

Risk Assessment for Annex IV Species for marine survey and site investigations for a fibre optic cable with a landfall at Glandore Bay and Castlefreke, Long Strand, Co. Cork.



14th May 2024

Prepared by [REDACTED] of Altemar Ltd.
On behalf of: McMahon Design and Management Ltd.

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Introduction

This Annex IV Risk Assessment has been prepared on behalf of McMahon Design and Management Ltd. to assess whether the proposed survey works remove the system of strict protection established for Annex IV species. This risk assessment will aid in the application to obtain a Marine Area Usage Licence (MAUL) for the proposed route of this undersea fibre optic cable. This report will detail the species protected under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive that may be present within the MAUL application area. Under Article 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive, Member States must establish systems of strict protection for animal and plant species which are particularly threatened, and which are listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive. Article 16 provides for derogations from these provisions under limited circumstances. Article 12, 13 and 16 of the Habitats Directive are transposed into Irish law by Regulations 51, 52 and 54 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended. Annex IV species are afforded strict protection throughout their range, both inside and outside of designated protected areas. It is an offence to deliberately kill, injure or disturb a specimen in the wild, or damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an Annex IV animal species. This report may also contain species which are protected under Annex II, which are protected within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) have been recorded in the area, however as this species is protected under Annex II and V, it will not be considered any further in this risk assessment.

Altemar Ltd.

Since its inception in 2001, Altemar has been delivering ecological and environmental services to a broad range of clients. Operational areas include: residential; infrastructural; renewable; oil & gas; private industry; Local Authorities; EC projects; and, State/semi-State Departments. Bryan Deegan, the managing director of Altemar, is an Environmental Scientist and Marine Biologist with 30 years' experience working in Irish terrestrial and aquatic environments, providing services to the State, Semi-State and industry. He is currently contracted to Inland Fisheries Ireland as the sole "External Expert" to environmentally assess internal and external projects. He is also chair of an internal IFI working group on environmental assessment. Bryan Deegan (MCIEEM) holds a MSc in Environmental Science, BSc (Hons.) in Applied Marine Biology, NCEA National Diploma in Applied Aquatic Science and a NCEA National Certificate in Science (Aquaculture). Bryan Deegan carried out all elements of this Annex IV Report. Bryan has been involved in eleven international sub marine fibre optic cable projects, many of which involved Horizontal Directional Drills within designated sites and all works required ecological supervision.

Annex IV Species

All species listed under Annex IV with the potential to be impacted by the proposed survey works should be included, even if they have been separately assessed in the SISAA, NIS, or EclA process.

Of the animal and plant species on Annex IV known to occur in Ireland, the following species (Table 1) were identified as relevant to the proposed development:

Table 1. Annex IV protected species in Ireland

Classification	Species	Conservation Status	Potential for Effect
<i>Cetacea</i>	Humpback Whale (<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Bottlenose Dolphin (<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Short-Beaked Common Dolphin (<i>Delphinus delphis</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Harbour Porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Killer Whale (<i>Orcinus orca</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Long-Finned Pilot Whale (<i>Globicephala melas</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Risso's Dolphin (<i>Grampus griseus</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Atlantic White-Sided Dolphin (<i>Lagenorhynchus acutus</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	White-Beaked Dolphin (<i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Striped Dolphin (<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Cuvier's Beaked Whale (<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Sowerby's Beaked Whale (<i>Mesoplodon bidens</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected.

Classification	Species	Conservation Status	Potential for Effect
			Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Minke Whale (<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Fin Whale (<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Blue Whale (<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Sperm Whale (<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Northern Bottlenose Whale (<i>Hyperoodon ampullatus</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea</i>	Sei Whale (<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea (Vagrant)</i>	Northern Right Whale (<i>Eubalaena glacialis</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea (Vagrant)</i>	False Killer Whale (<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea (Vagrant)</i>	True's Beaked Whale (<i>Mesoplodon mirus</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea (Vagrant)</i>	Pygmy Sperm Whale (<i>Kogia breviceps</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea (Vagrant)</i>	Beluga/White Whale (<i>Delphinapterus leucas</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Cetacea (Vagrant)</i>	Gervais' Beaked Whale (<i>Mesoplodon europaeus</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Mustelidae</i>	Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Favourable	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required

Classification	Species	Conservation Status	Potential for Effect
<i>Testudines</i>	Leatherback Turtle (<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>)	Unknown	There is potential for this species to be located within the survey area and therefore be effected. Further Assessment Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Lesser Horseshoe Bat (<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>)	Inadequate	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Common Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Soprano Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Nathusius' Pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus nathusii</i>)	Unknown	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Natterer's Bat (<i>Myotis nattereri</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required

Classification	Species	Conservation Status	Potential for Effect
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Daubenton's Bat (<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Whiskered Bat (<i>Myotis mystacinus</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Brown Long-Eared Bat (<i>Plecotus auritus</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Leisler's Bat (<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>)	Favourable	The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Chiroptera</i>	Other bat species not listed above if present		The works are in the coastal environment where structures are near the HWM. There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Works at landfall will be carried out during daylight hours only and no artificial lighting is required. The works will not impact on resting or breeding places of bats. No demolition or modifications to buildings are required. No lighting is required. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Mollusca</i>	Kerry Slug (<i>Geomalacus maculosus</i>)	Favourable	There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Anura</i>	Natterjack Toad (<i>Epidalea calamita</i>)	Bad	There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works.

Classification	Species	Conservation Status	Potential for Effect
			Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Hymenophyllaceae</i>	Killarney Fern (<i>Vandenboschia speciosa</i>)	Favourable	There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Najadaceae</i>	Slender Naiad (<i>Najas flexilis</i>)	Inadequate	There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Further Assessment Not Required
<i>Saxifragaceae</i>	Marsh Saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>)	Favourable	There is no potential for this species to be effected by the proposed survey works. Further Assessment Not Required

Risk Assessment for Relevant Annex IV Species

Cetaceans

A number of the 24 aforementioned cetacean species have been identified within the survey application area; the humpback whale, common minke whale, common dolphin, fin whale, harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin (IWDG, 2017). Many of the other cetacean species from Annex IV have been recorded in the area or region. The harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin and common dolphin, in particular, have been recorded frequently within the survey area and surrounding region, the harbour porpoise is also a Qualifying Interest (QI) of the nearby Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC (NPWS, 2011). These species of cetacean may be present year-round in the region (Wall et al., 2013). Whereas larger species such as fin whale or humpback whale are seasonal visitors during the late summer months (Wall et al., 2013). From the (IWDG, 2017) data, many of the cetacean species' sightings in the region, were recorded between the early autumn and late winter months.

Turtles

The leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the only turtle species that is protected under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive in Ireland. This species has been recorded within both the marine and terrestrial aspects of the proposed survey area (NBDC, 2024). This species is another seasonal visitor, leatherback turtles migrate north during the summer months to more temperate waters, some visit the northeast Atlantic and Irish waters where they feed on jellyfish before turning south again in Autumn (NPWS, 2019). These sightings mostly range from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, however, there are some more recent sightings from 2018 and 2019 located within the marine survey license area. There is, therefore, a possibility that the leatherback turtle may be present at the time of survey works.

Otters

Ireland continues to be a stronghold for the European otter (*Lutra lutra*). The most recent data shows that otter continues to be widespread across Ireland with a total of 44 SACs being designated with otter as a conservation objective (NPWS, 2019). The nearest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which contains otter as a Qualifying Interest (QI) is Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC, located 8.1 km west along the coastline. However, the National Biodiversity Data Centre records indicate a previous presence of otters along the coastline within the proposed survey license area (NBDC, 2024). Most of these sightings took place in the 1980's with the most recent sighting being in 2013. There is, therefore, the possibility that the European otter may be present during the survey works.

Potential Impacts on Annex IV Species

Cetaceans

The proposed survey works are to be temporary with the inshore works only predicted to last between 3-4 days. Offshore survey will take a number of weeks. However, due to the high number of cetacean records within the proposed survey area and surrounding region, it cannot be assumed that there is no risk to marine mammals from the proposed survey works. The survey activity which poses the greatest threat to cetacean species is the underwater noise levels produced by the survey equipment. However, these levels have been kept within an acceptable range as described by (Southall et al., 2019). Survey vessels will generate some subsea noise in the marine environment from engine noise and dynamic positioning thrusters. Shipping noise is typically within the 50-300 Hz frequency band and is the dominant noise source in deeper water (DECC, 2011). Propellers on vessels all have the potential to produce cavitation noise. This sound is caused by vacuum bubbles that were generated by the collapse of bubbles created by the spinning of the propellers. There are a large number of cetacean species that have been previously recorded within the proposed survey license area, therefore, the potential for a collision between the survey vessel or equipment and marine mammals must also be factored in as a potential risk. All of this considered, the speed of the survey vessel will be at a low speed at which cetacean species will be able to move away from the area with no pressure from the vessel. Mitigation measures will be put in place to ensure no harm on any cetacean species from the proposed survey works.

Turtles

Although there have been recordings of leatherback turtle proximate to the proposed survey works area, the potential for impact on this species is incredibly low. This is assumed due to the date of the majority of sightings, of which most occurred over 50 years ago and also the relatively limited scale and duration of these surveys. The only potential for impact to this Annex IV species is by collision with the vessel or equipment over the duration of the survey works, which as previously stated are temporary. As previously stated, there have been leatherback turtle sightings both in the marine and terrestrial environments of the license application area. There is, therefore, a possibility of that this species has used the two survey shores as resting or breeding sites in the past. The proposed works do not offend the system of strict protection of turtles under Article 12 of the Habitats Directive.

Otters

Impacts to otters can occur as a result of permanent loss of breeding or resting sites, habitat loss, disturbance/displacement, and injury/mortality. The desk-based study with the aid of NBDC data showed that otters have been sighted in the last 10 years (2011, 2013) in intertidal habitats located proximate to the survey licence application area. Out of an abundance of caution, it is considered that there is the potential for the survey works to impact on otter species. This could negatively affect the species as a whole under Annex IV legislation of the Habitats Directive. Although the likelihood for potential impact is very low, specific mitigation will be put in place to ensure there are no negative impacts on this species during the proposed survey works.

Mitigation Measures

Cetaceans

Mitigation impacts are primarily concerned with the survey and the following mitigation measures would be enforced.

1. Mitigation measures will include the presence of a MMO onboard the survey vessel. The purpose of the MMO is to ensure that there is no disturbance of seal /cetacean populations.
2. The NPWS Guidance to manage the risk to marine mammals from man-made sound sources in Irish waters' (NPWS, 2014) should be followed throughout the survey.
3. The MMO should ensure that mitigation measures are carried out. Sufficient resources should be made immediately available on the survey vessel to deal with accidental oil spills including hydraulic hoses bursting etc. and reported to the MMO.

The levels of noise produced from the survey works will be kept within an acceptable range as described by (Southall et al., 2019) and the vessel will travel at speed at which cetacean species will be able to deviate course and move away with ease and under no pressure from the survey vessel. If calves are sighted, all survey works must stop immediately for a minimum of 45 minutes from the last sighting to ensure the calves safety. The application of these proposed mitigation measures will ensure no significant impacts on cetacean species from the proposed survey works in or in proximity to the proposed survey works area.

Turtles

The potential risk of impact on a leatherback turtle from the proposed survey works are extremely low, however, the possible impacts must be mitigated against in an abundance of caution. An experienced MMO will be present on board for the duration of the survey works in both the marine and terrestrial stages. Before trial pits are to be dug on both shores, an ecologist will carefully dig into the sand as deep as 75 cm to ensure no eggs have been laid in that particular location (TLT, 2023). The possibility of this is remote and the survey works are temporary but out of an abundance of caution this specific mitigation will be applied.

Otters

The European otter (*Lutra lutra*) has been previously recorded within NBDC records in proximity to the proposed survey works area (NBDC, 2024). Therefore, there is potential for this species to be located foraging within the intertidal zone. To mitigate any potential impact on this species an experienced ecologist will be present at all times during the terrestrial phases of the proposed survey works. This mitigation is important even though the potential for impact is low and the works are temporary and will be implemented for the duration of the survey works.

Conclusion

This Risk Assessment of Annex IV has taken all species under this annex of the Habitats Directive into consideration. All species have been assessed on whether there is a potential of impact. Any species in which this was possible were further assessed. This narrowed the list down to all cetacean species (including vagrant species), leatherback turtles and European otter. The presence of these species within the region was discussed using historical data (NBDC 2024), the use of this data in combination with the proposed survey works, potential impacts were assessed and finally mitigation measures were specifically designed to protect the species protected under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive (EC, 2023).

There is potential for impact on all of the discussed species from the proposed survey works, however, out of an abundance of caution and with the strict implementation of the specific mitigation measures provided, the risk of potential impact of these species or their interests has been significantly lowered.

There is no significant risk for potential impact on Cetacean, Turtle or Otter from the proposed survey works.

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