 7 Impact identification

| Impact/ development phase | Description |
|---|---|
| <p>Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure</p> <p>Construction phase</p> | <p>Habitat loss occurs where there is complete removal of a habitat type, for example under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure. Habitat degradation is the diminishment of habitat quality and a loss of important habitat functions over time. It can arise from a number of sources e.g., introduction of invasive species, toxic contamination from spillages or physical modification or alteration of the environment.</p> <p>The loss/ degradation of habitats could result in effects on QI/ SCI species dependent on these habitats for whole or part of their life cycle. For example, the loss/ degradation of habitat outside of a SPA (sometimes referred to as ex-situ habitat or functionally linked land) regularly used by significant numbers of SPA QI bird species, such as geese could affect those species' ability to forage, survive and reproduce.</p> <p>There is the potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p> |
| <p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species</p> <p>Construction/ operational phases</p> | <p>There is the potential to disturb/ displace QI/SCI within European site(s) and/ or QI/ SCI species using land linked to a European site. Disturbance/ displacement to QI/SCI species could occur where there is an increase in the sources of disturbance/ displacement, such as noise and visual effects from construction (e.g. construction machinery) or operational activities (such as increasing sustainable tourism) associated with developments funded through the Regional Programme.</p> <p>Disturbance/ displacement could lead to effects on QI/ SCI species sensitive to such impacts (including otters, bats and waterfowl/ waders), resulting in potential changes to species distribution and/or changes that affect productivity or breeding success.</p> <p>There is the potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p> |
| <p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction phase</p> | <p>There is the potential to change water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure is hydrologically linked to a European site(s).</p> <p>The source of alterations of water quality may be in-situ or ex-situ (i.e., downstream and outside of the immediate area of development) and could include the release of suspended solids, increased nutrient run-off and spillages during construction activities. These could all lead to effects on QI/ SCI habitats and species sensitive to such impacts, for example, contamination of watercourses used by migratory fish species, such as salmon, could result in mortality and a reduction in the species ability to survive and reproduce.</p> <p>Alterations to surface or subsurface flow due to development could also result in impact to surface and groundwater dependent</p> |

| Impact/ development phase | Description |
|--|---|
| | <p>habitats. For example, coastal European sites in particular are vulnerable to changes in surface and ground water quality.</p> <p>There would be no in-channel works based on the types of projects which would come forward for funding as part of implementation of the Regional Programme. Therefore, the only potential impacts associated with water quality/ hydrology would be as a result of activities upstream of European(s) sites.</p> <p>There is the potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p> |
| <p>Changes in air quality where development/ infrastructure is near a European site(s) Construction/ operational phases</p> | <p>Changes in air quality from construction/ operational activities, increased traffic and new development/ infrastructure could have impacts on European sites through an increase in nitrogen deposition which could occur as a result of increase in nitrogen deposition as a result of construction activities; increase in nitrogen deposition as a result of operational activities associated with new development/ infrastructure; and increased road traffic as a result of development/ infrastructure.</p> <p>These activities could all increase nitrogen deposition on sensitive habitats within European sites lead to effects on QI/ SCI habitats and species sensitive to such impacts.</p> <p>Potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p> |

Impact prediction

- 5.2.5 As detailed previously, it is acknowledged that the Regional Programme is a high-level strategic document, and as such predicting the effects of the Programme at individual European site level is not practical or possible due to the lack of project/ spatial detail to give context to the extent or significance of any potential effects identified.
- 5.2.6 Therefore, the potential for adverse effects will be based on our current understanding of the Policy Objectives/ Specific Objectives set out within the Regional Programme which can subsequently be used to support the lower tier planning process and help to inform future decision making as requests for funding come forward.

5.3 Assessment of effects and mitigation

Existing policy framework within the Regional Programme

- 5.3.1 As detailed within Section 3, the key challenges and future ambitions for the Regional Programme area are clearly set out in the RSES for the Southern Region and the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region. Any future projects/ initiatives funded through implementation of the Policy and Specific Objectives within the Regional Programme must therefore comply with the existing policies set out within the RSESs. This is as well as

ensuring compliance with National and European legislation and policy (including Northern Ireland legislation and policy where transboundary effects have been identified².)

- 5.3.2 The development of the Regional Programme has been undertaken alongside the SEA, as per the Habitats Directive. This promotes a hierarchy beginning with avoidance before considering mitigation measures. Through iterative discussion during the preparation of the Regional Programme, potential impacts have been identified and addressed where possible at an early stage, this includes the provision of environmental protection wording at the beginning of the Regional Programme, as follows:

‘Environmental and Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Statement

The programme area has a wealth of environmental assets from Ireland’s highest mountains, dramatic coastlines, and remote rural areas to fertile agricultural landscapes. Our rich urban environment includes a strong and historic network of cities, towns and villages. These have associated flora, fauna, biodiversity and cultural heritage assets, many of which are protected through European and National legislation, including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas and Proposed Natural Heritage Areas. The Programme includes environmental assessment documents, on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and a Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal Screening (SFRA).

Reflecting the importance of tackling climate change in line with the Union’s commitments to implement the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the programme will contribute to mainstreaming climate actions and to support activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and would Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council. To ensure compliance with the requirements for DNSH the programme will endeavour to support projects and activities that protect biodiversity, water, air & land quality, and marine resources, that encourages circular economy initiatives that reduce waste and increases recycling and that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

At the project level, all applications for development consents for projects emanating from any policies that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment will need to be accompanied by one or more of the following, as relevant:

- *Ecological Impact Assessment Report (EclA);*
- *Environmental Report;*
- *Environmental Impact Assessment Report - if necessary, under the relevant legislation;*
- *Natura Impact Statement - if necessary, under the relevant legislation.*

Environmental Assessment

(a) Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable

² Projects funded under the Regional Programme will need to comply with cross jurisdiction environmental legislation which extends into the marine environment. Projects flowing from the Regional Programme must act in accordance with EU and national environmental assessment requirements and legislation, specifically AA and EIA, within the jurisdiction of which they fall.

development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, the protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity as a minimum), environmental assessment including EclA to support development management and where required, the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as appropriate.

- (b) The Programme seeks to protect, manage, and through enhanced ecological connectivity, improve the coherence of the Natura 2000 Network in the Region.*
- (c) Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.*
- (d) The Programme supports relevant development proposals that aim to protect of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater, preventing pollution, further deterioration of water quality, promotes sustainable water use and enhances improvement of the aquatic environment.*
- (e) Any planning consent process emanating from support through the programme will ensure compliance with the EU's Waste Framework Directive and EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy as such projects will be subject to:*
 - i. the objectives of City and County Development Plans and Local Area Plans supporting the circular economy and prioritizing waste prevention followed by re-use, recycling and recovery before landfill.*
 - ii. adhere to Best Practice Guidelines on the Preparation of Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Projects published by the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage and any updated guidelines and*
 - iii. adhere to the new National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy (NWMPCE), which will replace the Southern Region Waste Management Plan 2015-2021 and the Eastern and Midland Waste Management Plan 2015-2021*

Thereby, minimising the use of natural resource inputs, reducing waste, pollution and carbon emissions and improving the productivity of resources used in development through extending the life span of materials and facilitating the repurposing, recycling and re-use of these resources at end of life.

5.3.3 It is important that this NIS and the wording outlined above within the Regional Programme provides the high-level policy reassurance that future projects/ initiatives which come forward for funding will follow the necessary process to identify and assess potential implications for European site(s). If there is the potential for projects funded through implementing Policy PO1 RSO1.3 and PO5 RSO5.1 to adversely impact European site(s), these should be withdrawn, or amended and re-assessed, or pass the derogations set out under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, namely no alternative solutions, IROPI and compensatory measures secured.

5.3.4 In addition, in line with the 'Do No Significant Harm' (DNSH) EU Regulation (under the 'protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems' environmental objective), the SRA would not support any projects arising from the Regional Programme where adverse

effects on European site(s) cannot be readily avoided/ mitigated. This will ensure compliance with National and European legislation and policy. A separate 'Do No Significant Harm' Report has been produced for the Regional Programme (RSK, 2022).

Assessment of Policy/ Specific Objectives

5.3.5 The following section provides the assessment of Policy PO1 RSO1.3 and PO5 RSO5.1 based on current knowledge available at the time of writing. The impacts detailed below are not considered to be a conclusive list of all possible impacts; however, every effort has been made to identify those which are most likely to occur.

PO1: A Smarter Europe. Specific Objective RSO1.3: Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments. SEM1: Smarter and More Competitive Regions

5.3.6 Specific Objective RSO1.3 has been developed based on the following (taken from Table 1 of the Regional Programme):

- The Country Report Ireland 2019 identifies key priority investment areas for ERDF support under PO1 to effectively deliver on 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy. Investment is needed to enhance the competitiveness and growth of Irish-owned SMEs, strengthen innovation performance, prioritise smart specialisation areas, support clusters, and address regional differences in the research and development intensity.
- The independent Needs Analysis for ERDF and ESF+ in Ireland 2020 identified the need for investments to address the scale of regional disparities, measures to support an increase in R&D expenditure, supports to increase collaboration between industry and the higher education sector and measures to promote Smart Regions.
- The RSES for the Southern Region sets out an economic vision for the region based on '*five economic principles of smart specialisation, clustering, placemaking for enterprise development, knowledge diffusion, and capacity building*'.
- The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region's preferred economic strategy promotes '*smart specialisation strategies based on identified strengths and competitive advantages, combined with cluster policies that promote economies of scale and network effects in certain locations*'.
- Ireland's new Smart Specialisation Strategy identifies leveraging and building on the analysis of Irish regions' strengths and emerging areas of opportunity undertaken as part of the development of Ireland's S3 and addressing gaps in existing regional innovation infrastructures and systems by supporting projects aligned with the nine Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) as key to delivery on the S3 high level strategic goals of encouraging more regionally dispersed RD&I, strengthening the enterprise base and identifying emerging areas of opportunity.

5.3.7 RSO1.3 will address the recommendations of the Country Reports, the independent Needs Analysis, the RSES policy objectives and the S3 high level strategic goals summarised above. This will be done through TOAs which will enhance sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investment, in the regions and sub-regions of the Regional Programme area.

- 5.3.8 The Regional Programme includes one specific TOA associated with RSO1.3 (**RSO1.3.1** - *Provide appropriate infrastructure and key staff resources to deliver innovative solutions including support programmes to support entrepreneurship, start-ups and scaling companies.*).
- 5.3.9 The TOAs against Specific Objective RSO1.3 will be targeted at specific locations within the regions where an identifiable deficit exists e.g., supporting projects aligned with the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs). The main focus of RSO1.3 funding will be existing enterprises, businesses, universities and research facilities, and as such, there would be no, or minimal small-scale new buildings/ infrastructure associated with the funded projects. Should any new buildings/ infrastructure be required, these would be generally small-scale and concentrated within the footprint of existing developments and/ or centered around urban locations.
- 5.3.10 The main types of businesses which would receive funding would include Use Classes A2 (comprising financial, professional and other services) and B1 (business comprising offices, call centres, or premises for research and development which can be carried out without detriment to amenity by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot, ash, dust or grit).
- 5.3.11 Table 8 provides the assessment of effects associated with the implementation of Policy PO1 RSO1.3.

Table 8 Assessment of Policy PO1 RSO1.3

| Potential impact | |
|--|---|
| <p>Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure</p> <p>Within Ireland, a large proportion of the biodiversity resource is located outside areas under formal European designation and therefore many species, in particular mobile species which are QIs/SCIs of SPAs/ SACs, are regularly using areas outside of the boundaries of the designated sites (known as functionally linked land).</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>The main focus of RSO1.3 is to encourage investment and specialisation within urban areas (in particular directing funding towards specific towns where an identifiable deficit exists), targeting existing built-up footprints, universities and research facilities, thus avoiding more sensitive habitats. The large majority of funding associated with RSO1.3 will be targeted in this way thereby avoiding adverse impacts on the integrity of any European site(s).</p> <p>In instances where new buildings/ infrastructure may be funded through this policy, the SRA have confirmed that these would be generally small-scale and concentrated within the footprint of existing developments and/ or centred around urban locations (emphasising the Town Centres First policy). Although it is likely that this type/ location of new development / infrastructure would not lead to direct habitat loss/ degradation (and in general could provide positive benefits to the environment, for example managing uncontrolled run-off and/ or contamination issues within an existing site preventing degradation of adjacent sensitive habitats), as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>Therefore, where there is the potential for development/ infrastructure outside of existing development footprints, there is the potential for impacts associated with loss/ degradation of habitats linked to European sites. This is particularly important where a proposed development site is close to European site(s) with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects (and could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland). For example, where a proposed project was in a coastal location, such as the key town of Wicklow, consideration would need to be given to the potential for land in and around this town to be used by QIs/ SCIs bird species associated with nearby SPAs (such as Murrough SPA and Wicklow Head SPA).</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to habitat loss/ degradation) on European sites, in those instances where new development/ infrastructure is required, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme ‘Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable development’ that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies.’, refer to Section 5.3.2). |

| Potential impact | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where built development projects come forward for funding on land which could be linked to a European site(s) which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (as per the following wording in the Programme '<i>Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.</i>', refer to Section 5.3.2). <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |
| <p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, the main focus of RSO1.3 is funding within existing establishments in urban locations and therefore impacts associated with disturbance/ displacement on the integrity of any European site(s) will be largely avoided.</p> <p>Again, as above, where new buildings/ infrastructure may be funded through this policy, the SRA have confirmed that these would be generally small-scale and concentrated within the footprint of existing developments and/ or centred around urban locations. Although it is likely that this type/ location of new development / infrastructure would not lead to disturbance/ displacement effects, as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>The main impacts associated with disturbance/ displacement would occur during the construction phase, where activities such as piling, increases in vehicle movements and human presence could lead to increases in noise, vibration, visual and lighting disturbance/ displacement effects. This could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>These potential impacts are particularly important where a proposed development site is close to European site(s) with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects or where QI/ SCI species sensitive to disturbance/ displacement are using land linked to a European site. For example, there are a number of SPAs/ SACs in the vicinity of the key town of Ennis. The Lower River Shannon SAC flows through the town itself; the Newhall and Edenvale Complex SAC (designated for its important bat populations) lies to the southwest; and the Ballyallia Lough SPA is to the north (designated for its waterfowl and wader populations). Consideration will need to be given to the potential for disturbance/ displacement of QI/SCIs associated with European sites should funding for development take place in such locations.</p> |

| Potential impact | |
|---|---|
| | <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to disturbance/ displacement) on European sites, in those instances where new development/ infrastructure is required, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme ‘(a) Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable development’ that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies.’, refer to Section 5.3.2). • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to disturbance/ displacement which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (see below), as per the following wording in the Programme ‘Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.’, refer to Section 5.3.2. • Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects have been identified, measures such as buffer zones at the edge of developments, timing works to avoid sensitive times (such as bird breeding season, or fish migration periods), noise mitigation, visual screening (natural and artificial) and reducing access to sensitive habitats could be incorporated into scheme designs to avoid such effects. An on-site monitoring plan in terms of noise, lighting etc. combined with behavioural monitoring of the sensitive QI/SCI could also be carried out. <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |
| <p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, the main focus of RSO1.3 is funding within existing establishments in urban locations and therefore impacts associated with changes in water quality/ hydrology on the integrity of any European site(s) will be largely avoided.</p> |

| Potential impact | |
|--|--|
| <p>Water quality in Ireland has deteriorated over the past two decades, with sewage and diffuse agricultural sources are the main threat to Ireland's surface water quality.</p> | <p>Again, as above, where new buildings/ infrastructure may be funded through this policy, the SRA have confirmed that these would be generally small-scale and concentrated within the footprint of existing developments and/ or centred around urban locations. Although it is likely that this type/ location of new development / infrastructure would not lead to changes in water quality/ hydrology, as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>The main impacts associated with changes in water quality/ hydrology would occur during the construction phase, where construction site activities could lead to the increased risk of pollution incidents and release of suspended sediments. Consideration would need to be given to the potential for changes in water quality associated with European sites, should new development come forward in locations where development was hydrologically linked (located upstream) to European sites with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects. For example, this is important in towns where SAC's flow through the settlement, such as the Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC which flows through the key town of Mallow.</p> <p>The ongoing protection of water quality/ hydrology during the operational phase will also need to be considered.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in water quality/ hydrology) on European sites, in those instances where new development/ infrastructure is required, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme '<i>Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies.</i>', refer to Section 5.3.2). • To protect water quality, all new developments would be required to ensure hydrological assessments are carried out to determine the potential for hydrological links between development sites and European sites, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. Drainage strategies may also be required, which could include incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) features into scheme designs, to ensure the continued protection of water quality/ hydrology during the operational phase. This would be in addition to according with relevant legislation and policy (such as National Policy Objective 57, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water |

| Potential impact | |
|---|--|
| | <p>Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in water quality/ hydrology which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the Programme ‘<i>Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.</i>’, refer to Section 5.3.2. <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |
| <p>Changes in air quality where development/ infrastructure is near a European site(s)</p> <p>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 91st out of 106 countries, perceived as a ‘good’ average (AQI, 2020).</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, the main focus of RSO1.3 is funding within existing establishments in urban locations and therefore impacts associated with changes in air quality on the integrity of any European site(s) will be largely avoided.</p> <p>Again, as above, where new buildings/ infrastructure may be funded through this policy, the SRA have confirmed that these would be generally small-scale and concentrated within the footprint of existing developments and/ or centred around urban locations. Although it is likely that this type/ location of new development / infrastructure would not lead to changes in air quality, as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>Where funding would lead to some element of development, the types of businesses which would be established (including A2 and B1 use classes, refer to Section 5.3) do not include those which would lead to increases in air pollution, therefore, the main impacts associated with changes in air quality would occur during the construction phase.</p> <p>Air quality guidance (NRA, 2011) suggests that any construction sites or routes used by construction vehicles within 50 m of a designated site; and the presence of any European site within 200 m of the main access roads used by HGVs accessing a construction site could lead to adverse effects on the European site during the construction phases of new development (through deposition of pollutants onto adjacent sensitive habitats). This would be relevant in key towns such as Wexford, where Slaney River Valley SAC lies immediately to the north and east of the settlement. Consideration will need to be given to the potential for changes in air quality associated with European sites should new development come forward in such locations.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> |

| Potential impact | |
|------------------|--|
| | <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in air quality) on European sites, in those instances where new development/ infrastructure is required, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme <i>'Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies'</i>, refer to Section 5.3.2). • To protect air quality, all new developments would be required to ensure air quality assessments are carried out, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. This would be in addition to ensuring any emissions meet appropriate guidelines and complying with relevant policy (such as the emerging Clean Air Strategy for Ireland) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in air quality which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the Programme <i>'Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.'</i>, refer to Section 5.3.2. <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |

PO5: A Europe closer to its citizens. Specific Objective RSO5.1: Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in urban areas. SEM3: Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development

- 5.3.12 Specific Objective RSO5.1 has been developed based on the following (taken from Table 1 of the Regional Programme):
- 5.3.13 To ensure the harmonious development of urban areas as well as non-urban areas, the ERDF Regulation EU 2021 /1058 provides under policy objective 5 for support to be delivered in an integrated manner to the economic, social and environmental development of regions based on cross-sectoral territorial strategies using integrated territorial development tools. Furthermore, when developing urban areas, special attention is required to be paid to supporting functional urban areas due to their importance in triggering cooperation between local authorities and partners across administrative borders as well as strengthening urban-rural linkages.
- 5.3.14 The need to address competitiveness and attractiveness of our urban centres was captured in the independent Needs Analysis for ERDF and ESF+ Project Ireland 2040 is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. It includes a detailed capital investment plan for the period 2021 to 2030, the National Development Plan (NDP), and the 20-year National Planning Framework (NPF). In line with the NPF and NDP, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) / Strategic Growth Centre Plans set a 12-year statutory strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of the Regions in pursuit of balanced regional development.
- 5.3.15 Each RSES recognises the strategic role played by our urban settlements, building on Cities and Metropolitan Areas, Regional Growth Centres, Key Towns and our urban settlement networks as centres for population and employment growth to drive economic growth in the Regions. Regional Policy Objectives in each RSES support active land management and actions to address the principles of 'Compact Growth' and urban regeneration. RSO5.1 will provide for a place-based, flexible, innovative and integrated response to addressing Sustainable Urban Development, consistent with local and regional plans and with the national policy framework of Town Centre First.
- 5.3.16 The Programme includes two specific TOAs associated with RSO5.1:
- **Action RSO5.1.1:** 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.
 - **Action RSO5.1.2:** Deliver pilot and pathfinder projects for selected towns (priority for Key Towns and Regional Growth Centres listed in the RSEs) tackling town centre regeneration, placemaking, vacancy and dereliction. This will involve capital investment and may include public realm improvement projects.
- 5.3.17 In a similar manner to RSO1.3, the TOAs associated with RSO5.1 will be targeted at specific locations within the regions where an identifiable need has been identified i.e.,

through sustainable and integrated urban development and implementation of the Town Centre First policy. The main focus of RSO5.1 funding will be town centre regeneration, placemaking, and tackling vacancy and dereliction in urban locations. New development funded through RSO5.1 would be generally small-scale and concentrated within existing settlements and/ or centered around urban locations (development could include public realm projects). The types of businesses which would receive funding would include Use Class A1, A2, B1, C1, C2, C3, D1 and D2 use classes are defined as follows:

- A1 – Shops.
- A2 – Financial, professional and other services.
- B1 - Business (comprising offices, call centres, or premises for research and development which can be carried out without detriment to amenity by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot, ash, dust or grit).
- C1 – Dwelling houses.
- C2 – Guest houses.
- C3 – Residential institutions (residential accommodation and care to people in need).
- D1 – Community and cultural uses (comprising medical/ health services, day centre/ nursery, community centre, provision for education, display of artwork, museum, library, public hall or law court).
- D2 – Assembly and leisure (comprising bingo hall, cinema, concert hall, dance hall or theatre).

5.3.18 Table 9 provides the assessment of effects associated with the implementation of Policy PO5 RSO5.1.

Table 9 Assessment of Policy PO5 RSO5.1

| Potential impact | |
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| <p>Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure</p> <p>Within Ireland, a large proportion of the biodiversity resource is located outside areas under formal European designation and therefore many species, in particular mobile species which are QIs/SCIs of SPAs/ SACs, are regularly using areas outside of the boundaries of the designated sites (known as functionally linked land).</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>The main emphasis of RSO5.1 funding will be town centre regeneration, placemaking, and tackling vacancy and dereliction. Funding would therefore be generally small-scale and concentrated within existing settlements and/ or centred around urban locations, with priority for Key Towns and Regional Growth Centres listed in the RSES.</p> <p>Although it is likely that this type/ location of development/ regeneration would not lead to direct habitat loss/ degradation (and in general could provide positive benefits to the environment, for example new green spaces as part of regeneration projects potentially providing habitat for QIs/SCIs), as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>Therefore, where there is the potential for development outside of existing development footprints, there is the potential for impacts associated with loss/ degradation of habitats linked to European sites. This is particularly important where a proposed development site is close to European site(s) with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects (and could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland). For example, where proposed regeneration was located within the key town of Dungarvan, consideration would need to be given to the potential for land in and around this settlement to be used by QIs/ SCIs bird species associated with the adjacent Dungarvan SPA.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to habitat loss/ degradation) on European sites, in those instances where development/ regeneration takes place, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme '(a) Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies', refer to Section 5.3.2) • Where built development projects come forward for funding on land which could be linked to a European site(s) which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (as per the following wording in the Programme 'Support for other plans/ |

| Potential impact | |
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| | <p><i>programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.</i>, refer to Section 5.3.2).</p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |
| <p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, the main focus of RSO5.1 funding will be town centre regeneration, placemaking, and tackling vacancy and dereliction. Funding would therefore be generally small-scale and concentrated within existing settlements and/ or centred around urban locations.</p> <p>Again, as above, although it is likely that this type/ location of development / regeneration would not lead to disturbance/ displacement effects, as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>The main impacts associated with disturbance/ displacement would occur during the construction phase, where activities such as piling, increases in vehicle movements and human presence could lead to increases in noise, vibration, visual and lighting disturbance/ displacement effects. There is also the potential for operational phase impacts associated with placemaking and sustainable tourism where an increases in people to an area could lead to recreational pressure on sensitive habitats and species. This could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>These potential impacts are particularly important where development/ regeneration site is close to European site(s) with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects or where QI/ SCI species sensitive to disturbance/ displacement are using land linked to a European site. For example, there are a number of SACs and SPAs in the vicinity of the key town of Mullingar, including Lough Ennell SPA and Lough Owel SPA, designated for wetland and waterbirds. Consideration will need to be given to the potential for disturbance/ displacement of QI/SCIs associated with European sites should funding for development take place in such locations. town.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to disturbance/ displacement) on European sites, in those instances where development/ regeneration takes place, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> |

| Potential impact | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme '(a) Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies.', refer to Section 5.3.2). • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to disturbance/ displacement which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the Programme 'Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.', refer to Section 5.3.2. • Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects have been identified, measures such as buffer zones at the edge of developments, timing works to avoid sensitive times (such as bird breeding season, or fish migration periods), noise mitigation, visual screening (natural and artificial) and reducing access to sensitive habitats could be incorporated into scheme designs to avoid such effects. An on-site monitoring plan in terms of noise, lighting etc. combined with behavioural monitoring of the sensitive QI/SCI could also be carried out. • Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects associated with recreational pressure during the operational phase of a project have been identified, measures such as providing sufficient public open space (ensuring that there is sufficient space available for dog walkers); avoiding linking new footpaths into existing footpaths which lead to sensitive areas; installing additional fencing in sensitive areas to restrict access (to dog walkers and vehicles); and, if required, restrict access to unauthorised car parking areas, and promote the use of car parks in less sensitive areas. <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |
| <p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, the main focus of RSO5.1 funding will be town centre regeneration, placemaking, and tackling vacancy and dereliction. Funding would therefore be generally small-scale and concentrated within existing settlements and/ or centred around urban locations.</p> |

| Potential impact | |
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| <p>Water quality in Ireland has deteriorated over the past two decades, with sewage and diffuse agricultural sources are the main threat to Ireland's surface water quality.</p> | <p>Again, as above, although it is likely that this type/ location of development / regeneration would not lead to changes in water quality/ hydrology, as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>The main impacts associated with changes in water quality/ hydrology would occur during the construction phase, where construction site activities could lead to the increased risk of pollution incidents and release of suspended sediments. Consideration would need to be given to the potential for changes in water quality associated with European sites, should new development come forward in locations where development was hydrologically linked (located upstream) to European sites with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects. For example, this is important in towns where SAC's flow through the settlement, such as the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC which flows through the key town of Navan.</p> <p>The ongoing protection of water quality/ hydrology during the operational phase will also need to be considered.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in water quality/ hydrology) on European sites, in those instances where new development/ infrastructure is required, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme '<i>Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies'</i>, refer to Section 5.3.2). • To protect water quality, all new developments would be required to ensure hydrological assessments are carried out to determine the potential for hydrological links between development sites and European sites, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. Drainage strategies may also be required, which could include incorporating SuDS features into scheme designs, to ensure the continued protection of water quality/ hydrology during the operational phase. This would be in addition to according with relevant legislation and policy within Ireland (such as National Policy Objective 57, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in water quality/ hydrology which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be |

| Potential impact | |
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| | <p>delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the Programme ‘<i>Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.</i>’, refer to Section 5.3.2.</p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |
| <p>Changes in air quality where development/ infrastructure is near a European site(s)</p> <p>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 91st out of 106 countries, perceived as a ‘good’ average (AQI, 2020).</p> | <p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, the main focus of RSO5.1 funding will be town centre regeneration, placemaking, and tackling vacancy and dereliction. Funding would therefore be generally small-scale and concentrated within existing settlements and/ or centred around urban locations. Again, as above, although it is likely that this type/ location of development / regeneration would not lead to disturbance/ displacement effects, as the details of such proposals are not currently known, the potential for adverse effects cannot be fully ruled out.</p> <p>Where funding would lead to some element of development, the types of businesses which would be established (refer to Section 5.3) do not include those which would lead to increases in air pollution, therefore, the main impacts associated with changes in air quality would occur during the construction phase.</p> <p>Air quality guidance (NRA, 2011) suggests that any construction sites or routes used by construction vehicles within 50 m of a designated site; and the presence of any European site within 200 m of the main access roads used by HGVs accessing a construction site could lead to adverse effects on the European site during the construction phases of new development (through deposition of pollutants onto adjacent sensitive habitats). This would be relevant in key towns such as Clonmel, where the Lower River Suir SAC runs through the town. Consideration will need to be given to the potential for changes in air quality associated with European sites should new development come forward in such locations.</p> <p>There is also the potential for increases in traffic associated with new tourist locations and regenerated areas. Where a European site(s) with QI/SCI which include habitats sensitive to air pollution, is close major commuting routes, there is potential for adverse effects on the European site during the operational phases.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> |

| Potential impact | |
|------------------|--|
| | <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through this policy will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in air quality) on European sites, in those instances where new development/ infrastructure is required, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme <i>'Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies'</i>, refer to Section 5.3.2). • To protect air quality, all new developments would be required to ensure air quality assessments are carried out, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. Travel Plans with a strong emphasis on sustainable travel modes should be produced as part of the planning permissions, this would include integrating with 'Smarter Travel' projects (promoting bus priority, urban cycling and urban walking route). This would be in addition to ensuring any emissions meet appropriate guidelines and complying with relevant policy (such as the emerging Clean Air Strategy for Ireland and The Climate Action Plan 2019, which puts in place 'a decarbonisation pathway' to 2030 to reach the EU Target of Net Zero emissions by 2050) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in air quality which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the Programme <i>'Support for other plans/ programmes (and initiatives arising) is on the basis of appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes being undertaken in order to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects on European Sites and ensure implementation of mitigation measures where required.'</i>, refer to Section 5.3.2. <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation (refer to Section 5.3.2) would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing this policy.</p> |

5.4 Conclusion (alone)

- 5.4.1 On completion of the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, the following conclusion has been drawn.
- 5.4.2 Overall, none of the Policy and Specific Objectives in the Regional Programme are considered to be actively directing new development/ infrastructure in such a location or manner that potential impacts arising from projects receiving funding through RSO 1.3 and RSO5.1 could not be avoided or mitigated.
- 5.4.3 It is not possible at this high level to identify all impacts associated with policy implementation; however, the AA process has determined the types of impacts which are most likely to be encountered and identified measures for each of the policies which would avoid/ mitigate for such types of impacts. These measures must be adhered to when allocating funding under the Policy and Specific Objectives to ensure that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of European site(s).
- 5.4.4 In Ireland, all plans and projects with the potential to impact European sites (regardless of their distance from such sites) are required to comply, as a matter of law, with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the associated Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) which are transposed into Irish legislation by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011. Therefore, irrespective of the policy wording or mitigation measures set out in this NIS, statutory AA of plans/ projects would be required. Compliance with Irish legislation (as well as UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects with Northern Ireland have been identified) and the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out against each of the Policy and Specific Objectives will provide an overarching safeguard which projects coming forward for funding will be required to adhere to. The Regional Programme would not support any projects where adverse effects on European sites cannot be avoided or mitigated.
- 5.4.5 The Appropriate Assessment (alone) therefore concludes that (assuming the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out within this NIS are implemented), there would be no adverse impacts on the integrity of any European sites a result of implementation of the Regional Programme.

5.5 In-combination effects

- 5.5.1 In line with AA guidance (European Commission, 2001), a stepwise approach has been taken to consideration of in-combination effects, as follows:
- Identify plans / projects that might act in combination.
 - Identify the types of impact that might occur.
 - Define boundaries of the assessment.
 - Identify pathways for impact.
 - Impact prediction and assessment.

5.5.2 Due to the high-level nature of the Regional Programme, and the lack of allocations or specific spatial elements, only similarly high-level and strategic plans/policies have been considered in the in-combination assessment.

5.5.3 In addition, only the effects of other plans or projects which would not be likely to be significant alone, need to be included in the in-combination assessment. If the effects of other plans or projects will already be significant on their own, they are not added to those associated with the Regional Programme as they already have their own measures in place to mitigate for those effects.

Impacts identification

5.5.4 The following potential in-combination impacts have been identified:

- Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure.
- Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species.
- Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).
- Changes in air quality where development/ infrastructure is near a European site(s)

Assessment of effects

5.5.5 Table 10 sets out the in-combination assessment.

Table 10 Polices/plans/programmes/strategies to consider in the in-combination assessment

| Policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | In-combination assessment |
|---|---|
| European Union/ National | |
| EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 | This Strategy is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Europe 2020 Economic Strategy. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010) | This document outlines the EU's ten-year growth strategy. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the aims of the strategy, and therefore there no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| EU Country Report (Ireland) 2019 and 2020 | This report provides a framework for the coordination of social and economic policies across the EU. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the policies which will be developed as part of the framework. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Roadmap for Resource Efficient Europe 2011 | This roadmap outlines how Ireland can help transform Europe's economy into a sustainable one by 2050. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the policies which will be developed as part of the roadmap. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) 2020-2032 | The RAs will utilise the funding available through the Regional Programme to support the delivery of key regional objectives and priorities of the RSESs. The formulation of the Regional Programme is grounded in the RSES implementation, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Indecon Needs Analysis (2020) | The analysis underpins the planning for Ireland's Partnership Agreement for the Programme period (2021-2027) and informs strategic choices for the use of ERDF/ESF+ funds. The Regional Programme has been informed by the results of the Needs Analysis, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| National Smart Specialisation Plan | This Plan aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through the Smart Specialisation Plan, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| DCHG (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021 | The NBAP is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |

| Policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | In-combination assessment |
|--|---|
| NPWS Conservation Plans and/or Conservation Objectives for SACs and SPAs | Conservation Plans are designed to protect and enhance the natural environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| DAHG (2015) National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) | The Landscape Strategy is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan (NDP) and National Planning Framework (NPF) 2021-2030 | The NPF and NDP 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 objectives of the NDP match those of the NPF. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the investment priorities and objectives Project Ireland 2040, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Future Jobs Ireland (2019) | Future Jobs Ireland sits alongside Project Ireland 2040, Global Ireland 2025 and the Climate Action Plan represents an integrated approach to prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the future economy. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the investment priorities and objectives Project Ireland 2040, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| DCCAE (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018–2020 | This Plan aims to provide a framework for how Ireland will implement the Sustainable Development Goals. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the goals, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| EU (2019) European Green Deal | The European Green Deal is a roadmap for sustainability in the EU and aims to protect and enhance the natural environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| EU (2009) Sustainable Development Strategy (2009) | The Sustainable Development Strategy sets out 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. The Strategy aims to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022 | The priority of the RDP (part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)) is restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry and aims to protect and enhance the natural environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Food Wise 2025 | Food Wise 2025 is a 10-year vision for the growth of the Irish agri-food sector. There is the potential for in-combination effects with the Regional Programme through direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat linked to a European site. |

| Policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | In-combination assessment |
|---|--|
| | Given the nature of potential projects which would come forward for funding (e.g., within or near to existing development) and assuming that future agri-food sector initiatives would comply with EU and National policy and legislation, no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme are expected. |
| National Broadband Plan 2022 | <p>The aim of the Plan is to deliver high-speed broadband services to all businesses and households in Ireland. There is the potential for in-combination effects with the Regional Programme through direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat linked to a European site/ disturbance/ displacement of QIs/SCIs.</p> <p>Given the nature of these potential projects (e.g., small-scale, short-term and temporary) and assuming that any future telecommunications and broadband improvement projects comply with EU and National policy and legislation, no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme are expected.</p> |
| Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector (2014) | Construction 2020 outlines measures aimed at stimulating activity in the building industry but would not in itself lead to development. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme are expected. |
| EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) 2021 | The RIS assesses the innovation performance of European regions on a limited number of indicators. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing actions which arise from the assessment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges | This study identifies and analyses EU's lagging regions. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing actions which arise from the analysis, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| EPA (2018) River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 | The RBMP outlines Ireland's approach to protecting rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters. The RBMP is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services) | The WSSP sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services up to 2040. The plan includes objectives to provide effective management of wastewater and protect and enhance the environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| National Water Resources Plan | The NWRP sets out how to balance the supply and demand for drinking water over the short, medium and long term in Ireland. The plan includes measures to safeguard the environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |

| Policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | In-combination assessment |
|---|---|
| EPA National Waste Prevention Programme | The Programme is designed to prevent waste and encourage a circular economy. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Regional Waste Management Plans | Regional waste management plans address waste prevention and management (including generation, collection and treatment). No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan | The NWSMP sets out a nationwide standardised approach to ensure that treated wastewater sludge across the country is effectively managed, stored, transported and re-used or disposed of in a sustainable way, to the benefit of the public and the environment. The plan includes measures to protect and enhance the environment. No adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020 | The aim of the framework is to create a strong cycling culture in Ireland thus contributing to an improved quality of life, and a stronger economy and business environment. The Regional Programme will help to deliver the actions associated with objectives outlined in the framework, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 'A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020' | The Smarter Travel 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 quality can be improved. The Smarter Travel policy therefore aims to protect and enhance the natural environment. The Regional Programme will help to deliver the actions associated with the Smarter Travel policy, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| DCCAIE (2020) National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030 DCCAIE (2021) National Climate Action Plan DCCAIE (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland DCCAIE (2017) National Mitigation Plan National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012) EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy | All of these frameworks/ plans include aims/ objectives/ policies associated with decarbonisation, energy efficiency/ security, internal energy market and research/ innovation/ competitiveness. These all work towards positive benefits to the natural environment. The Regional Programme will help to deliver the actions associated with these documents, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |

| Policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | In-combination assessment |
|---|--|
| EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 | |
| Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Taxonomy | The DNSH Regulation provides that no measure included in a Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) should lead to significant harm to environmental objectives. DNSH is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy (2020) | 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 Strategy is designed to reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| National Retrofit Plan | This scheme pledges to upgrade the energy efficiency of 500,000 homes by 2030. This Strategy is designed to reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Regional Enterprise Plans | Regional development plans are currently being developed across Ireland. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through the Regional Plans, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Housing for All 2021 a new Housing Plan for Ireland | The aim of this plan is to deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through the Regional Plans ,and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy | Impact 2030 will maximise the impact of research and innovation on national priorities. The Regional Programme forms one of the mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through the Strategy, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Northern Ireland | |
| Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 | These Strategies/ policies are designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |
| Draft NI Peatland Policy | |
| Draft Environment Strategy | |

| Policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies | In-combination assessment |
|---|---|
| Draft Green Growth Strategy | |
| Northern Ireland Energy Strategy 2050 | This Strategy works towards positive benefits to the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the Regional Programme have been identified. |

5.6 Conclusion (in-combination)

- 5.6.1 It is not possible at this high level to identify an extensive list of all plans and projects which may lead to in-combination effects together with the Regional Programme; as specific projects come forward for funding, the project-level AA will have a better understanding of the likely impacts, alone and in combination. The in-combination assessment at this high level is necessarily limited, and therefore in-combination effects cannot be completely ruled out.
- 5.6.2 However, as stated previously in Section 5.4, in Ireland, all plans and projects with the potential to impact European sites (regardless of their distance from such sites) are required to comply, as a matter of law, with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the associated Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) which are transposed into Irish legislation. Therefore, irrespective of the policy wording or mitigation measures set out in this NIS, statutory AA of plans/ projects would be required. Compliance with Irish legislation and the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out against each of the Policy and Specific Objectives will provide an overarching safeguard which projects coming forward for funding will be required to adhere to. The Regional Programme would not support any projects where adverse effects on European sites cannot be avoided or mitigated
- 5.6.3 The in-combination assessment therefore concludes that (assuming the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out within this NIS are implemented), there would be no adverse in-combination impacts on the integrity of any European sites as a result of implementation of the policies set out with the Regional Programme.

6.0 OVERALL CONCLUSION

- 6.1.1 Whilst this NIS has made it clear that it is difficult at this high-level stage of the planning process to be clear about how European sites may or may not be affected by strategic policy within the Regional Programme, it is important to note that the potential implications for European sites have been considered throughout the development of the Regional Programme, such that early avoidance of the issues (and/or reduction of risk) has been a key element of the process of developing the Regional Programme objectives.
- 6.1.2 Section 5.3 of the NIS sets out the type of impacts which could occur through the implementation of the Regional Programme and identifies avoidance/mitigation measures which must be adhered to when allocating funding to ensure no adverse impacts on European sites. This, in addition to the legal requirement for projects with the potential to impact European sites (through EU and Irish policy and legislation (as well as UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects with Northern Ireland have been identified)) to undertake AA, provides sufficient safeguarding to be able to confirm that no adverse effects on integrity are anticipated as a result of implementing the policies within the Regional Programme (alone or in-combination).

REFERENCES

National Roads Authority (2011) Guidelines for the Treatment of Air Quality During the Planning and Construction of National Road Schemes.

RPS (2019a) Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Natura Impact Report. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

RPS (2019b) Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

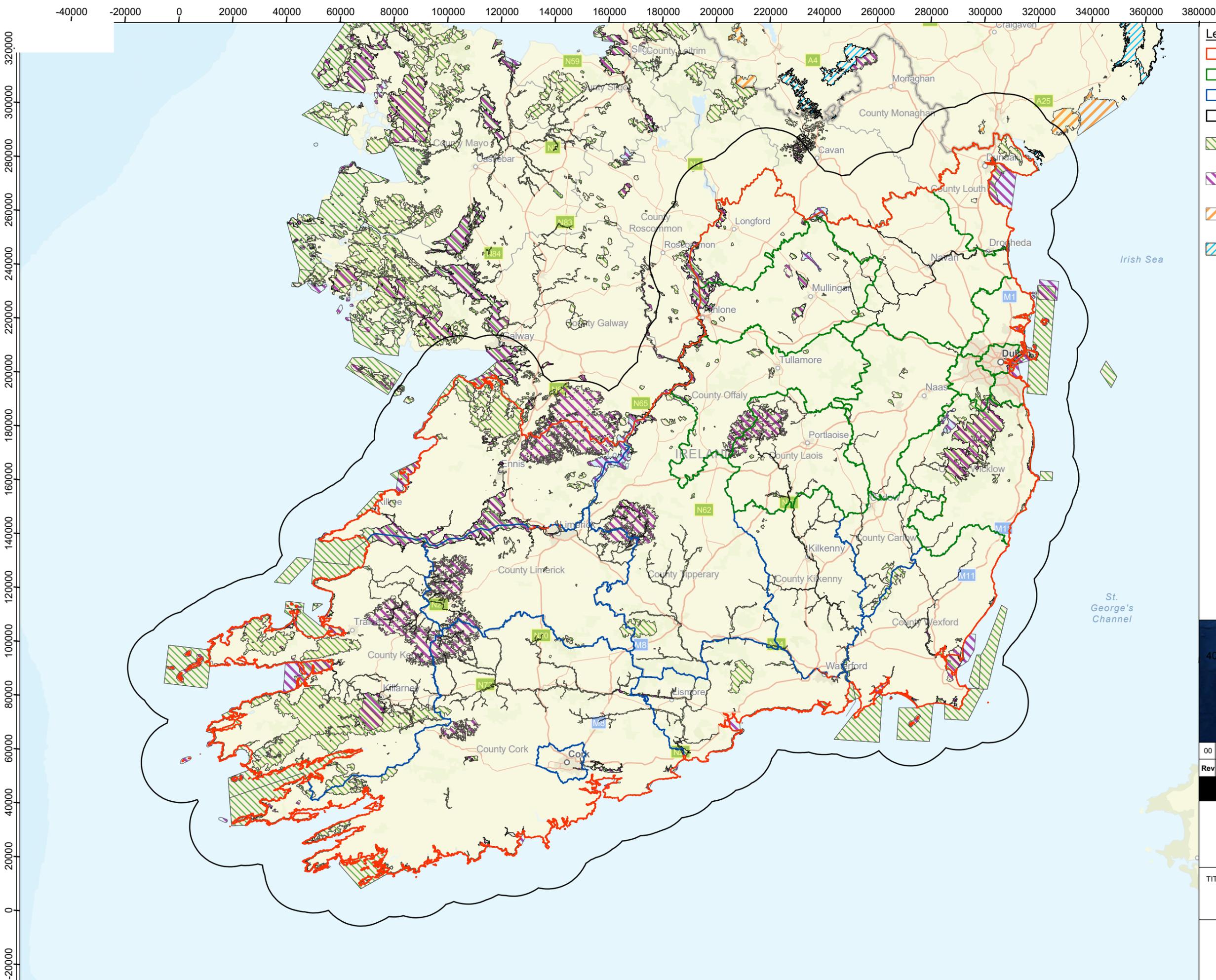
RPS (2020a) Natura Impact Report. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region.

RPS (2020b) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region.

RSK (2022) Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021 – 2027. Do No Significant Harm Report.

FIGURES

Figure 1 Location of European sites



- 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 1:
Natura 2000 sites

0 10,000 20,000 30,000
Metres
SCALE: 1:1,305,759@ A3

REV 00

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2021
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

APPENDIX A – EUROPEAN SITES

Table A.1 SPAs and SACs within the Southern, Eastern and Midland Region and the 15km zone of influence buffer

| SACs | SPAs |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Akeragh, Banna and Barrow Harbour SAC | All Saints Bog SPA |
| All Saints Bog and Esker SAC | Baldoyle Bay SPA |
| Anglesey Road SAC | Ballyallia Lough SPA |
| Annaghmore Lough (Roscommon) SAC | Ballycotton Bay SPA |
| Ardagullion Bog SAC | Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA |
| Ardgraique Bog SAC | Ballymacoda Bay SPA |
| Ardmore Head SAC | Ballyteigue Burrow SPA |
| Ardrahan Grassland SAC | Bannow Bay SPA |
| Arragh More (Derryreen) Bog SAC | Beara Peninsula SPA |
| Askeaton Fen Complex SAC | Blackwater Callows SPA |
| Baldoyle Bay SAC | Blackwater Estuary SPA |
| Ballinduff Turlough SAC | Blasket Islands SPA |
| Ballinskelligs Bay and Inny Estuary SAC | Boyne Estuary SPA |
| Ballinturly Turlough SAC | Cahore Marshes SPA |
| Ballyallia Lake SAC | Carlingford Lough SPA |
| Ballycullinan Lake SAC | Carlingford Lough SPA |
| Ballycullinan, Old Domestic Building SAC | Castlemaine Harbour SPA |
| Ballyduff/Clonfinane Bog SAC | Cliffs of Moher SPA |
| Ballyhoura Mountains SAC | Clonakilty Bay SPA |
| Ballymacoda (Clonpriest and Pillmore) SAC | Connemara Bog Complex SPA |
| Ballyman Glen SAC | Coole-Garryland SPA |
| Ballymore Fen SAC | Cork Harbour SPA |
| Ballynafagh Bog SAC | Corofin Wetlands SPA |
| Ballynafagh Lake SAC | Courtmacsherry Bay SPA |
| Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC | Cregganna Marsh SPA |
| Ballyogan Lough SAC | Dalkey Islands SPA |
| Ballyprior Grassland SAC | Deenish Island and Scariff Island SPA |
| Ballyseedy Wood SAC | Dingle Peninsula SPA |
| Ballyteige (Clare) SAC | Dovegrove Callows SPA |
| Ballyteige Burrow SAC | Dundalk Bay SPA |
| Ballyvaughan Turlough SAC | Dungarvan Harbour SPA |
| Bandon River SAC | Eirk Bog SPA |
| Bannow Bay SAC | Galley Head to Duneen Point SPA |
| Barley Cove to Ballyrisode Point SAC | Garriskil Bog SPA |
| Barrigone SAC | Glen Lough SPA |
| Barroughter Bog SAC | Helvick Head to Ballyquin SPA |
| Black Head-Poulsallagh Complex SAC | Howth Head Coast SPA |
| Blackstairs Mountains SAC | Illaunonearaun SPA |

| SACs | SPAs |
|---|--|
| Blackwater Bank SAC | Inner Galway Bay SPA |
| Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC | Ireland's Eye SPA |
| Blackwater River (Kerry) SAC | Iveragh Peninsula SPA |
| Blasket Islands SAC | Keeragh Islands SPA |
| Bolingbrook Hill SAC | Kerry Head SPA |
| Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC | Kilcolman Bog SPA |
| Bray Head SAC | Killarney National Park SPA |
| Brown Bog SAC | Lady's Island Lake SPA |
| Buckronev-Brittis Dunes and Fen SAC | Lambay Island SPA |
| Caha Mountains SAC | Loop Head SPA |
| Caherglassaun Turlough SAC | Lough Corrib SPA |
| Cahermore Turlough SAC | Lough Croan Turlough SPA |
| Cahore Polders and Dunes SAC | Lough Cutra SPA |
| Carlingford Mountain SAC | Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA |
| Carlingford Shore SAC | Lough Derravaragh SPA |
| Carn Park Bog SAC | Lough Ennell SPA |
| Carnsore Point SAC | Lough Iron SPA |
| Carrigeenamronety Hill SAC | Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA |
| Carriggower Bog SAC | Lough Oughter SPA |
| Carrowbaun, Newhall and Ballylee Turloughs SAC | Lough Owel SPA |
| Carrowmore Dunes SAC | Lough Rea SPA |
| Carrowmore Point to Spanish Point and Islands SAC | Lough Ree SPA |
| Castlemaine Harbour SAC | Lough Sheelin SPA |
| Castlesampson Esker SAC | Magharee Islands SPA |
| Castletaylor Complex SAC | Malahide Estuary SPA |
| Castletownshend SAC | Mid-Clare Coast SPA |
| Charleville Wood SAC | Middle Shannon Callows SPA |
| Clara Bog SAC | Mid-Waterford Coast SPA |
| Clare Glen SAC | Mongan Bog SPA |
| Cleanderry Wood SAC | Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA |
| Clogher Head SAC | North Bull Island SPA |
| Clonakilty Bay SAC | Old Head of Kinsale SPA |
| Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC | Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA |
| Cloonee And Inchiquin Loughs, Uragh Wood SAC | Puffin Island SPA |
| Clooneen Bog SAC | River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA |
| Cloonmoylan Bog SAC | River Little Brosna Callows SPA |
| Comeragh Mountains SAC | River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA |
| Connemara Bog Complex SAC | River Nore SPA |
| Coole-Garryland Complex SAC | River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA |
| Coolrain Bog SAC | River Suck Callows SPA |
| Corbo Bog SAC | Rockabill SPA |
| Courtmacsherry Estuary SAC | Rogerstown Estuary SPA |
| Cregg House Stables, Crusheen SAC | Saltee Islands SPA |
| Crosswood Bog SAC | Seven Heads SPA |
| Cullahill Mountain SAC | |

| SACs | SPAs |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Curraghchase Woods SAC | Sheep's Head to Toe Head SPA |
| Danes Hole, Poulnalecka SAC | Skelligs SPA |
| Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve SAC | Skerries Islands SPA |
| Derragh Bog SAC | Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA |
| Derryclogher (Knockboy) Bog SAC | Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA |
| Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC | Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA |
| Derryleckagh SAC | South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA |
| Dromore Woods and Loughs SAC | Sovereign Islands SPA |
| Drongawn Lough SAC | Stabannan-Braganstown SPA |
| Drummin Wood SAC | Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA |
| Dunbeacon Shingle SAC | Tacumshin Lake SPA |
| Dundalk Bay SAC | The Bull and The Cow Rocks SPA |
| East Burren Complex SAC | The Gearagh SPA |
| Eastern Mourne SAC | The Murrough SPA |
| Farranamanagh Lough SAC | The Raven SPA |
| Ferbane Bog SAC | Tralee Bay Complex SPA |
| Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC | Tramore Back Strand SPA |
| Fortwilliam Turlough SAC | Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA |
| Galmoy Fen SAC | Wicklow Head SPA |
| Galtee Mountains SAC | Wicklow Mountains SPA |
| Galway Bay Complex SAC | |
| Garriskil Bog SAC | |
| Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC | |
| Glanlough Woods SAC | |
| Glanmore Bog SAC | |
| Glen Bog SAC | |
| Glen of the Downs SAC | |
| Glenasmole Valley SAC | |
| Glendine Wood SAC | |
| Glendree Bog SAC | |
| Glengarriff Harbour and Woodland SAC | |
| Glenloughaun Esker SAC | |
| Glenomra Wood SAC | |
| Glenstal Wood SAC | |
| Gortacarnaun Wood SAC | |
| Great Island Channel SAC | |
| Helvick Head SAC | |
| Holdenstown Bog SAC | |
| Hook Head SAC | |
| Howth Head SAC | |
| Hugginstown Fen SAC | |
| Inagh River Estuary SAC | |
| Inisheer Island SAC | |
| Inishmaan Island SAC | |
| Ireland's Eye SAC | |

| SACs | SPAs |
|--|------|
| <p>Island Fen SAC Keeper Hill SAC Kenmare River SAC Kerry Head Shoal SAC Kilcarren-Firville Bog SAC Kilduff, Devilsbit Mountain SAC Kilgarvan Ice House SAC Kilkee Reefs SAC Kilkeran Lake and Castlefreke Dunes SAC Kilkishen House SAC Killarney National Park, Macgillycuddy's Reeks and Caragh River Catchment SAC Killeglan Grassland SAC Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC Kilmuckridge-Tinnaberna Sandhills SAC Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC Kiltartan Cave (Coole) SAC Kiltiernan Turlough SAC Knockacoller Bog SAC Knockanira House SAC Knocksink Wood SAC Lady's Island Lake SAC Lambay Island SAC Lisbigney Bog SAC Lisduff Fen SAC Lisduff Turlough SAC Liskeenan Fen SAC Long Bank SAC Lough Bane and Lough Glass SAC Lough Corrib SAC Lough Coy SAC Lough Croan Turlough SAC Lough Cutra SAC Lough Derg, North-east Shore SAC Lough Ennell SAC Lough Fingall Complex SAC Lough Forbes Complex SAC Lough Funshinagh SAC Lough Gash Turlough SAC Lough Hyne Nature Reserve and Environs SAC Lough Lene SAC Lough Oughter And Associated Loughs SAC Lough Owel SAC Lough Rea SAC Lough Ree SAC</p> | |

| SACs | SPAs |
|---|------|
| <p>Lough Yganavan and Lough Nambrackdarrig SAC Loughatorick South Bog SAC Lower River Shannon SAC Lower River Suir SAC Magharee Islands SAC Magherabeg Dunes SAC Malahide Estuary SAC Maulagowna Bog SAC Moanour Mountain SAC Moanveanlagh Bog SAC Moneen Mountain SAC Moneybeg And Clareisland Bogs SAC Mongan Bog SAC Mouds Bog SAC Mount Brandon SAC Mount Hevey Bog SAC Mount Jessop Bog SAC Mountmellick SAC Moyclare Bog SAC Moyree River System SAC Mucksna Wood SAC Mullaghanish Bog SAC Myross Wood SAC Newgrove House SAC Newhall and Edenvale Complex SAC Nier Valley Woodlands SAC North Dublin Bay SAC Old Domestic Building (Keevagh) SAC Old Domestic Building, Askive Wood SAC Old Domestic Building, Curraglass Wood SAC Old Domestic Building, Dromore Wood SAC Old Domestic Buildings, Rylane SAC Old Farm Buildings, Ballymacrogan SAC Peterswell Turlough SAC Philipston Marsh SAC Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC Pollagoona Bog SAC Pollardstown Fen SAC Pollnacknockaun Wood Nature Reserve SAC Pouladatig Cave SAC Poulnagordon Cave (Quin) SAC Raheenmore Bog SAC Ratty River Cave SAC Raven Point Nature Reserve SAC Red Bog, Kildare SAC</p> | |

| SACs | SPAs |
|--|------|
| <p>Redwood Bog SAC</p> <p>Reen Point Shingle SAC</p> <p>Ridge Road, SW of Rapemills SAC</p> <p>River Barrow and River Nore SAC</p> <p>River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC</p> <p>River Shannon Callows SAC</p> <p>Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC</p> <p>Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC</p> <p>Rogerstown Estuary SAC</p> <p>Rostrevor Wood SAC</p> <p>Rosturra Wood SAC</p> <p>Rye Water Valley/Cartron SAC</p> <p>Saltee Islands SAC</p> <p>Scohaboy (Sopwell) Bog SAC</p> <p>Scragh Bog SAC</p> <p>Screen Hills SAC</p> <p>Sharavogue Bog SAC</p> <p>Sheep's Head SAC</p> <p>Sheheree (Ardagh) Bog SAC</p> <p>Silvermine Mountains SAC</p> <p>Silvermines Mountains West SAC</p> <p>Slaney River Valley SAC</p> <p>Slieve Bernagh Bog SAC</p> <p>Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC</p> <p>Slieve Gullion SAC</p> <p>Slieve Mish Mountains SAC</p> <p>Sonnagh Bog SAC</p> <p>South Dublin Bay SAC</p> <p>Spahill and Clomantagh Hill SAC</p> <p>Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC</p> <p>St. Gobnet's Wood SAC</p> <p>Tacumshin Lake SAC</p> <p>Termon Lough SAC</p> <p>The Gearagh SAC</p> <p>The Long Derries, Edenderry SAC</p> <p>The Loughans SAC</p> <p>The Murrough Wetlands SAC</p> <p>Thomastown Quarry SAC</p> <p>Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC</p> <p>Toonagh Estate SAC</p> <p>Tory Hill SAC</p> <p>Tralee Bay and Magharees Peninsula, West to Cloghane SAC</p> <p>Tramore Dunes and Backstrand SAC</p> <p>Tullaheer Lough And Bog SAC</p> | |

| SACs | SPAs |
|---|------|
| Vale of Clara (Rathdrum Wood) SAC Valencia Harbour/Portmagee Channel SAC White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC Wicklow Mountains SAC Wicklow Reef SAC Wooddown Bog SAC | |

APPENDIX B – CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultation responses (relevant to the AA Screening) were received from the following organisations, set out in Table B1 (refer to Section 3.4):

- Geological Survey Ireland (a division in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications).
- Environmental Protection Agency.
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency.
- Environmental Protection Division (a division of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications).
- Office of Public Works.

Table B.1 Consultation responses relevant to the AA Screening

| Consultee | Consultee response | Action |
|---|---|---|
| Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. | It is important to include commercial stocks as a material asset in the assessments. Commercial sea fishing is a long standing, pre-existing and traditional activity in the marine environment. It is essential that any negative impacts on fisheries are avoided. The evaluation of potential impacts on any commercial sea fishing activities needs to be given consideration as part of any planning/proposal process and during the development process itself. It is imperative that engagement should be sought with the fishing industry and other relevant stakeholders at as early a stage as possible to discuss any changes that may affect them to afford a chance for their input. Fishers' interests and livelihoods must be fully recognised, supported, and taken into account. | Noted. SRA has confirmed that there would be no impacts on the commercial fishing industry as a result of implementing the Regional Programme. |
| Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) | All recommendations from the SEA and AA processes, including mitigation measures, should be integrated in the Programme. We recommend that the Programme includes summary tables outlining the key findings of the SEA and linking the significant environmental effects identified to the proposed mitigation measures, monitoring programme and Programme policies/measures. EPA also included a list of useful references for the assessment. | Noted. References and links will be consulted as necessary for the NIS. |
| Northern Ireland Environment | NIEA Natural Environment Division (NED) are in agreement and welcome the completion of a | Noted. |

| Consultee | Consultee response | Action |
|--|--|--|
| Agency (NIEA) on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland | Habitats Regulations Assessment in parallel to the SEA and are content with the objectives to be included in this assessment. We welcome that the AA will also include assessment of potential significant effects on sites in NI where they fall within the 15km zone of influence. We welcome that monitoring will be put in place in due course and look forward to the opportunity to comment further as appropriate as the process develops. NED included a list of strategies/ policies for consideration in the assessment and a list of useful references. | References and links will be consulted as necessary for the NIS. |
| Development Applications Unit National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) | NWPS welcomed the conclusion of the AA Screening to move onto the next stage of assessment. Formal feedback will be given on the NIS during the next round of consultation. | Noted. |

Consultation responses (relevant to the NIS) were received from the following organisations, set out in Table B2 (refer to Section 3.4):

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) including the following:
 - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Natural Environment Division (NED) (Via NIEA).
 - Marine Fisheries Division (Via NIEA).
 - Marine Plan Team (Via NIEA).

Table B.2 Consultation responses relevant to the NIS

| Consultee | Consultee response | Action |
|-------------|--|--------|
| NIEA | DAERA SEA Team welcome the inclusion in the NIS of considerations of transboundary effects within a 15km zone of influence and inclusion of relevant policies in the SEA as per the NIEA response to the Scoping report dated 21st April 2022. | Noted. |
| DAERA (NED) | NED note that no transboundary effects have been identified and as such are content that given the geographical location of this plan it is unlikely to significantly impact on Northern Ireland. | Noted. |
| | Should transboundary issues arise then consultation with the relevant NI bodies should be undertaken | Noted. |

| Consultee | Consultee response | Action |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Marine Fisheries Division | <p>Natura Impact Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCA welcomes the consideration of the following potential impacts listed in the Executive summary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/infrastructure. (MCA recommends also considering any associated access roads). - Disturbance/ displacement to Qualifying interests (QI)/ Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) species. (MCA recommends ensuring SCI species also includes priority species.) - Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s). (MCA recommends also considering coastal processes such as coastal erosion in relation to hydrology.) | <p>Access roads have been taken into consideration as part of the infrastructure of potential new developments.</p> <p>Priority species (as defined in the AA process) are also SCIs/ QIs and therefore have been considered.</p> <p>Given the size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding, coastal processes have not been considered in the assessment.</p> |
| | <p>MCA welcomes the consideration of 'In-combination effects' in Section 4.</p> | <p>Noted.</p> |
| | <p>MCA welcomes the consideration of the following Policies and Strategies in Table 4:</p> <p>Polices/plans/programmes/strategies to consider in the in-combination assessment and Appendix C – Summary of other plans/programmes: Table C.1. Sets out the other plans/ Programmes considered in the in-combination assessment of the NIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 - Draft Environment Strategy | <p>Noted.</p> <p>Added to the in-combination assessment tables</p> |
| | <p>MCA welcomes the consideration of 'transboundary effects with NI' in Table 7 Impact identification. In addition, MCA has the following comments on the impacts listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct habitat loss/ degradation of habitat under the footprint of new development/ infrastructure <p>MCA welcomes the consideration of invasive species and recommends this includes terrestrial, aquatic and marine invasive species, where relevant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species MCA recommends ensuring SCI species also includes priority species. - Changes in water quality/ hydrology where development/ | <p>Consideration of invasive species includes terrestrial and aquatic species. Marine invasive species have not been considered as none of the projects likely to come forward for funding would include works within the marine environment.</p> <p>Priority species (as defined in the AA process) are also SCIs/</p> |

| Consultee | Consultee response | Action |
|-----------|--|--|
| | <p>infrastructure are hydrologically linked to a European site(s) MCA recommends also considering coastal processes such as coastal erosions, where relevant.</p> | <p>QIs and therefore have been considered.</p> <p>Given the size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding, coastal processes have not been considered in the assessment.</p> |
| | <p>MCA welcomes the following statement in Table 8 Assessment of Policy PO1 RSO1.3: 'Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the Regional Programme 'Any reference to support for all plans, projects, activities and development in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies.'</p> | <p>Noted.</p> |
| | <p>Regarding Appendix A – European sites: Table A.1. SPAs and SACs within the Southern, Eastern and Midland Region and the 15km zone of influence buffer. MCA welcomes the consideration of Carlingford Lough SPA. However, MCA recommends also considering Carlingford Marine pSPA.</p> <p>In addition, MCA recommends considering the following additional MPAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carlingford Lough ASSI - Kilkeel Steps ASSI - Samuel's Port ASSI - Mourne Coast ASSI - Carlingford Lough MCZ - Carlingford Lough Ramsar Site | <p>Noted.</p> <p>Although projects could be located in coastal towns/ settlements, impacts on coastal processes and the wider marine environment have not been considered in the assessment due to the size, scale and nature of such projects (focusing funding on urban regeneration).</p> |
| | <p>Furthermore, in relation to the Habitats Regulations Assessment for this proposal, recent advice, relating to MPAs which have marine mammals as a site selection feature, recommends the following ranges should be used when screening for either Harbour Grey seals and Harbour porpoise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all SACs within 100km of the project should be screened for Grey seals • all SACs within 50km should be screened for Harbour | <p>Given the size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding, impacts on marine mammals have not been considered in the assessment.</p> |

| Consultee | Consultee response | Action |
|------------------|---|--------|
| | <p>seals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all SACs within 100km should be screened for Harbour porpoise <p>Therefore The Strangford Lough SAC should be considered for Harbour seals and the North Channel SAC should be considered for Harbour Porpoise.</p> | |
| Marine Plan Team | <p>The MPT, along with other sections of the Marine & Fisheries Division (MFD), had prepared comprehensive input into the original SEA Scoping and AA Screening documents in March 2022. However, due to an administrative oversight, this response was not sent back as part of the wider DAERA response. The drafted MPT input for both documents to these previous stages is attached at Appendices A&B.</p> | Noted. |

APPENDIX C – SUMMARY OF OTHER PLANS/ PROGRAMMES

Table C.1. Other plans/ Programmes considered in the in-combination assessment of the NIS

| Plan or Programme | Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme |
|---|--|
| European/ National | |
| EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 | 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. |
| 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. |
| 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. |
| Roadmap for Resource Efficient Europe 2011 | The Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe outline how Ireland can transform Europe's economy into a sustainable one by 2050. It proposes ways to increase resource productivity and decouple economic growth from resource use and its environmental impact. It illustrates how policies interrelate and build on each other |
| Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) (2020-2032) Three RSESs have been developed: Southern Region, Eastern and Midland Region and Northern Region | The three RSESs set a 12-year strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of the Regions in line with vision and objectives for national change in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) supporting the implementation of Project Ireland 2040. |
| DCHG (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021 | 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; 1. Mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors |

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| Work on drafting Ireland's 4th NBAP is underway which will go for public consultation and launch in 2022. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Strengthen the knowledge base for conservation, management and sustainable use of biodiversity 3. Increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services 4. Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside 5. Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine environment 6. Expand and improve management of protected areas and species 7. Strengthen international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services. |
| NPWS Conservation Plans and/or Conservation Objectives for SACs and SPAs | 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. |
| Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan (NDP) and National Planning Framework (NPF) 2021-2030 | 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 human capital and to fostering the development of clusters in important growth areas in order to attract new investment. |
| 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. |
| National Broadband Plan 2022 | 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. |
| 'Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector' (2014) | 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 set out are 75 which ensure that sensible and necessary development can take place without unnecessary obstacles. |
| 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. |
| EU Regional innovation Scoreboard 2021 | 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. |

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| | The Northern and Western Region is now the only region in Ireland to be considered a “Moderate Innovator” |
| EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges | This study identifies and analyses EU’s lagging regions while also proposing a new classification to recognise regions which are most vulnerable. It identifies challenges that arise from economic transitions and examines the lagging regions input in EU policies while also outlining recommendations to improve their future support. |
| EPA (2018) River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 | <p>This second River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) outlines the new approach that Ireland will take as it 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"> • Ensure full compliance with relevant EU legislation • Prevent deterioration • Meet the objectives for designated protected areas • Protect high-status waters • 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 |
| Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services) | <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"> • Meet Customer Expectations; • Ensure a Safe and Reliable Water Supply; • Provide Effective Management of Wastewater; • Protect and Enhance the Environment; • Support Social and Economic Growth; and • Invest in Our Future. |
| National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020 | 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. |
| Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future. ‘A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020’ | 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. |
| DCCA (2020) National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030 | 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: |

| Plan or Programme | Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements of the Plan or Programme |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation – GHG emissions and removals and renewable energy • Energy efficiency • Energy security • Internal energy market • Research, innovation and competitiveness |
| DCCAIE (2021) National Climate Action Plan | <p>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.</p> |
| DCCAIE (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland | <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting in place revised governance and reporting arrangements • Formalising the status of existing guidelines • Formalising long term operational support for key sectors • Facilitating the establishment of regional local authority climate action offices • Increasing awareness around climate adaptation and resilience • Integrating climate adaptation into key national plans and policies |
| DCCAIE (2017) National Mitigation Plan | <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • a stable and predictable policy and regulatory framework will be underpinned by rigorous analysis and appraisal, supported by strong research and analytical capacity; • the Government will pursue investment, innovation and enterprise opportunities towards building a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy; and • the citizen and communities will be at the centre of the transition. |
| National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012) | <p>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.</p> |

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| EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy | 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 United Nations (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. |
| EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 | Key Elements of the 2030 framework include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 40% • A renewable energy target at EU level of at least 27% • Energy Efficiency increase of 25% in 2030 • Reform of the Emissions Trading System • Ensuring competition in integrated markets • Competitive and affordable energy for all consumers • Promoting security of energy supply |
| EPA National Waste Prevention Programme | 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. |
| DAHG (2015) National landscape strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) | 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. |
| DCCAIE (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 – 2020 | 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness: Increase public awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, their relevance to Ireland, and national efforts to achieve them. • 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. • Support: Support and encourage communities and organisations to make their own contributions to achieving the Goals, and to foster public participation. • 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. |
| 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. |

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| 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. |
| 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> |
| 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"> 1. ensuring that new buildings are to at least a nearly zero-energy building (NZEB) standard, and 2. The retrofitting of the majority of existing buildings. |
| Indecon Needs Analysis (2020) | The Needs Analysis is an independent report of the needs which could be addressed by EU Cohesion Funding. The analysis will help to underpin the planning for Ireland's Partnership Agreement for the next programming period (2021-2027). The objective is to inform strategic choices for the use of ERDF/ESF+ funds. |
| National Smart Specialisation Plan (currently being reviewed) | <p>Smart Specialisation is an enterprise innovation policy concept developed by the European Commission that aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths.</p> <p>The development of a new Smart Specialisation Strategy (also known as S3) presents an opportunity to assess, with stakeholders, our regional competitive advantages, future market opportunities, solutions to societal challenges, and the effectiveness of the current suite of enterprise innovation supports.</p> |
| Regional Enterprise Plans | Regional development plans are currently being developed across Ireland. They have been developed by regional stakeholders and focus on undertaking collaborative initiatives that can help realise enterprise growth and job creation in each of the nine regions across Ireland. |
| Regional Waste Management Plans | Regional waste management plans give effect to national and EU waste policy, and address waste prevention and management (including generation, collection and treatment) over the period 2015-2021. |
| National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan | <p>Irish Water has published the first National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan (NWSMP) outlining its strategy for managing wastewater sludge over the next 25 years.</p> <p>The NWSMP sets out a nationwide standardised approach to ensure that treated wastewater sludge across the country is effectively managed, stored, transported and re-used or disposed of in a sustainable way, to the benefit of the public and the environment.</p> |
| Housing for All 2021 a new Housing Plan for Ireland | Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland' is the government's housing plan to 2030. |

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| | <p>It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan which will improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The government's overall objective is that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to purchase or rent at an affordable price • built to a high standard and in the right place • offering a high quality of life |
| Research and Innovation Strategy (currently being reviewed) | <p>Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy' puts RD&I at the heart of addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges.</p> <p>Impact 2030 will maximise the impact of research and innovation on many national priorities. It will progress objectives shared across the Irish RD&I system such as maximising its impact on public policymaking and implementation, and nurturing and attracting talent.</p> |
| Future Jobs Ireland | <p>Future Jobs Ireland, along with Project Ireland 2040, Global Ireland 2025 and the Climate Action Plan represents an integrated approach to prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the future economy.</p> <p>Future Jobs Ireland focuses on five pillars namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Innovation and Technological Change • Improving SME Productivity • Enhancing Skills and Developing and Attracting Talent • Increasing Participation in the Labour Force • Transitioning to a Low Carbon Economy |
| National Water Resources Plan | <p>The NWRP is our plan to identify how we will provide a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable water supply to our customers for now and into the future whilst safeguarding the environment.</p> <p>The NWRP will set out how we will balance the supply and demand for drinking water over the short, medium and long term. It is a 25-year strategy to ensure we have a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable drinking water supply for everyone.</p> |
| National Retrofit Plan | <p>The Irish government's National Retrofitting Scheme pledges to upgrade the energy efficiency of 500,000 homes by 2030 — around one third of homes in Ireland. It forms part of the Irish government's Climate Action Plan, which has set the target for an overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 51% by 2030, and to achieve net zero by 2050.</p> |
| Northern Ireland | |
| Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 | <p>A strategy for Northern Ireland to meet its international obligations and local targets to protect biodiversity and ensure that the environment can continue to support our people and economy.</p> |
| Draft Environment Strategy | <p>Draft strategy to improve the environment, create opportunities for business, improve people's health and well-being, and help</p> |

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| | to protect the planet. |
| Draft NI Peatland Policy | The draft NI Peatland Strategy sets out the Strategic Objectives and Actions which DAERA consider necessary to ensure that the semi-natural peatlands are conserved and restored to functioning ecosystems |
| Draft Green Growth Strategy | The Green Growth Strategy sets out an ambitious vision and a framework for delivery with which all other NI government policies and strategies must align. It provides us with a vitally important opportunity to embed wider climate change, a green economy and environmental considerations into decision making. |
| Northern Ireland Energy Strategy 2050 | The Energy Strategy sets out a pathway for energy to 2030 that will mobilise the skills, technologies and behaviours needed to take us towards our vision of net zero carbon and affordable energy by 2050. |



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