

Siobhan Murphy,
Licencing Unit,
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority,
Drinagh,
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1th December 2023

Final Environmental Report

Re: Lic230006 University College Cork Deployment, Operation and Recovery of Hydrophones off the Coast of Counties Wicklow and Cork.

Applicant: UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK (UCC).

The application and all the environmental documents associated with the Maritime Usage Licence LIC0006 for the deployment, operation and recovery of hydrophones off the coast of Counties Wicklow and Cork have been reviewed. The proposed maritime usage aims to describe seasonal and diurnal occurrence of whales, dolphins and porpoises (cetaceans) in the Irish and Celtic Sea, in areas in proximity to existing or planned offshore wind farms. The work is being carried out as part of a large multidisciplinary research project called CETUS. The CETUS project: Cetacean, Elasmobranch, Turtle, and Seabird distribution modelling platform supporting the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy and is funded by SEAI. This Final Environmental Report forms part of MARA's statutory obligations under the Habitats Directive.

My comments are as follows:

Preliminary Environmental Report: My Preliminary Environmental Report of the 30/11/2023 remains valid and all recommendations made within remain unchanged specifically in relation to the:

- EIA Directive
- Birds & Habitats Directive
 - Screening for Appropriate Assessment
 - Annex IV Species

Assessment of Impacts of the Maritime Usage (AIMU) Report: The applicants AIMU report provided a comprehensive project description, programme of works and fully assessed the impacts of the project on the receiving marine environment. Specifically, the AIMU Report considered:

- Land & Soils
- Water
- Biodiversity
- Fisheries and Aquaculture
- Air Quality
- Noise & Vibration
- Landscape/Seascape
- Traffic & Transport (including navigation)
- Cultural Heritage
- Population & Human Health
- Major Accidents & Disasters
- Climate
- Waste
- Material Assets

AIMU Report conclusion: In relation to navigation, the vessel(s) to be used are not yet known, UCC must seek approval from the MARA prior to commencement of the proposed activities. In this event, confirmation will be required that the survey equipment and methodology on the vessel are equivalent to that described in the application documents and that the description of the project used to inform the Environmental Assessment is still valid. Accordingly, this decision is further contingent on this requirement also being included as a condition of any consent granted in respect of this application. Following my assessment of the AIMU Report and having considered the nature, size, duration and location of the proposed deployment, operation and recovery of hydrophones, I conclude that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the receiving marine environment subject to the conditions set out below.

Marine Strategy Framework Directive: The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is European legislation, which aims to protect the marine environment. It requires the application of an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities, enabling a sustainable use of marine goods and services.

In order to implement the Directive Ireland is required to:

- Describe what they consider is a clean, healthy and productive sea i.e. Good Environmental Status
- Monitor and assess the quality of their seas against Good Environmental Status, and
- Ensure they take appropriate action to maintain or achieve Good Environmental Status.

The aim of the MSFD is to achieve a good environmental status of EU's marine waters and sustainably protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend.

Having reviewed and assessed the information on file (including the AIMU Report) for this application, I am satisfied that the overall objective of this project (to gain knowledge about the distribution of whales, dolphins and porpoises in the Irish maritime area - which are key indicators of ocean health) aligns with the objectives of the MSFD. Furthermore, I am satisfied that no implications shall arise from this project which would adversely affect MARA's obligations under the MSFD.

Public and Relevant Body Consultation: Owing to the nature, size, duration and location of the proposed survey and taking into account that the survey was screened out for Appropriate Assessment, there was no Public or Relevant Body consultation.

Conclusion and Recommendation: Having considered the information submitted in support of the application, I have no objection to the granting of a Maritime Usage Licence under Section 119 of the MAP Act for this application subject to the following conditions:

1. The licensee shall ensure that appropriate methods of operation are adopted in order to ensure that no spillages of fuel, hydrocarbons, cement or other hazardous substance occur during the deployment and recovery operations. In the unlikely event of a spill occurring, MARA and all relevant statutory bodies, shall be notified as soon as possible.
Reason: To ensure the protection of the marine environment.
2. The licensee shall ensure that all vessels used in deployment and recovery operations are free of invasive marine species on their hulls and in their ballast water.
Reason: To ensure the protection of the marine environment.
3. The Licensee must seek approval, from MARA, for the survey vessel, equipment and methodology prior to commencement of the proposed activity.
Reason: To ensure the protection of the marine environment.


Mary Hegarty,

Marine Advisor - Environment

1st December 2023