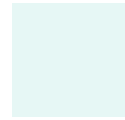


May 2024

Report

# Draft Water Services Strategic Plan 2050

Natura Impact Statement



# Safeguarding our water for our future

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## Executive Summary

This is the Natura Impact Statement (NIS) in support of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) for Uisce Éireann's Draft Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) 2050. The preparation of this NIS complies with the requirements of Article 6, and in particular, the provisions of Article 6(3), of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) in that it provides information and assessment of the implications for European sites from the Draft WSSP 2050.

The Draft WSSP 2050 presents Uisce Éireann's objectives to 2050 aligned to their vision "*A sustainable Ireland where water is respected and protected, for the planet and all the lives it supports*". The four strategic objectives have a series of strategic aims which address each component of the services Uisce Éireann provides and associated with these are 35 actions which outline the programme of work to be delivered.

Screening for AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 indicated that the potential for likely significant effects (LSEs) on European Sites could not be excluded and that the Draft WSSP 2050 would undergo AA. Given the nature of the plan, all European Sites within the island of Ireland would be brought forward to AA and an NIS prepared to fully inform the AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 by the Competent Authority.

This NIS details the potential for the Draft WSSP 2050 to affect the integrity of European Sites taking into account the potential for in-combination effects with other plans and programmes.

The NIS identified that the general activities of Uisce Éireann – water supply and wastewater treatment – could have a range of specific activities which might have impacts including, but not limited to, species mortality, habitat loss and/or fragmentation, barrier effects, disturbance, water quality, hydrology, and the transfer of non-native species. These could result in direct and/or indirect impacts on European Sites, including transboundary effects.

Mitigation measures and key principles for protecting European Sites were identified within this NIS and any lower tier plans and projects arising from the Draft WSSP 2050 would be required to adhere to these. These measures comprised relevant lower tier projects and plans arising from the

implementation of the Draft WSSP 2050, and would be subject to Screening for AA/AA where appropriate.

It was concluded that, with these mitigation measures and key principles in place, the Draft WSSP 2050 would have no adverse effects on the integrity of any European Site(s), either alone or in-combination with other plans or programmes.



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# 1 Introduction and Background

## 1.1 Background to Uisce Éireann

Uisce Éireann (UÉ), as Ireland's national public water services provider, supplies 1.7 billion litres of drinking water to their customers (households and businesses) every day and collects and treats more than 1.2 billion litres of wastewater before safely returning it to the environment. Through the provision of safe, secure and sustainable water services, UÉ plays a central role in enabling economic growth and protecting both the environment and the health and safety of customers and communities across Ireland.

Uisce Éireann's purpose is:

**We rise to the challenge of delivering transformative water services that enable communities to thrive.**

Uisce Éireann's vision is for:

**A sustainable Ireland where water is respected and protected, for the planet and all the lives it supports.**

Uisce Éireann is responsible for the operation of all public water and wastewater services including:

- Management of national water and wastewater assets
- Maintenance of the water and wastewater system
- Investment and planning
- Managing capital projects
- Customer care and billing

In discharging their role as the national water services utility, responsible for water services operations and investment, UÉ is regulated by:

- The economic regulator, the [Commission for Regulation of Utilities \(CRU\)](#) which is charged with protecting the interests of the customer, while approving an appropriate funding requirement sufficient to enable the utility to deliver the required services to specified standards in an efficient manner; and
- The environmental regulator, the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#), which sets standards and enforces compliance with EU and National Regulations for drinking water supply and wastewater discharge to water bodies. The EPA liaises with the Health Services Executive in matters of public health.

## 1.2 The Water Services Strategic Plan 2050

### 1.2.1 Purpose

The Water Services Strategic Plan 2050 (WSSP 2050) is UÉ's long-term strategic plan, which UÉ is required to prepare under the Water Services No. 2 Act 2013. It sets out UÉ's objectives and the means by which they will aim to achieve them in the context of the significant challenges they are likely to face over the next 25 years to 2050. The plan outlines UÉ's strategic direction and the actions they will implement to ensure sustainable water services for Ireland.

The WSSP is one of a suite of plans and policy documents guiding the delivery of water and wastewater services in Ireland:

- The **Water Framework Directive (WFD)** is the overarching Directive relating to water policy in the European Union (EU). It aims to protect and restore the water environment so that all water bodies are at 'Good Ecological Status' or better.
- The **Drinking Water Directive (DWD)** is the EU's main law on drinking water. It concerns the access to, and the quality of water intended for human consumption to protect human health.
- The **Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD)** aims to protect human health and the environment through obligations for collection and treatment of urban wastewater.
- The **Water Services Policy Statement (WSPS)** sets out the priorities of Government regarding the provision of water services during the period specified in the statement<sup>1</sup>.

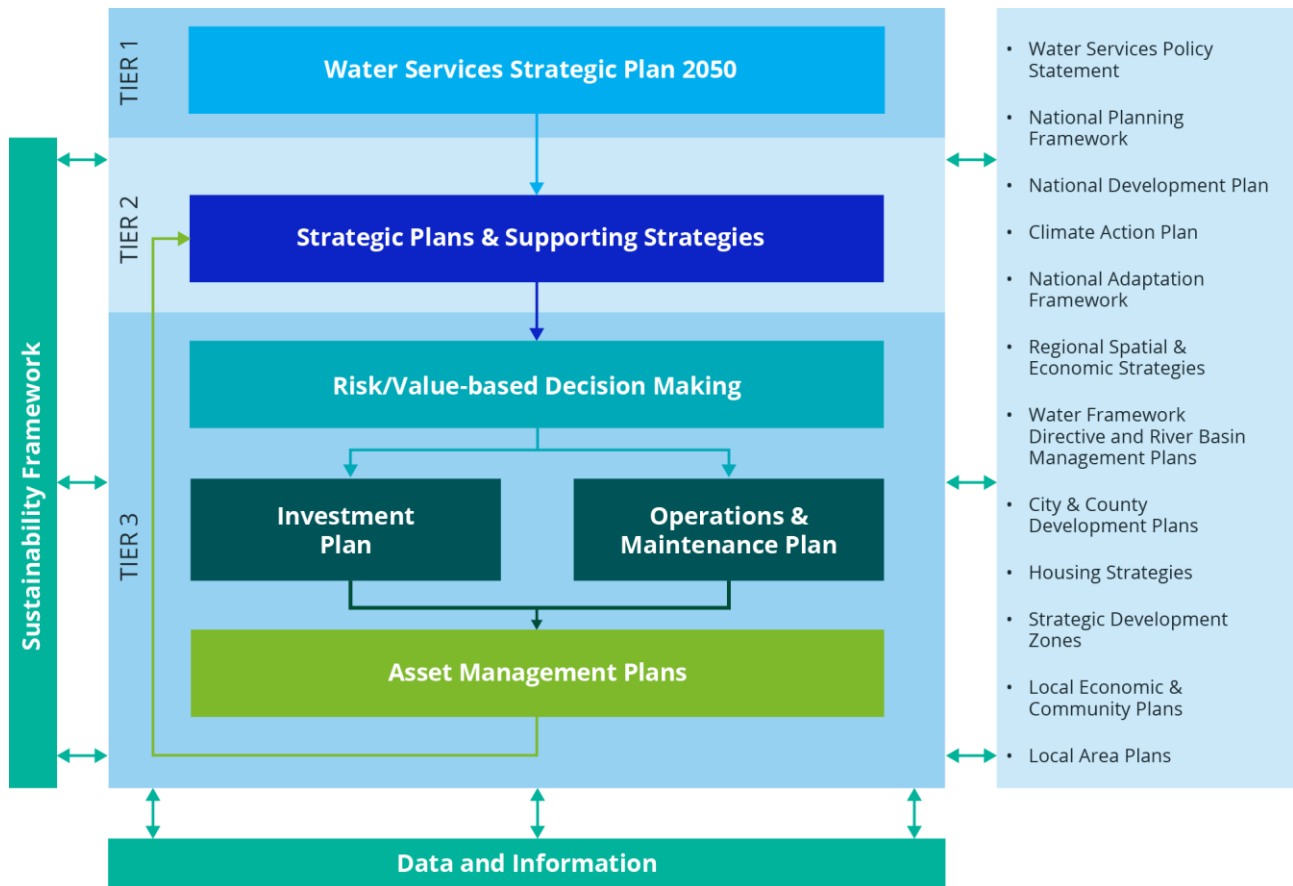
The WSSP 2050 will guide the development of implementation plans and programmes. The relationship of the WSSP 2050 (Tier 1) to the (Tier 2) implementation plans, and the future (Tier 3) projects and programmes is illustrated in Diagram 1-1.

The Draft WSSP 2050 is being consulted on in 2024 and will be published in 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> The Water Services Policy Statement 2024 – 2030 was published in February 2024.





**Diagram 1-1: Interaction of Plans and Projects**

### 1.2.2 WSSP Legislative Context

UÉ work within the legal context of the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2022. The following is particularly relevant to preparing the WSSP:

#### **Water Services Act 2013**

A WSSP is required to be prepared under the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (as amended) (the Water Services Act). It must state the objectives of UÉ over a 25-year horizon and the means by which it proposes to achieve those objectives covering:

- Drinking water quality.
- Prevention or abatement of risk to human health or environment relating to the provision of water services.
- Existing and projected demand for water services.
- Existing and planned arrangements for provisions of water services.
- Existing and reasonably foreseeable deficiencies in the provision of water services.
- Existing and planned water conservation measures.
- Management of the property of UÉ.

The Water Services Act requires that UÉ consult with the CRU, the EPA, each local authority and each regional body in advance of preparing a new WSSP. The legislation also states that the WSSP shall be consistent, as far as is practical, with:

- The National Planning Framework.
- Regional Planning Guidelines.
- Any river basin management plan in force at the time.

The WSSP must have regard to, inter alia, proper planning and sustainable development at a county and local level. It is also subject to the SEA Directive (see Section 1.5), the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive (see below).

### 1.3 Legislative Context

The EU 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 (hereafter referred to as European Sites). European Sites comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). SPAs are designated as a result of the implementation of the Birds Directive. Candidate SACs (cSACs) and proposed SPAs (pSPAs) are afforded the same protection as SACs and SPAs.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect European Sites. The first step of the AA process is to carry out a Screening to establish whether, in relation to a particular plan or project, an AA is required.

AA is a process for undertaking a focused impact assessment of a plan or project, examining its implications, on its own or in-combination with other plans and projects, on one or more European Site(s) in view of the sites' conservation objectives, as referred to in Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive.

Article 6(3) established the requirement for AA:

*"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."*

Article 6(4) states:

*"If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [Natura 2000] 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 a social or economic nature, Member States 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."*

A screening for AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 in line with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive has been undertaken (see Section 1.6) which concluded that an AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 would be required.

## 1.4 Public Authorities and AA

The duties of public authorities in relation to nature conservation are laid out principally in Article 27 of the S.I. No. 477/2011 – European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the Habitats Regulations 2011). Uisce Éireann is defined as a ‘public authority’ for the purposes of the 2011 Regulations.

The first step of the AA process is to carry out a screening to establish whether, in relation to a particular plan or project, if there is potential for likely significant effects (LSEs) to any European Site(s). Specifically, Regulation 42(1) states:

*“A screening for Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project for which an application for consent is received, or which a public authority wishes to undertake or adopt, and which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site, shall be carried out by the public authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site, if that plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the European Site.”*

Regulation 42(6) states that:

*“The public authority shall determine that an Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project is required where the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site as a European Site and if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information following screening under this Regulation, that the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European Site”*

In the context of Article 6(3), Uisce Éireann must carry out screening for AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 to assess whether, on the basis of objective scientific information, the plan individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site. If this screening determines that it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the Plan, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European Site, then Uisce Éireann must determine that an Appropriate Assessment of the plan is required.

To assist UÉ in carrying out any Appropriate Assessment that may be required following screening, UÉ must prepare a Natura Impact Statement (NIS), which is a report comprising the scientific examination of a plan or project and the relevant European Site or European Sites, to identify and characterise any possible implications of the plan or project individually or in combination with other plans or projects in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites, and any further information including, but not limited to, any plans, maps or drawings, scientific information or data required to enable the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment.

In carrying out the full AA, the Habitats Regulations 2011 require UÉ to take into account:

- The NIS;
- Any other plans or projects that may, in-combination with the plan or project under consideration, adversely affect the integrity of a European Site;
- Any supplemental information furnished in relation to any such report or statement;
- If appropriate, any additional information furnished in relation to the NIS;
- Any information or advice obtained by UÉ;
- If appropriate, any written submissions or observations made to UÉ in relation to the application for consent for the Plan; and
- Any other relevant information.

Following the Appropriate Assessment process, UÉ must then only adopt the Plan after having determined that the Plan shall not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site(s).

## 1.5 Overlap with Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The SEA process involves assessing the significant effects on the environment of implementing the Draft WSSP 2050 and considering reasonable alternatives for achieving its objectives. Combined and cumulative effects of the Draft WSSP 2050 as a whole and with other plans and programmes are also included as part of the assessment. The first stage in the SEA process is the screening stage, to consider whether SEA is required. As per the SEA Screening Report<sup>2</sup> it was determined that the Draft WSSP 2050 is of a type that falls within the remit of the SEA Directive/SEA Regulations and requires mandatory SEA. Therefore, the Draft WSSP 2050 was taken forward to the SEA Scoping stage including statutory consultation with the designated environmental authorities.

This helped inform the SEA Environmental Report which will be published alongside the Draft WSSP 2050 for public consultation. The SEA Environmental Report and consultation responses are also required to be taken into account in finalising the Draft WSSP 2050 and for monitoring its implementation.

## 1.6 Summary of Stage 1 AA Screening

The AA Screening Report determined that UÉ as a public authority under the Habitat Regulations 2011 (as amended) are required to screen all of their plans and projects. The Draft WSSP 2050 was therefore subject to the requirements of the Habitats Regulations and as such UÉ were required to assess the implications of the Draft WSSP 2050 on relevant European Sites in view of the sites' conservation objectives.

The report concluded that the Draft WSSP 2050 is not directly connected to or necessary to the management of any European Site. It further concluded that given the strategic nature of the Draft WSSP 2050 and the current stage of preparation, that there was potential for likely significant effects on one or more European Sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives. Furthermore, it was concluded that all European Sites across Ireland and Northern Ireland should be screened in.

In the absence of more detailed information on the Draft WSSP 2050 the precautionary principle was applied. Therefore, in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, it was determined that a Stage 2 AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 would be required. For further details see Section 5; the full screening report can be found in Appendix A.

## 1.7 Consultation

### 1.7.1 Consultation Process

The Draft WSSP 2050 will be developed following two phases of consultation. An initial statutory consultation was undertaken in Autumn 2023 on the WSSP Issues Paper, SEA Scoping Report (as indicated above) and the AA Screening Report. For this period of consultation, UÉ engaged directly with key statutory and regulatory stakeholders. Feedback received on the Issues Paper and the SEA Scoping Report and the AA Screening Report, were reviewed and taken into account as the Draft WSSP 2050, SEA Environmental Report and NIS were prepared.

As part of the second phase of consultation, UÉ will carry out a public consultation on the Draft WSSP 2050 together with the SEA Environmental Report and this NIS (AA process) in Spring 2024.

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<sup>2</sup> Appended to the SEA Scoping Report, <https://www.water.ie/projects/strategic-plans/water-services-strategic/>

### 1.7.2 Responses from the First Phase of Consultation

Responses from the first phase of consultation relevant to this NIS are provided in Appendix B. A summary of those where comments relevant to the NIS is provided below.

The **Environment Protection Agency** advised that all recommendations from the SEA and AA processes, including mitigation measures and monitoring proposals, should be integrated into the Plan.

**Inland Fisheries Ireland** (IFI) stated that some general issues and likely significant effects that IFI had highlighted in the past had been rightly identified in the SEA scoping and AA Screening reports.

The **Northern Ireland Environment Agency** (NIEA), Natural Environment Division (NED) listed commented on terminology with respect to the network of European protected sites in Northern Ireland as a result of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU. The organisation also provided a list of legislative instruments and policy statements/strategies that might be considered, and relevant web links. The NED also stated that AAs should refer to the status of habitats and species in the relevant reports available on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) website.

The NIEA Inland Fisheries branch advised that any SEA/AA be cognisant of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO), Convention for the Conservation of Salmon in the North Atlantic Implementation Plan for the period 2019 – 2024 in relation to transboundary effects.

The NIEA Marine Conservation Branch advised that there are now 18 SPAs in Northern Ireland – the East Coast Marine proposed (p)SPA and Carlingford Marine pSPA also need to be considered. They also advised that changes in hydrology can change the movement of sediment, therefore, potentially change coastal processes which could impact reliant habitats and species. In addition, they also advised considering how the introduction and spread of invasive non-native species can be prevented/minimise, and that extreme noise disturbance can also cause species mortality.



## 2 Approach and Assessment Methodology

### 2.1 Stages in the AA Process

In-line with the following European Union (EU) 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' (EC, 2021), the AA process can be broken down into four stages:

- Stage 1: Screening for AA/Test of Likely Significant Effects.
- Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment.
- Stage 3: Alternative Solutions.
- Stage 4: Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI).

#### **Stage 1: Screening for AA/Test of Likely Significant Effects**

Stage 1 identifies whether a plan or project, alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European Site. If the effects are deemed to be significant, potentially significant, or uncertain, or if the screening process becomes overly complicated, then the process must proceed to Stage 2 (AA). Screening should be undertaken without the inclusion of mitigation.

As the mere possibility of there being a significant effect on the site will trigger the need for an Appropriate Assessment, this decision can be taken either after a thorough examination of the plan or project, or on the basis of a simple analysis where it is already anticipated that there are likely to be significant effects (due to the type, size or scale of the plan or project, the characteristics of the European Site or because of a high risk of combined effects with other plans or projects). This will enable the Appropriate Assessment to start as soon as possible (EC, 2021).

#### **Stage 2: AA**

Stage 2 assesses whether the plan or project, alone or in-combination with other projects or plans, will have adverse effects on the integrity of a European Site, and includes any mitigation measures necessary to avoid negative effects.

#### **Stage 3: Alternative Solutions**

Stage 3 examines any alternative solutions or options that could enable the plan or project to proceed without adverse effects on the integrity of a European Site.

#### **Stage 4: Reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI)**

Stage 4 examines whether there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for allowing a plan or project that will have adverse effects on the integrity of a European Site to proceed in cases where it has been established that no less damaging alternative solution exists. Compensatory measures must be proposed and assessed, and the Commission must be informed of the compensatory measures.

Compensatory measures must be practical, implementable, likely to succeed, proportionate and enforceable, and they must be approved by the Minister.

Not all stages of the process will be required in all cases.



## 2.2 Guidance Documents and Information Sources

### Guidance Documents

The preparation of this NIS/AA has taken account of guidance contained in the following documents:

- Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management. Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) Practice Note PN01 (2021).
- AA of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. DoEHLG (2010).
- Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (2021).
- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle. European Commission (2000).
- Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the concepts of: Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission. European Commission (2007).
- Guidance document on Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites, A summary. European Union, 2022,
- Marine Natura Impacts Statements in Irish Special Areas of Conservation. A working Document. Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht (DAHG) (2012).
- Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (2018).

### Departmental/National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) Circulars

- AA under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 and PSSP 2/10.
- AA of Land Use Plans. Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08.
- Compliance Conditions in respect of Developments requiring (1) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); or (2) having potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Circular Letter PD 2/07 and NPWS 1/07.
- Guidance on Compliance with Regulation 23 of the Habitats Directive. Circular Letter NPWS 2/07.
- Water Services Investment and Rural Water Programmes – Protection of Natural Heritage and National Monuments. Circular L8/08.

### Data Sources Informing the AA Screening

The following general sources of information have been consulted for background environmental information:

- Online data available on European Sites as held by the NPWS from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie) – including site synopsis, conservation objectives and other relevant supporting documentation. SAC and SPA datasheet versions were dated 17 October 2023 (NPWS, 2023a; 2023b).
- GIS data for European Site boundaries obtained in digital format online from the NPWS (downloaded July 2023).
- Favourable reference ranges and tabulated threats and pressures for QI species/habitats in the NPWS latest national conservation status assessments (NPWS, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).
- Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 4: 2020–2026 (Gilbert et al., 2021).

- Water Framework Directive, Programme of Measures, High Status Sites; Annex IV Protected Areas: Water Dependent Habitats and Species. December 2008 (Mayes, 2008).
- Online data available on European Sites as held by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) from <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/searching-protected-areas> including the DAERA natural environment map viewer <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/natural-environment-map-viewer>.
- Article 17 Habitats Directive Report 2019: Habitat Conservation Status Assessments 2019 (JNCC, 2024a).
- Article 17 Habitats Directive Report 2019: Species Conservation Status Assessments 2019 (JNCC, 2024b).

### 2.3 Work Phases and Appropriate Assessment

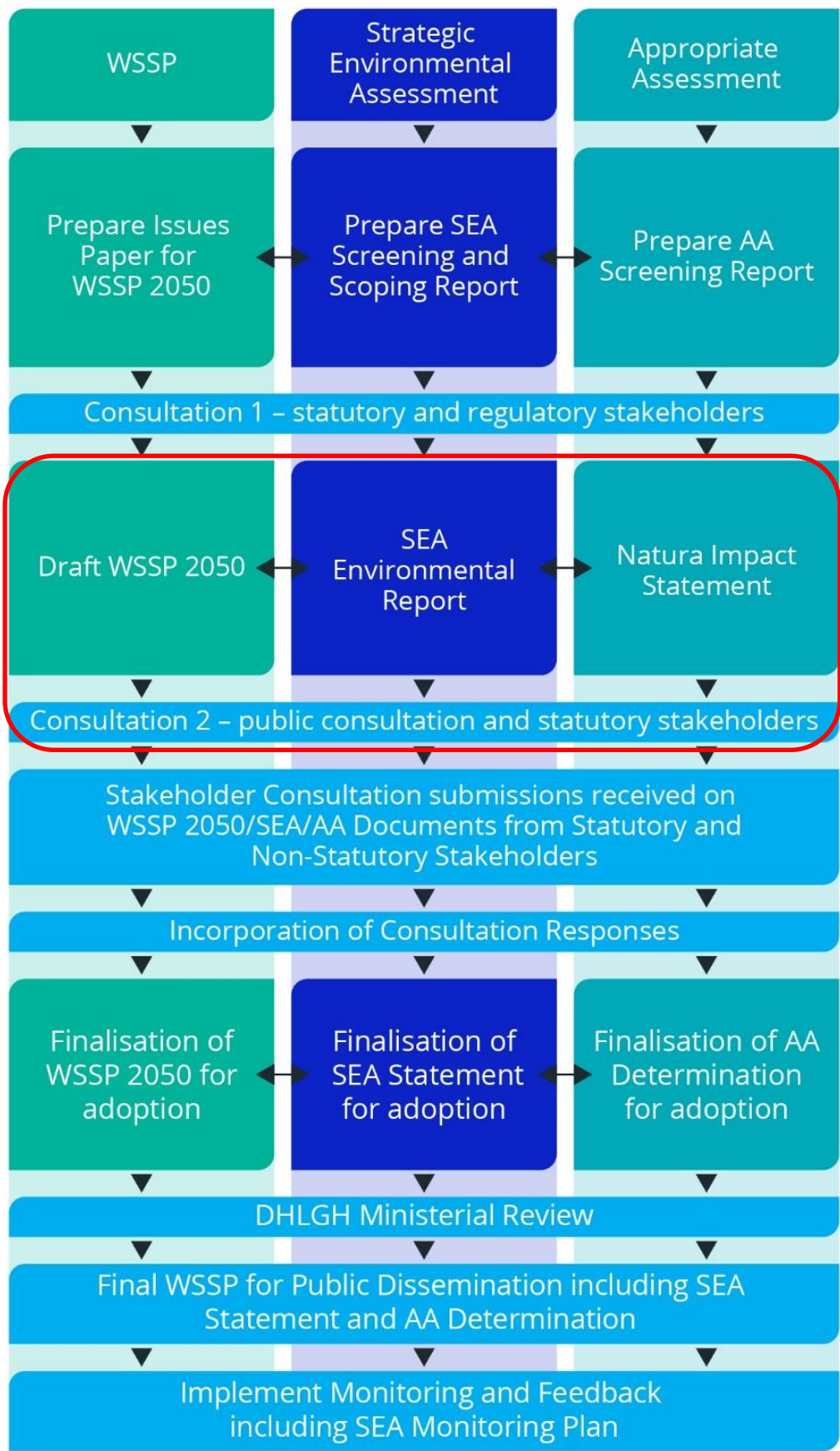
The Draft WSSP 2050 must meet the provisions of the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive, as indicated above, in addition to compliance with the SEA Directive. These directives have been transposed into Irish law by the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011) (as amended) (the Habitat Regulations).

Table 2-1 explains the work phases in the development of the Draft WSSP 2050. The first step in the AA process is to undertake an AA screening (see Sections 1.6 and 5) which was undertaken in phase 1. The screening was completed during the first phase of the WSSP 2050 development. The NIS is carried out and completed during phases 2 and 3. Diagram 2-1 explains the process in more detail including the consultation stages and post WSSP 2050 finalisation.

**Table 2-1: Work phases and consultations during the development of the WSSP 2050**

Phase	Plans/Reports	Consultation
1	Issues Paper, SEA Scoping Report, AA Screening Report	Key stakeholder consultation including the environmental authorities specified in the SEA Regulations, the stakeholders referred to in section 33(2) of the Water Services (No. 2) Act, 2013 (as amended) and Northern Ireland environmental authorities. <b>This consultation has been completed.</b>
2	Draft WSSP 2050, SEA Environmental Report, Natura Impact Statement	Public consultation and key and statutory stakeholders.
3	Final WSSP 2050, SEA Statement, Addendum to Natura Impact Statement (if required) and AA Determination	Plans/ Reports updated to address consultation feedback





**Diagram 2-1: Development of WSSP 2050 with the Environmental Assessments including NIS.**

## 3 The WSSP 2050

### 3.1 Overview

Uisce Éireann is responsible for the operation of all public water and wastewater services in Ireland. They are the custodian of Ireland's precious water resources, for current and future generations.

It is UÉ's responsibility to ensure that all their customers (households and businesses) receive a safe and secure supply of drinking water and have their wastewater collected, appropriately treated, and returned safely to the environment.

Uisce Éireann's vision is for:

**A sustainable Ireland where water is respected and protected, for the planet and all the lives it supports.**

Uisce Éireann have considered the possible long term future scenarios and challenges that are likely to emerge taking account of the global megatrends through their Vision 2050 study. As a result, they have developed four strategic objectives to address the key challenges.

<b>Safe and reliable drinking water</b>	We ensure the quality of our water supplies are safe, and we deliver a water service that customers, communities, and the broader economy can rely on.
<b>Support our customers, communities and the economy</b>	We strive to provide an excellent service to our customers, and work with our stakeholders to deliver aligned priorities and support sustainable growth.
<b>Protect and restore the environment</b>	We deliver a reliable water and wastewater service that protects the environment, and we support a healthy environment by enhancing habitats and ecosystems.
<b>Sustainable services fit for the future</b>	We make decisions for the long-term which enable us to adapt and ensure our assets remain resilient.

Accompanying the four **strategic objectives** are fourteen **strategic aims** that will help UÉ to address their most critical challenges, and ensure that they continue to deliver water services for the long term.

Underpinning the objectives and aims are 35 actions which define the activities UÉ will need to implement to collectively manage the challenges UÉ faces over the next 25 years.

As previously stated, this Draft WSSP 2050 is UÉ's long-term strategic plan, setting out their objectives to 2050 and the actions they will implement that will aim to deliver these objectives. The Draft WSSP 2050 is the second WSSP following on from WSSP 2015. It builds on the plans and programmes delivered under the WSSP 2015, as well as outlining new approaches and actions to deliver obligations under new legislation and to respond to policy shifts and emerging challenges. The Draft WSSP 2050 is being consulted on in 2024 and will be published in 2025.

### 3.2 Strategic Objectives

Further details of each of the strategic objectives and the 14 strategic aims is provided below. Table 3-1 lists the 35 key actions which represent the means to achieve the strategic objectives and aims.

#### 3.2.1 Strategic Objective 1: Safe and Reliable Drinking Water

Since the publication of the first WSSP in 2015, Uisce Éireann have made significant progress towards ensuring the availability of safe and reliable drinking water in Ireland. This includes the publication of the first National Water Resources Plan (NWRP), identifying how a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable water supply

whilst safeguarding the environment will be provided both now and into the future. The NWRP sits below the WSSP as a Tier 2 plan and explains how relevant objectives in the WSSP will be achieved. The NWRP comprises the NWRP Framework Plan and four regional plans.

Over the period to 2050, a set of strategic aims and actions have been defined to continue to supply safe and reliable drinking water. These strategic aims are:

<b>Safe and reliable drinking water</b>	<b>Ensuring safe drinking water:</b> We will manage the safety and quality of drinking water from source to tap to protect human health.
	<b>Delivering reliable water supplies:</b> We will improve our assets and sources to ensure our supplies are robust enough to meet our customers' needs at the target level of service.
	<b>Conserving our precious resources:</b> We will take pressure off our resources through leakage reduction and helping our customers to conserve water.

### 3.2.2 Strategic Objective 2: Supporting our Customers, Communities and the Economy

Since the publication of the first WSSP in 2015, Uisce Éireann has made significant progress in supporting its customers, communities and the economy. Uisce Éireann's approach is to put customers first, to make a difference in communities which can help achieve long-term goals through catchment-based approaches. These strategic aims, in addition, are designed to not only benefit Uisce Éireann but also to promote sustainable economic growth, making a positive impact locally and nationally.

To address some of the issues around supporting customers, community and the economy Uisce Éireann have defined a set of strategic aims and actions. These strategic aims are:

<b>Supporting our customers, communities and the economy</b>	<b>Delivering for customers:</b> We will put our customers at the heart of what we do and deliver on their needs.
	<b>Engaging with communities:</b> We will engage with communities at a local level to realise the value from our shared water resources.
	<b>Providing for growth:</b> We will manage the availability of capacity to support housing and the economy in line with national policy.

### 3.2.3 Strategic Objective 3: Protect and Restore our Environment

Since the publication of the first WSSP in 2015, Uisce Éireann has made significant progress in protecting and restoring the environment through improvements to existing and development of new infrastructure. The provision of water and wastewater services which not only avoid damaging but also enhance the environment is vital to safeguard the well-being of current and future generations.

To address some of the issues around biodiversity conservation and the environment Uisce Éireann have defined a set of strategic aims and actions to guide them. These strategic aims are:

<b>Protect and restore our environment</b>	<b>Protecting our water environment:</b> We will play our part in protecting and restoring our water environment.
	<b>Playing our part under the Water Framework Directive:</b> We will work with others to progressively deliver on Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives.
	<b>Contributing to positive biodiversity:</b> We will manage our assets to have biodiversity net gain.

### 3.2.4 Strategic Objective 4: Sustainable Services Fit for the Future

Ensuring sustainable water services is key to securing safe water and a protected environment for future generations. Uisce Éireann will aim to deliver sustainable water services by becoming a net zero carbon utility, maximising resource recovery and value from innovation and optimising asset lifecycle management. This will be underpinned by securing long-term funding.

To address some of the issues around sustainability, future uncertainty, data and resilience Uisce Éireann have defined a set of strategic aims and actions to guide them. These strategic aims are:

<b>Sustainable services fit for the future</b>	<b>Achieving net zero carbon:</b> We will progressively work towards achieving net zero carbon services.
	<b>Adopting circular approaches:</b> We manage our assets to maximise resource recovery and resource efficiency and minimise waste.
	<b>Managing our assets:</b> We will manage the risk and resilience of our services through best practice asset management.
	<b>Gaining value from innovation:</b> We will drive research and innovation to deliver value and meet future challenges.
	<b>Securing long-term funding:</b> We will work with our stakeholders to secure long-term funding for efficient and resilient services.

### 3.3 Strategic Aims and Actions

As stated above, each of the strategic objectives have a combined total of 14 strategic aims which address each component of the services UÉ provides. Underpinning the objectives and aims are 35 actions which outline the programme of work to be delivered. The actions outline the direction of travel and steps for UÉ over the next ten years to deliver on our long-term objectives. Table 3-1 outlines the strategic objectives, the strategic aims and the associated actions which comprise the Draft WSSP 2050.

**Table 3-1: Strategic Objectives, their Strategic Aims and the Actions that support them.**

Strategic Objectives	Strategic Aims	Actions
<b>1. Safe and reliable drinking water</b>	<b>1. Ensuring safe drinking water:</b> We will manage the safety and quality of drinking water from source to tap to protect human health.	<b>Action 1.1:</b> Undertake risk assessments across our supplies and implement appropriate measures to manage risk. <b>Action 1.2:</b> Conform with Drinking Water Directive and other legislative requirements relating to drinking water quality. <b>Action 1.3:</b> Coordinate catchment management measures and champion nature-based solutions for improving source water quality.
	<b>2. Delivering reliable water supplies:</b> We will improve our assets and sources to ensure our supplies are robust enough to meet our customers' needs at the target level of service.	<b>Action 1.4:</b> Implement and continue to review our National Water Resources Plan, delivering improvements in water supply infrastructure to ensure resilient supplies into the future. <b>Action 1.5:</b> Develop contingency plans to improve reliability of our water supplies. <b>Action 1.6:</b> Improve operational resilience through preventative measures and developing and implementing improved incident response processes.
	<b>3. Conserving our precious resources:</b> We will take pressure off our resources through leakage reduction and helping our customers to conserve water.	<b>Action 1.7:</b> Use less water through promoting water conservation to help customers reduce their use. <b>Action 1.8:</b> Use less water through developing and implementing an enhanced Water Stewardship Programme. <b>Action 1.9:</b> Lose less water through delivering leakage reduction.
<b>2. Supporting our customers, communities and the economy</b>	<b>4. Delivering for customers:</b> We will put our customers at the heart of what we do and deliver on their needs.	<b>Action 2.1:</b> Understand customer needs and expectations. <b>Action 2.2:</b> Enhance customer communications to address our customer expectations and provide real-time information on usage, incidents and water quality. <b>Action 2.3:</b> Support our customers to play their part in protecting water as a precious resource and enabling better water services.
	<b>5. Engaging with communities:</b> We will engage with communities at a local level to realise the value from our shared water resources.	<b>Action 2.4:</b> Develop a community education and engagement programme to raise awareness on the value of water and the water services we provide. <b>Action 2.5:</b> Continue to develop amenity value in our assets with local communities, where safe and appropriate.
	<b>6. Providing for growth:</b> We will manage the availability of capacity to support housing and the economy in line with national policy.	<b>Action 2.6:</b> Engage and collaborate with key stakeholders to support national, regional and local planning policy. <b>Action 2.7:</b> Engage with housing and industry stakeholders to support delivery of new homes and economic growth. <b>Action 2.8:</b> Develop and embed demand analysis capability to inform, forecast and plan for future investment requirements.
<b>3. Protect and restore our environment</b>	<b>7. Protecting our water environment:</b> We will play our part in protecting and restoring our water environment.	<b>Action 3.1:</b> Work with regulators and stakeholders to develop a Wastewater Strategy Framework. <b>Action 3.2:</b> Develop and implement Integrated Urban Wastewater Management Plans. <b>Action 3.3:</b> Ensure sustainable abstractions and manage water treatment residuals.
	<b>8. Playing our part under the Water Framework Directive:</b> We will work with others to progressively deliver on Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives.	<b>Action 3.4:</b> Protect and restore water bodies through collaboration. <b>Action 3.5:</b> Manage wastewater services throughout the asset lifecycle to achieve regulatory requirements. <b>Action 3.6:</b> Manage water services throughout the asset lifecycle to achieve regulatory requirements.
	<b>9. Contributing to positive biodiversity:</b> We will manage our assets to have biodiversity net gain.	<b>Action 3.7:</b> Manage our assets to have biodiversity 'net gain'. <b>Action 3.8:</b> Champion nature-based solutions and catchment measures in the delivery of water and wastewater projects.

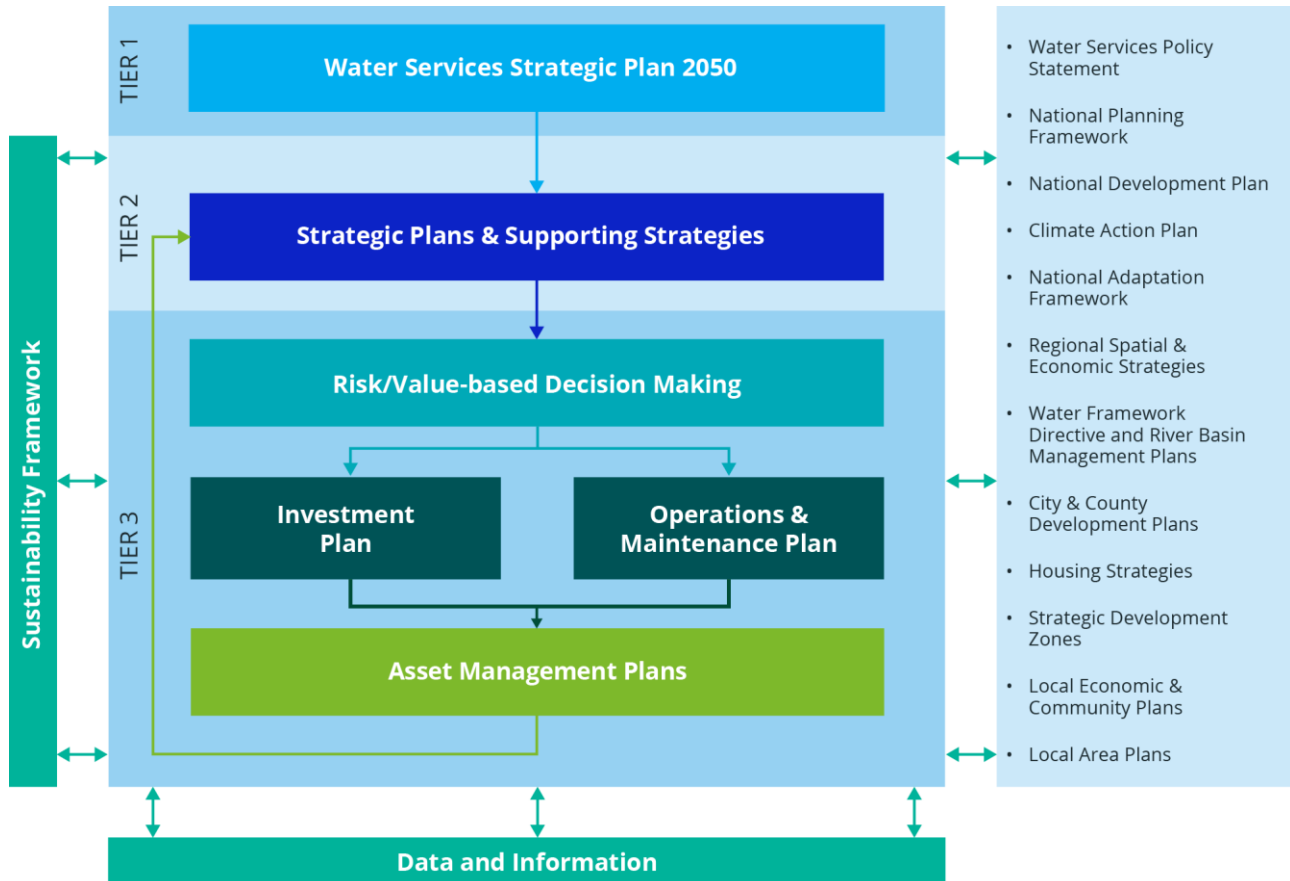


Strategic Objectives	Strategic Aims	Actions
<b>4. Sustainable services fit for the future</b>	<b>10. Achieving net zero carbon:</b> We will progressively work towards achieving net zero carbon services.	<b>Action 4.1:</b> Develop and implement a Net Zero Road Map. <b>Action 4.2:</b> Work with our supply chain to embed sustainability in the delivery of water and wastewater infrastructure.
	<b>11. Adopting circular approaches:</b> We manage our assets to maximise resource recovery and resource efficiency and minimise waste.	<b>Action 4.3:</b> Review and implement the National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan. <b>Action 4.4:</b> Maximise circular economy benefits.
	<b>12. Managing our assets:</b> We will manage the risk and resilience of our services through best practice asset management.	<b>Action 4.5:</b> Manage activities on our assets in a coordinated manner across their full lifecycle, with the aim of achieving ISO 55000 certification. <b>Action 4.6:</b> Ensure risk and value-based decision making across the lifecycle of assets.
	<b>13. Gaining value from innovation:</b> We will drive research and innovation to deliver value and meet future challenges.	<b>Action 4.7:</b> Develop a culture of innovation in the water services sector to enable a sustainable future. <b>Action 4.8:</b> Continue to develop foresight and horizon scanning capability.
	<b>14. Securing long-term funding:</b> We will work with our stakeholders to secure long-term funding for efficient and resilient services.	<b>Action 4.9:</b> Quantify and articulate long-term investment needs for our water and wastewater assets. <b>Action 4.10:</b> Secure multi-annual funding approach.



### 3.4 Implementation

The WSSP 2050 sets the overarching framework for subsequent more detailed implementation plans. The relationship of this (Tier 1) Water Services Strategic Plan to the (Tier 2) implementation plans, and the future (Tier 3) plans is illustrated in Figure 9.1 with their relationship to national and local policies and strategies included.



**Figure 9.1 Relationship of this Tier 1 WSSP to Tier 2 Strategic Plans, Supporting Strategies and more detailed implementation plans and their relationship to national and local policies and strategies.**

Uisce Éireann (UÉ) outlines its long-term objectives and their strategic direction of travel to achieve them in the Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP). The approach to achieve them is detailed through Tier 2 plans such as the National Water Resources Plan, which ensures water supply resilience over 25 years. The National Wastewater Strategy Framework will serve a similar purpose for wastewater management. These plans are supported by additional strategies, such as the National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan and the Biodiversity Action Plan. Both the plans and strategies are subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment, including public consultation.

The WSSP and Tier 2 plans inform the Tier 3 plans, including capital projects and programmes for 5-year regulatory periods. Due to funding limitations, these plans are prioritised to align with government policies outlined in the Water Services Policy Statement (WSPS).

#### 3.4.1 Monitoring and reporting

Uisce Éireann is closely monitored and regulated to ensure accountability and performance. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage oversees the water sector, while UÉ's operations and investments are regulated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Uisce Éireann reports on various performance metrics to the CRU and engages in a statutory stakeholder engagement process for its Capital Investment Plan, which is also subject to public

consultation. The EPA ensures compliance with water standards and publishes annual reports on drinking water quality and wastewater treatment, highlighting areas requiring improvement.

In addition to regulatory reporting, UÉ's performance is documented in their annual report. This report provides insights into the organisation's performance against established metrics. In 2026, this will include the first reporting under the Corporate Sustainability Directive (EU 2022/2464) ('CSRD'), for the financial year 2025, which will provide information on how sustainability matters affect the company and the impact of the company's activities on the environment and people. Monitoring of environmental outcomes will also be undertaken as required under the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) regulations and in accordance with the draft Monitoring Plan provided in Table 9.2 of the SEA Environmental Report.





## 4 Ecological Baseline/Site Overview

Ireland is home to 28 species of land mammal, over 400 species of birds, more than 4,000 plant species and over 12,000 species of insect (NPWS, 2023c). Ireland aims to conserve habitats and species, through designation of conservation areas under European and national legislation. The Natura 2000 network comprises:

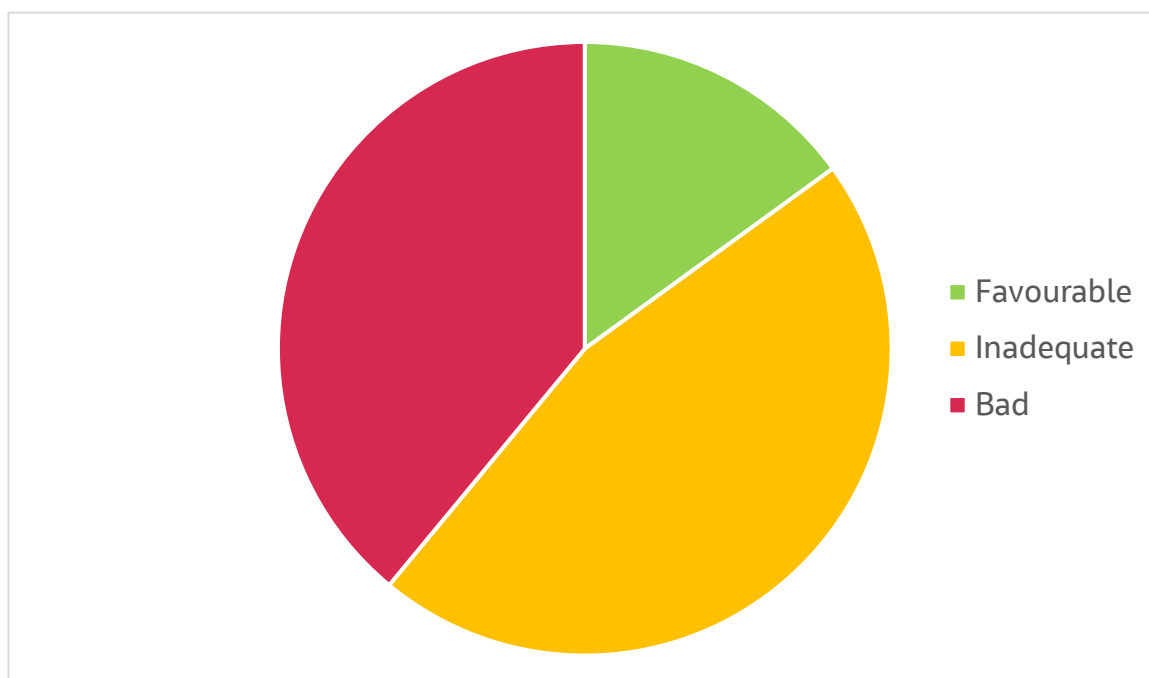
- 441 SACs, and;
- 166 SPAs.

In addition to these, the Northern Ireland National Site Network<sup>3</sup> comprises 58 SACs and 18 SPAs (including two proposed SPAs (pSPAs)).

The locations of these sites can be seen in Figure 1.

### Special Areas of Conservation

The 441 SACs (Figure 1) support 59 habitats (Table 4-1) and 24 species<sup>4</sup> (Table 4-2). The most common habitats designated are bogs and heaths of various types. Conservation status information (NPWS, 2019a) indicates that the majority of habitats are in inadequate (46%) or bad (39%) condition. Furthermore, whilst 55% of habitats had a stable or improving trend, 46% had a declining trend (NPWS, 2019a). Eighteen habitats (31% were in both a bad condition and showed a declining trend. This included marine, freshwater, grassland and bog habitats.

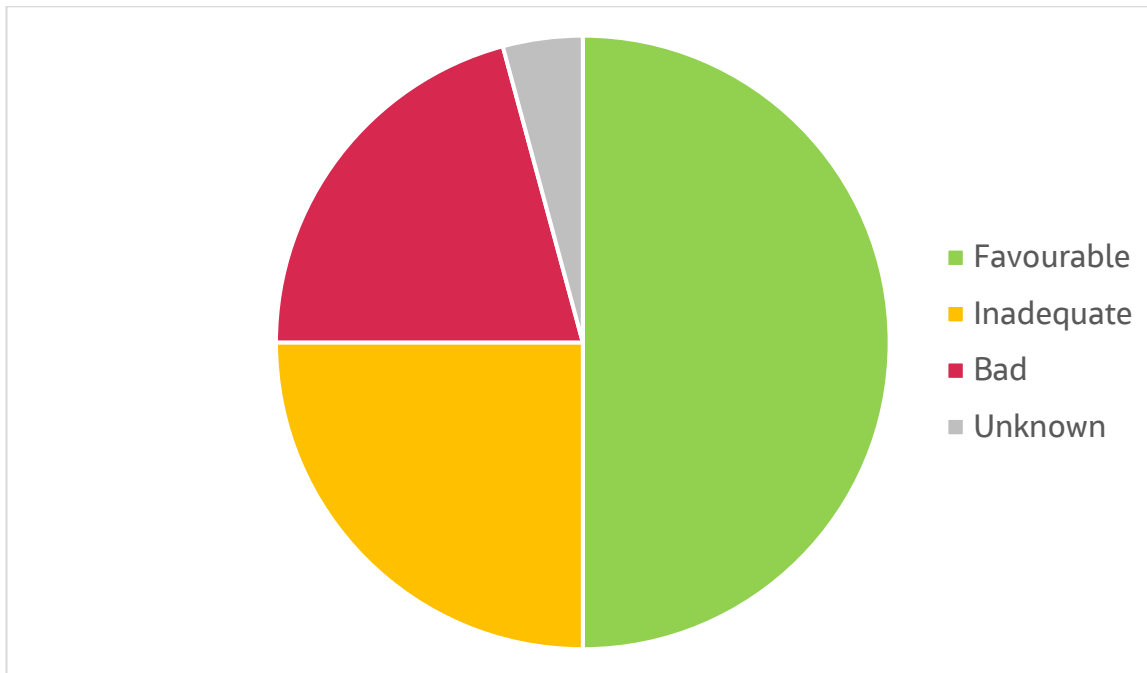


**Diagram 4-1: Condition status of SAC habitats.**

The condition status of species appears to be better with 50% in a favourable condition and 21% in a bad condition. Furthermore, 67% of the species had a stable or improving trend. However, three species – freshwater pearl mussel, Geyer’s whorl snail, white-clawed crayfish (all species of freshwater habitats) – were in a bad condition and showed a declining trend.

<sup>3</sup> As a result of the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the EU the network of European protected sites is now known as “National Site Network” in Northern Ireland, as well as the rest of the UK.

<sup>4</sup> Due to taxonomic changes the number of species has been reduced from 25 to 24. although not all relevant documentation has been updated. See Table 4-2 for more details.



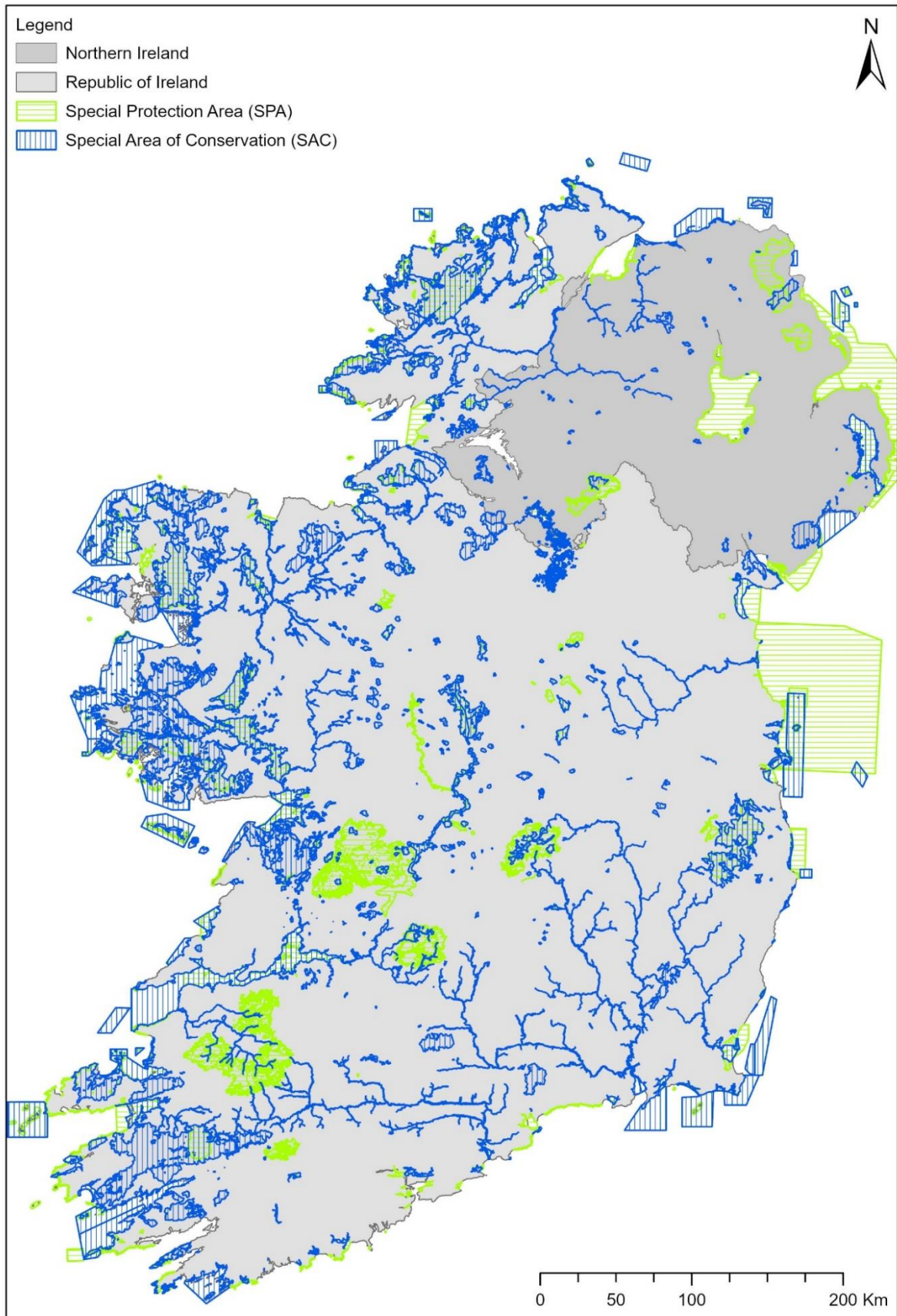
**Diagram 4-2: condition status of SAC species**

Information on water dependency of habitats and species features is taken from Mayes (2008). The majority of the habitat features (75%) are dependent on (supported by) groundwater, surface water and/or marine water. 12% of habitats are solely dependent on groundwater whilst 47% are at least partly dependent on it, with water also coming from the surface and/or marine sources. No habitats are solely dependent on surface water but 32% are at least partly dependent on it. While 24% of habitats are dependent on marine sources only. Thus, a large proportion of protected habitats are susceptible to impacts resulting from water management operations.

Impacts to these water sources, such as by abstraction or release of pollutants, could have an effect on these features. Even those features which are not directly dependent on these water sources, such as lowland hay meadows, will be reliant on precipitation and, furthermore, could be affected through infrastructure development.

Of the 24 species features of the SACs, 21 (88%) are assessed as being dependent on the various types of water sources. This included two species for whom information had not been provided in Mayes (2008) but was available through other sources; the Killarney shad is endemic to a single lake (Lough Leane) whilst the slender green feather moss is found in upland transitional flushes and wet lowland sedge meadows and fens (Campbell et al., 2013) – see also Table 4-2. Thus, a large proportion of SAC species could be susceptible to impacts resulting from water management operations.

As a result, it is calculated that 88% of SACs in Ireland are in some way dependent on groundwater, surface water or marine water, or a combination of them through either the habitats or the species they support. These sites could be susceptible to impacts as a result of a range of water management operations.



**Figure 1: Distribution of European Sites on the Island of Ireland**

**Table 4-1: Protected SAC Habitats in Ireland, the number of sites in which they occur (Count) and their Status (Condition and Trend). Water dependency (Mayes, 2008) is GW (groundwater), MW marine water), SW (surface water). - is used where there is no specified water dependency. \* denotes priority habitats.**

Habitat	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
<b>Marine, coastal and halophytic habitats</b>				
1170 Reefs	48	Inadequate	Stable	MW
1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	43	Inadequate	Declining	MW
1330 Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> )	41	Inadequate	Declining	GW, MW
1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks	36	Inadequate	Stable	MW
1410 Mediterranean salt meadows ( <i>Juncetalia maritimi</i> )	35	Inadequate	Declining	GW, MW
1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic Coasts	34	Inadequate	Stable	MW
1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines	28	Inadequate	Declining	MW
1150 Coastal lagoons	25	Bad	Declining	SW, GW, MW
1310 <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonizing mud and sand	25	Favourable	Stable	MW
1160 Large shallow inlets and bays	22	Bad	Declining	SW, MW
1130 Estuaries	19	Inadequate	Declining	SW, MW
1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time	4	Favourable	Stable	MW
1420 Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs ( <i>Sarcocornetea fruticosi</i> )	2	Bad	Declining	MW
1180 Submarine structures made by leaking gases	1	Favourable	Stable	-
<b>Coastal sand dunes and continental dunes</b>				
2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ("white dunes")	47	Inadequate	Stable	MW
2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")	46	Bad	Declining	MW

Habitat	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
2110 Embryonic shifting dunes	39	Inadequate	Stable	MW
2190 Humid dune slacks	23	Inadequate	Declining	GW, MW
21A0 Machairs (* in Ireland)	22	Inadequate	Stable	SW, GW, MW
2170 Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> ( <i>Salicion arenariae</i> )	13	Inadequate	Stable	MW, GW
2150 Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes ( <i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i> )	11	Inadequate	Stable	MW
2140 Decalcified fixed dunes with <i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	5	Favourable	Stable	MW
<b>Freshwater habitats</b>				
3180 Turloughs	45	Inadequate	Stable	SW, GW
3110 Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains ( <i>Littorelletalia uniflorae</i> )	28	Bad	Stable	SW, GW
3130 Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or of the <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i>	23	Inadequate	Stable	SW, GW
3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation	21	Inadequate	Declining	SW, GW
3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp.	19	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
3160 Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds	10	Inadequate	Stable	SW, GW
3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> - type vegetation	9	Inadequate	Stable	SW, GW
3270 Rivers with muddy banks with <i>Chenopodion rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidention</i> p.p. vegetation	7	Favourable	Stable	SW, GW
<b>Temperate heath and scrub</b>				
4030 European dry heaths	59	Bad	Stable	-
4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	45	Bad	Declining	GW

Habitat	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths	35	Bad	Improving	-
<b>Sclerophyllous scrub (matorral)</b>				
5130 <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands	23	Favourable	Stable	-
<b>Natural and semi-natural grassland formations</b>				
6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates ( <i>Festuco-Brometalia</i> ) (* important orchid sites)	38	Bad	Declining	-
6410 <i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> )	17	Bad	Declining	GW
6230 Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands, on silicious substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas in Continental Europe)	12	Bad	Declining	-
6510 Lowland hay meadows ( <i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> , <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i> )	11	Bad	Declining	-
6430 Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels	6	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
6130 Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Violetalia calaminariae</i>	5	Inadequate	Declining	-
<b>Raised bogs and mires and fens</b>				
7150 Depressions on peat substrates of the <i>Rhynchosporion</i>	63	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
7120 Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	62	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
7110 Active raised bogs	55	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
7130 Blanket bogs (* if active bog)	55	Bad	Declining	GW
7230 Alkaline fens	39	Bad	Declining	GW
7220 Petrifying springs with tufa formation ( <i>Cratoneurion</i> )	21	Inadequate	Declining	GW
7140 Transition mires and quaking bogs	20	Bad	Stable	SW, GW



Habitat	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
7210 Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i>	17	Inadequate	Stable	GW
<b>Rocky habitats and caves</b>				
8240 Limestone pavements	25	Inadequate	Stable	-
8220 Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	18	Inadequate	Stable	-
8210 Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	14	Inadequate	Stable	-
8110 Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels ( <i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i> )	14	Inadequate	Stable	-
8330 Submerged or partially submerged sea caves	12	Favourable	Stable	MW
8310 Caves not open to the public	9	Favourable	Stable	GW
8120 Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels ( <i>Thlaspietea rotundifolii</i> )	3	Inadequate	Stable	-
<b>Forests</b>				
91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles	39	Bad	Declining	-
91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ( <i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i> )	28	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
91D0 Bog woodland	12	Favourable	Stable	GW
91J0 <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles	5	Bad	Stable	-

**Table 4-2: Protected SAC Species in Ireland, the number of sites in which they occur (Count) and their Status (Condition and Trend). Water dependency (Mayes, 2008) is GW (groundwater), MW marine water), SW (surface water). - is used where there is no specified water dependency.**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
<b>Invertebrates: Molluscs</b>					
1029 Freshwater pearl mussel / Nore pearl mussel <sup>5</sup>	<i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>	19	Bad	Declining	SW
1014 Narrow-mouthed whorl snail	<i>Vertigo angustior</i>	13	Inadequate	Declining	GW
1013 Geyer's whorl snail	<i>Vertigo geyeri</i>	13	Bad	Declining	GW
1016 Desmoulin's whorl Snail	<i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>	8	Inadequate	Declining	SW, GW
1024 Kerry slug	<i>Geomalacus maculosus</i>	7	Favourable	Improving	-
<b>Invertebrates: Arthropods</b>					
1092 White-clawed crayfish	<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	15	Bad	Declining	SW, GW
1065 Marsh fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	12	Inadequate	Improving	-
<b>Vertebrates: Fish</b>					
1106 Atlantic salmon	<i>Salmo salar</i>	26	Inadequate	Stable	SW, MW
1095 Sea lamprey	<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>	12	Bad	Stable	SW, MW
1096 Brook lamprey	<i>Lampetra planeri</i>	10	Favourable	Stable	SW
1099 River lamprey	<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	10	Unknown	Unknown	SW
1103 Twaite shad	<i>Alosa fallax</i>	4	Bad	Stable	SW, MW
5046 Killarney shad	<i>Alosa killarnensis</i>	1	Favourable	Stable	No information <sup>1</sup>
<b>Vertebrates: Mammals</b>					
1355 Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	45	Favourable	Improving	SW, MW

<sup>5</sup> Genetic research has placed the Nore population within the freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) taxon. The relevant SAC (River Barrow and River Nore SAC) is also designated for freshwater pearl mussel.



Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
1303 Lesser horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>	42	Inadequate	Declining	-
1365 Harbour seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	13	Favourable	Stable	MW
1364 Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	10	Favourable	Improving	MW
1349 Common bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	5	Favourable	Stable	MW
1351 Harbour porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	3	Favourable	Stable	MW
<b>Lower Plants</b>					
1395 Petalwort	<i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>	21	Favourable	Stable	GW
6216 Slender green feather-moss	<i>Hamatocaulis vernicosus</i>	9	Favourable	Stable	No information <sup>2</sup>
<b>Higher Plants</b>					
1833 Slender naiad	<i>Najas flexilis</i>	24	Inadequate	Declining	SW
1421 Killarney fern	<i>Trichomanes speciosum</i>	18	Favourable	Stable	SW
1528 Marsh saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>	6	Favourable	Stable	GW

<sup>1</sup> Although there is no information for Killarney shad, SAC details indicate that it would be freshwater (SW) dependent.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is no information for slender green feather-moss Campbell et al. (2013) indicate that the species occurs in mesotrophic fens and it is therefore assumed to be GW and SW dependent.

## Special Protection Areas

There are 166 SPAs in Ireland which support a wide range of bird species (Table 4-3). Condition status has not been assessed for these species and as a result their Red, Amber or Green conservation status according to the *Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 4: 2020–2026* (BoCCI4) (Gilbert et al., 2021) has been used as a proxy. Twenty-five of the 72 individual species are on the Red list (the highest conservation priority) with another 41 (57%) on the Amber list.

Of the 166 sites 98 (59%) support at least one Red listed species with the remaining sites (41%) supporting at least one Amber listed species; no SPAs support only Green listed species. Additionally, for 66 of the 166 SPAs the presence of wetlands has contributed to their selection as SPAs (NPWS, 2023b).

**Table 4-3: Protected SPA Species in Ireland, the number of sites in which they occur (Count) and their Status (BoCCI4 listing).**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
<b>Auks</b>			
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	12	Amber
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	11	Red
Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	10	Red
<b>Boobies &amp; Gannets</b>			
Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	3	Amber
<b>Cormorants &amp; Shags</b>			
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	23	Amber
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> <sup>6</sup>	15	Amber
<b>Crows</b>			
Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	18	Amber
<b>Divers</b>			
Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	7	Amber
Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	5	Amber
Black-throated diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	1	Amber
<b>Ducks, Geese &amp; Swans</b>			
Greenland white-fronted goose	<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>	29	Amber
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i> <sup>7</sup>	25	Amber
Light-bellied brent goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	24	Amber
Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	22	Amber
Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	22	Amber
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	21	Amber

<sup>6</sup> Now known as *Gulosus aristotelis*

<sup>7</sup> Now known as *Mareca penelope*

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	17	Amber
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i> <sup>8</sup>	15	Red
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	11	Amber
Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	11	Amber
Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	10	Amber
Common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	9	Red
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	9	Amber
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	8	Amber
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	6	Red
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	6	Red
Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	5	Red
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	4	Amber
Bewick's swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i>	3	Red
Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	1	Red
<b>Falcons</b>			
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	10	Green
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	7	Amber
<b>Grebes</b>			
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	9	Amber
Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	6	Green
Slavonian grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1	Red
<b>Gull &amp; Terns</b>			
Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	22	Amber
Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	20	Amber
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	19	Amber
Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	18	Red
Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	17	Amber
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	15	Amber
Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	14	Amber
Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	9	Amber
Sandwich tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	9	Amber

<sup>8</sup> Now known as *Spatula clypeata*

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	5	Amber
Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	1	Green
Little gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	1	Amber
<b>Herons, Storks &amp; Ibises</b>			
Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	4	Green
<b>Kingfishers</b>			
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	2	Amber
<b>Kites, Hawks &amp; Eagles</b>			
Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	8	Amber
<b>Oystercatchers</b>			
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	16	Red
<b>Petrels &amp; Shearwaters</b>			
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	18	Amber
Storm petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	11	Amber
Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	6	Amber
Leach's storm-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	1	Red
<b>Plovers</b>			
Golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	36	Red
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	23	Red
Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	21	Red
Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	15	Amber
<b>Rails, Crakes &amp; Coots</b>			
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	12	Amber
Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>	10	Red
<b>Sandpipers, Snipes &amp; Phalaropes</b>			
Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	25	Red
Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	24	Red
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	23	Red
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	21	Red
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	19	Red
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	15	Green
Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	13	Red

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	11	Amber
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina schinzii</i>	6	Red
Purple sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	4	Red
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	3	Green

## Conservation Objectives

The NPWS have developed generic or specific conservation objectives for all European Sites. Site-specific conservation objectives aim to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at a site. The maintenance of habitats and species within the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition contributes to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

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.

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.

## Northern Ireland National Site Network

There are 58 SACs in Northern Ireland and 18 SPAs. This includes the North Channel cSAC designated for harbour porpoise which was submitted to the European Commission as candidate SACs in January 2017 and designated as an SAC in February 2019. The most common habitats are active raised bogs (H7110), old oak woods (H91A0) and blanket bogs (H7130). Conservation Status information (JNCC, 2024a) indicates that all habitats were classed as being Unfavourable (either Bad or Inadequate) (Table 4-4). Furthermore, 24% show a Deteriorating trend in Conservation Status; 39% were Stable whilst 26% were Improving (11% were unknown).

**The condition status of SAC species (JNCC, 2024b) appears to be better with three of the 12 species in a Favourable condition (marsh saxifrage, otter and grey seal see**

Table 4-5). Seven of the species were in an Unfavourable condition (either Unfavourable-Bad or Unfavourable-Inadequate); while two species are of an Unknown Conservation Status (harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin). Four of the species showed a Deteriorating conservation trend whilst five were Stable or Improving including all those in a Favourable condition. It should be noted that conservation status/trend information was reported at the UK scale for both habitats and species and the specific Conservation Status of features within Northern Ireland may differ slightly.

74% of SAC habitats were at least partly dependent on ground, marine and/or surface water with 48% at least partly dependent on ground and/or surface water. 26% of habitats were not specifically dependent on such water sources including some woodland, grassland and rocky habitats.

All but one of the SAC species were at least partly dependent on ground, marine and/or surface water with seven species at least partly dependent and/or ground or surface water.

The 18 SPAs, including the East Coast Marine pSPA and Carlingford Marine pSPA, support 54 bird species (Table 4-6). Nineteen of the species are Red list species with 32 Amber listed; only three species are on the Green list. Of the 18 SPAs, nine support at least one Red listed species whilst the other nine support at least one Amber listed species. No SPAs support only Green listed species.



**Table 4-4: Protected SAC Habitats in Northern Ireland, the number of sites in which they occur (Count) and their Status (Condition and Trend). Water dependency (Mayes, 2008) is GW (groundwater), MW (marine water), SW (surface water) – is used where there is no specified water dependency.**

Habitat	Count	Condition Status	Trend	Water Dependency
<b>Marine, coastal and halophytic habitats</b>				
1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Unknown	MW
1330 Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> )	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	GW, MW
1170 Reefs	3	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Unknown	MW
1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines	3	Unfavourable - Bad	Unknown	MW
1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Unknown	MW
1150 Coastal lagoons	1	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Stable	SW, GW, MW
1160 Large shallow inlets and bays	1	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Stable	SW, MW
1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	MW
1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic Coasts	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	MW
1310 <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonizing mud and sand	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Unknown	MW
<b>Coastal sand dunes and continental dunes</b>				
2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ("white dunes")	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	MW
2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	MW
2110 Embryonic shifting dunes	3	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	MW
2170 Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> ( <i>Salicion arenariae</i> )	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	MW, GW
2150 Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes ( <i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i> )	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	MW
2190 Humid dune slacks	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	GW, MW

Habitat	Count	Condition Status	Trend	Water Dependency
<b>Freshwater habitats</b>				
3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachion</i> vegetation	5	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	SW, GW
3160 Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	SW, GW
3130 Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the <i>Littorelletea uniflorae</i> and/or of the <i>Isoeto-Nanojuncetea</i>	3	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	SW, GW
3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> - type vegetation	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	SW, GW
3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp.	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	SW, GW
3180 Turloughs	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	SW, GW
<b>Temperate heath and scrub</b>				
4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	5	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	GW
4030 European dry heaths	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	-
4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	-
<b>Natural and semi-natural grassland formations</b>				
6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates ( <i>Festuco-Brometalia</i> ) (* important orchid sites)	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	-
6230 Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands, on silicious substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas in Continental Europe)	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	-
6410 <i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> )	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	GW
6150 Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	-



Habitat	Count	Condition Status	Trend	Water Dependency
<b>Raised bogs and mires and fens</b>				
7110 Active raised bogs	15	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	SW, GW
7130 Blanket bogs (* if active bog)	8	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	GW
7230 Alkaline fens	4	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	GW
7140 Transition mires and quaking bogs	3	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	SW, GW
7120 Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	SW, GW
7210 Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i>	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	GW
7220 Petrifying springs with tufa formation ( <i>Cratoneurion</i> )	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	GW
<b>Rocky habitats and caves</b>				
8110 Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels ( <i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i> )	2	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Improving	-
8220 Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	2	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Stable	-
8330 Submerged or partially submerged sea caves	2	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Stable	MW
8120 Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels ( <i>Thlaspietea rotundifolii</i> )	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	-
8210 Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	-
8240 Limestone pavements	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Improving	-
<b>Forests</b>				
91A0 Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles	13	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	-
91D0 Bog woodland	3	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Improving	GW

Habitat	Count	Condition Status	Trend	Water Dependency
91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ( <i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i> )	3	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	SW, GW
9180 <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines	2	Unfavourable - Bad	Stable	-

Table 4-5: Protected SAC Species in Northern Ireland, the number of sites in which they occur (Count) and their Status (Condition and Trend). Water dependency (Mayes, 2008) is GW (groundwater), MW marine water), SW (surface water). - is used where there is no specified water dependency.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	Condition	Trend	Water Dependency
<b>Invertebrates: Molluscs</b>					
1029 Freshwater pearl mussel	<i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	SW
1014 Narrow-mouthed whorl snail	<i>Vertigo angustior</i>	1	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Deteriorating	GW
<b>Invertebrates: Arthropods</b>					
1065 Marsh fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	5	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Stable	-
1092 White-clawed crayfish	<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	SW, GW
<b>Vertebrates: Fish</b>					
1106 Atlantic salmon	<i>Salmo salar</i>	5	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Stable	SW, MW
<b>Vertebrates: Mammals</b>					
1355 Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	6	Favourable	Stable	SW, MW
1365 Harbour seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	4	Unfavourable - Inadequate	Unknown	MW
1351 Harbour porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	3	Unknown	Unknown	MW
1364 Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	2	Favourable	Improving	MW
1349 Common bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	1	Unknown	Unknown	MW
<b>Lower Plants</b>					
1395 Petalwort	<i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>	1	Unfavourable - Bad	Deteriorating	GW
<b>Higher Plants</b>					
1528 Marsh saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>	3	Favourable	Stable	GW

**Table 4-6: Protected SPA Species in Northern Ireland, the number of sites in which they occur (Count) and their Status (BoCCI4 listing).**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
<b>Auks</b>			
Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	1	Amber
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	1	Amber
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	1	Red
Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	1	Red
<b>Cormorants &amp; Shags</b>			
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2	Amber
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> <sup>9</sup>	1	Amber
<b>Crows</b>			
Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	1	Amber
<b>Divers</b>			
Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	2	Amber
<b>Ducks, Geese &amp; Swans</b>			
Light-bellied brent goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	7	Amber
Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	3	Red
Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	3	Amber
Bewick's swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i>	2	Red
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	2	Amber
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2	Amber
Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2	Amber
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	2	Amber
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	2	Amber
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i> <sup>10</sup>	2	Amber
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	1	Amber
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	1	Red
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1	Red
Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	1	Amber
Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	1	Red
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i> <sup>11</sup>	1	Red

<sup>9</sup> Now known as *Gulosus aristotelis*

<sup>10</sup> Now known as *Mareca penelope*

<sup>11</sup> Now known as *Spatula clypeata*<sup>7</sup>

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1	Amber
<b>Falcons</b>			
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1	Green
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1	Amber
<b>Grebes</b>			
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	4	Amber
Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	Green
<b>Gull &amp; Terns</b>			
Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	7	Amber
Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	5	Amber
Sandwich tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	5	Amber
Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	1	Amber
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	1	Amber
Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	1	Red
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1	Amber
Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	1	Amber
<b>Kites, Hawks &amp; Eagles</b>			
Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	2	Amber
<b>Oystercatchers</b>			
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	2	Red
<b>Petrels &amp; Shearwaters</b>			
Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	2	Amber
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	1	Amber
<b>Plovers</b>			
Golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	3	Red
Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	2	Red
Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	2	Amber
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1	Red
<b>Rails, Crakes &amp; Coots</b>			
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	1	Amber
<b>Sandpipers, Snipes &amp; Phalaropes</b>			
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	4	Red

Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	BoCCI4 List
Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	2	Red
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	2	Red
Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	2	Red
Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	1	Red
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	1	Red
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1	Green
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	1	Amber



## 5 Summary of Stage 1 AA Screening

The AA Screening report (see Appendix A) identified that Uisce Éireann as a public authority is required under the Habitat Regulations to screen all of their plans and projects and that the Draft WSSP 2050 was therefore subject to the requirements of the Regulations.

It was also noted that the Draft WSSP 2050 is not directly connected to or necessary to the management of any European Site.

The AA Screening report concluded that LSEs were possible as a result of the Draft WSSP 2050. The report identified that the Draft WSSP 2050 will not itself, being a high-level plan, result in LSEs. However, the types of activities that UÉ will be responsible for during and resulting from the implementation of the Draft WSSP 2050 may do.

The report also categorised the activities of UÉ that the Draft WSSP 2050 will support into two broad groups and further considered specific activities and impacts pathways. These impact pathways are also considered further in this AA, in Section 6.3.

Given the strategic nature of the Draft WSSP 2050 and the current stage of its preparation at the time of the AA Screening Report, it was concluded that all European Sites across Ireland and Northern Ireland were required to be screened in as, in the absence of more detailed information on the Draft WSSP 2050, the precautionary principle must be applied.

It was therefore concluded that, in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, a Stage 2 AA of the Draft WSSP 2050 would be required.



## 6 Appropriate Assessment

### 6.1 Introduction

The AA identifies and examines the implications of the Draft WSSP 2050 for the sites and features in Ireland previously identified as well as potential implications for sites in Northern Ireland where it is identified in the AA that they are functionally linked. The AA is undertaken in-combination with other plans. The full list of plans is presented in Section 7. Given the strategic nature of the Draft WSSP 2050 consideration has been given to only other plans on a similarly strategic scale.

This AA examines and assesses the strategic objectives, strategic aims and the actions associated with them against the European Sites identified in Section 4 (Ecological Baseline/Site Overview). The AA also takes into account Uisce Éireann's obligation to comply with all environmental legislation and government policies. As stated above in Section 5, all European Sites across Ireland and Northern Ireland are included in this AA.

### 6.2 Approach to this Assessment

#### 6.2.1 General Approach

The Draft WSSP 2050 is a long-term strategic plan to support growth, protect the environment and deliver resilient water services for Uisce Éireann customers for the next 25 years. It will influence the future provision of water and wastewater services in Ireland through the development and implementation of other, lower tiered plans. The actual or likely effects of implementing the Draft WSSP 2050, especially in the absence of detailed proposals that will necessarily follow adoption of the Plan, are inevitably uncertain. It is, however, conceivable that the lower tier plans could have an effect on European Sites, including transboundary effects, although it is not possible to say where, when or how these effects may occur. This is due to the wide scope of the Draft WSSP 2050 and its position in the planning hierarchy.

Projects that may flow from the provisions of the Draft WSSP 2050 will be subject to detailed, statutory assessment for their effects on European Sites, and will only be permitted if they meet the first two tests of the Habitats Regulations. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to delegate consideration of the effects of plans on European Sites to lower tier plan and/or project assessment level, or to rely solely on a general policy in a plan to protect European Sites.

The assessment also takes into account guidance provided in Tyldesley and Associates (2015) in which general policy statements are concluded as having no conceivable effects as they set out a strategic aspiration on a certain issue. Any projects or plans referred to within the Draft WSSP 2050 but not proposed by the Plan can also not be assessed; for instance, plans where the Draft WSSP 2050 plays no role in their delivery. This does not exclude plans which form part of the in-combination assessment, however. Elements of the Draft WSSP 2050 that are intended to protect the natural environment can also normally be concluded as having no adverse effects although there may conceivably be situations where improvements to the natural environment may have unintended consequences.

In undertaking this AA, three main steps were followed:

- Impact Prediction
- Assessment of Effects
- Mitigation Measures

#### 6.2.2 In-Combination Assessment

As indicated above, the AA is undertaken in-combination with other plans as well as 'within-plan' in-combination effects. The assessment of in-combination effects for this AA focused on potential effects between elements of the Draft WSSP 2050 and other plans. As the Draft WSSP 2050 is a high-level plan it



does not determine the precise location of any development or intervention. It is likely that a further assessment of in-combination effects will be required to be undertaken as lower tier plans and projects are developed.

There could be many other plans/projects which, theoretically, could interact with the Draft WSSP 2050. However, given the strategic nature of the plan a pragmatic approach was undertaken in carrying out the assessment and only similar high-level/strategic plans were included i.e. plans at the same level in the planning hierarchy.

Uisce Éireann plans such as *National Water Resources Plan Framework Plan* (published in 2021) and the *National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan* (published in 2016) fall under the previous WSSP and are outcomes of WSSP objectives. There were therefore not included within the in-combination assessment.

Details of all plans included in the assessment and a commentary associated with the plans is provided in Section 7, Table 7-1. In total, five plans were identified where in-combination effects were conceivable, but not necessarily identifiable.

### 6.2.3 Mitigation

Mitigation measures may be necessary to remove, avoid or reduce the impacts identified in the appropriate assessment to a level where they will no longer affect the site. As the Draft WSSP 2050 is a strategic document specific impacts on specific European Sites are unlikely to be identified and overarching measures to address any potential adverse effects are likely to be more appropriate.

Examples of mitigation measures which might be applied to the Draft WSSP 2050 demonstrate no adverse effect on the integrity of any European site include, but are not limited to:

- Deletion of the policy/proposal/action.
- Changing the nature or type of the policy/proposal/action.
- Specific policy restrictions or caveats.
- Prescribing how adverse effects on site integrity will be avoided by mitigation measures in a lower tier plan, which would be confirmed by a detailed AA at that level.

Deleting or amending individual elements of the policy/proposal/action which would probably result in adverse effects when tested at a lower tiered stage.

## 6.3 Impact Sources and Effects Pathways

As stated, activities of UÉ were categorised into two broad groups, and these related to either water supply or wastewater treatment (Table 6-1). Other activities with potential for impacts include water conservation and demand management, catchment management and other supporting or associated measures as well as property management.

**Table 6-1: General Activities of Uisce Éireann**

General Activity	Specific Activities
Water Supply	Raw Water abstraction (from surface or groundwater). Treatment of raw water to a potable water standard (the level of treatment required will depend on the quality of raw water abstracted). Storage of raw and treated water. Distribute treated water to customers through a pipe network. Water treatment residuals management. Construction, operation, maintenance and management of the above.
Wastewater Treatment	Collection of wastewater from customers connected to the public wastewater sewer network. Collection and treatment of surface water where surface water drains are currently connected to the public sewer network. Treatment of wastewater to an acceptable standard set by legislation (the level of treatment required will depend on the type of receiving water and its assimilative capacity). Discharging treated wastewater to surface or groundwater under licence/certification. Wastewater sludge management. Construction, operation, maintenance and management of the above

Table 6-2 outlines the possible likely significant effects associated with the Draft WSSP 2050. The implementation of the Draft WSSP 2050 may give rise to measures, in the absence of mitigation, that could result in a variety of possible effect pathways through, but not limited to:

- species mortality;
- habitat loss and/or fragmentation;
- barriers to species movement;
- disturbance (noise, vibration, movement, lighting);
- changes in water quality;
- changes in hydrology or hydrogeology; and
- transfer of non-native species.

Impacts may be short-term or long-term and, in some cases, short-term impacts may have long term effects on a qualifying interest (a species or a habitat). More information on possible effects pathways and impacts is provided below. A summary of impacts and potential LSEs is presented in Table 6-2.

### **Species Mortality**

Species mortality may occur during infrastructure construction activities or as a result in changes to water quality or quantity. Mortality may also occur as a result of the loss of prey species or through the fragmentation of habitats resulting in barriers to species movement. Freshwater pearl mussel is at risk from habitat deterioration including sedimentation and nutrient enrichment.

### Habitat Loss/Fragmentation and Barriers to Movement

New infrastructure may result in the loss and/or fragmentation of habitat (including habitat that supports qualifying interests). It may also create barriers to movement of species, such as salmon, resulting in loss or changes to populations. These impacts may also affect the prey species of qualifying interests.

New or increased water abstraction may also result in the loss and/or fragmentation of habitats. Habitats and species particularly at risk would be those partly or fully dependent on ground and/or surface water sources. Effects could be short- to medium-term (for example during periods of drought) or long-term.

### Disturbance

The construction of new infrastructure may lead to the disturbance of species altering their populations and/or distribution. Disturbance may take the form of, for example, noise and vibration, lighting and movement. This disturbance could affect terrestrial or aquatic animal species across a range of habitats and locations. Disturbance may also cause barriers to movement which result in reduced availability of habitats and fragmentation of populations. Depending on the type of infrastructure, disturbance could be short-term or long-term.

### Changes in Water Quality

Changes in water quality may occur for a variety of reasons including spillages and run-off, sedimentation and wastewater discharges. These changes may occur during construction of new infrastructure or during operation as a result of changes in water flows (pathways). Changes in water quality may result in the mortality of qualifying species and/or their prey. It may also result in the loss of qualifying or supporting habitats. Many habitats and species have had impacts from wastewater and/or urban run-off identified as a specific pressure or threat including various lake habitats, water courses and freshwater pearl mussel, brook lamprey and slender naiad.

### Changes in Hydrology/Hydrogeology

Hydrological changes may directly affect aquatic habitats changing the ecological functionality of systems and the species they support. Hydrological changes may also alter the distribution of habitats thus affecting the distribution and population of species. Hydrological/hydrogeological changes may result from new or enhanced abstractions, or from new infrastructure. As a large proportion of the protected habitats and species are dependent on ground and/or surface water sources, hydrological/hydrogeological changes could have an effect across many areas and the functioning of the systems they support.

### Transfer of Non-Native Species

The distribution and transfer of water and the collection, treatment and discharge of wastewater may lead to the transfer of non-native species. If invasive, these species may alter habitats or displace species. These changes may directly affect qualifying habitats and species or the ecological functionality of systems.

**Table 6-2: Possible Likely Significant Effects associated with the Related Activities of the Draft WSSP 2050**

WSSP Related Activity	Potential Impacts	Potential LSE and Pathways
New or enhanced water abstraction from surface water or groundwater locations.	Reduction of habitat area including complete loss as well as habitat change.  Reduction in species population (including prey species) altering	Where abstractions are required there is potential for direct, indirect, construction, operational and cumulative effects on SACs and SPAs in the absence of mitigation. Aquatic and water dependent receptors would be most at risk.

WSSP Related Activity	Potential Impacts	Potential LSE and Pathways
	<p>distribution or complete loss.</p> <p>Hydrogeological changes.</p>	<p>Habitats and the species supported by them may change resulting in population and distribution changes. This may also affect the prey species of qualifying interests.</p> <p>All sites which contain surface and/or groundwater dependent habitats and species that are hydrologically linked to abstractions would be potentially affected.</p>
<p>Development of new water services infrastructure including reservoirs, pipelines and wastewater treatment plants.</p>	<p>Species mortality (including prey species).</p> <p>Loss/change in habitat area.</p> <p>Disturbance (short-term or long-term) to species.</p> <p>Habitat fragmentation including barrier effects to species movement.</p> <p>Hydrological/hydrogeological changes to aquatic environments.</p> <p>Transfer of invasive non-native species.</p>	<p>Changes in hydrology potentially altering the aquatic environment and impacting on aquatic receptors.</p> <p>Habitats and the species supported by them may change resulting in population and distribution changes. This may also affect the prey species of qualifying interests.</p> <p>Invasive non-native species may result in habitat and/or species replacement altering ecological functionality of sites.</p> <p>Potential for direct, indirect, construction, operational and cumulative effects on SACs and SPAs in the absence of mitigation.</p>
<p>Discharge of treated wastewater.</p>	<p>Reduction of habitat area.</p> <p>Reduction in species density.</p>	<p>There is potential for direct, indirect, construction, operational and cumulative effects on SACs and SPAs that contain water dependent habitats and species which are hydrologically linked to wastewater treatment plants (WwTPs).</p> <p>Habitats and the species supported by them may change resulting in population and distribution changes. This may also affect the prey species of qualifying interests. Aquatic and water dependent receptors would be most at risk.</p> <p>Potential for direct, indirect, operational and cumulative effects on SACs and SPAs in the absence of mitigation.</p>

## 6.4 Appropriate Assessment

### 6.4.1 Strategic Objectives

The four strategic objectives are listed below:

- 1. Safe and reliable drinking water:** We ensure the quality of our water supplies are safe, and we deliver a water service that customers, communities, and the broader economy can rely on.
- 2. Supporting our customers, communities and the economy:** We strive to provide an excellent service to our customers, and work with our stakeholders to deliver aligned priorities and support sustainable growth.
- 3. Protect and restore our environment:** We deliver a reliable water and wastewater service that protects the environment, and we support a healthy environment by enhancing habitats and ecosystems.
- 4. Sustainable services fit for the future:** We make decisions for the long-term which enable us to adapt and ensure our assets remain resilient.

They are high-level strategic objectives and are general statements of policy. They express expectations of Uisce Éireann for when they consider future proposals. For such general policy statements which show the general intention of UÉ it is not possible to identify when, where or how any effects on the Natura 2000 Network may occur. It is concluded that these strategic objectives, in themselves, are not likely to have an adverse effect on a European Site. However, it should be noted that strategic objective 3 (*Protect and restore the environment*) may provide opportunities for positive effects on European Sites.

When examining the high-level strategic objectives in relation to an adverse effect on a European Site this was also done in-combination with plans (see Section 7). As it was concluded that the strategic objectives alone could have no conceivable effect on a site it follows that it is not possible for an in-combination effect to occur.

### 6.4.2 Strategic Aims

Table 6-3 assesses the 14 strategic aims associated with each strategic objective. All strategic aims are general policy statements. Whilst more specific than the over-arching strategic objectives they do not indicate where, when or how the aspects of the four strategic objectives may be implemented. However, the actions (Tier 1) that underlie them require further assessment to ensure any possible adverse effects are recognised, and that mitigation strategies for these effects are identified.

The strategic aims associated with *Protect and restore our environment* are likely to benefit European Sites although the timescales over which these benefits may occur cannot be determined. Furthermore, it is conceivable that in the delivery of the associated strategic aims (the actions and further lower-tier actions and plans) LSEs on specific species and habitat interests may inadvertently occur.

When examining the strategic aims for an adverse effect on a European Site this was also done in combination with plans (see Section 7). As it was concluded that the strategic aims alone could have no conceivable effect on a site it follows that it is not possible for an in-combination effect to occur.

Table 6-3: AA Commentary and Conclusions for the Strategic Aims





Strategic Objective	Strategic Aims	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
1: Safe and Reliable Drinking Water	1. Ensuring safe drinking water.	These strategic aims are general policy statements. It is not known where, when or how the aspects of the various objectives may be implemented, or where any adverse effects may occur, or which European Sites, if any, may be affected.	Strategic aim 1 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	2. Delivering reliable water supplies.		Strategic aim 2 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	3. Conserving our precious resources.	These strategic aims can therefore be removed from further assessment. However, the actions (Tier 1) that underlie them require further assessment to ensure any possible adverse effects are identified.	Strategic aim 3 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
2. Support our Customers, Communities and the Economy	4. Delivering for customers.	These strategic aims are general policy statements. It is not known where, when or how the aspects of the various objectives may be implemented, or where any adverse effects may occur, or which European Sites, if any, may be affected.	Strategic aim 4 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	5. Engaging with communities.		Strategic aim 5 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	6. Providing for growth.	These strategic aims can therefore be removed from further assessment. However, the actions (Tier 1) that underlie them require further assessment to ensure any possible adverse effects are identified.	Strategic aim 6 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
3. Protect and Restore our Environment	7. Protecting our water environment.	These strategic aims are general policy statements. It is not known where, when or how the aspects of the various objectives may be implemented, or where any adverse effects may occur, or which European Sites, if any, may be affected. However, protecting and restoring the water environment and delivering on WFD objectives should ultimately benefit European Sites.	Strategic aim 7 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	8. Playing our part under the Water Framework Directive.		Strategic aim 8 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	9. Contributing to positive biodiversity.	These strategic aims can therefore be removed from further assessment. However, the actions (Tier 1) that underlie them require further assessment to ensure any possible adverse effects are identified.	Strategic aim 9 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
4. Sustainable Services Fit for the Future	10. Achieving net zero carbon.	These strategic aims are general policy statements. It is not known where, when or how the aspects of the various objectives may be implemented, or where any adverse effects may occur, or which European Sites, if any, may be affected.	Strategic aim 10 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	11. Adopting circular approaches.		Strategic aim 11 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	12. Managing our assets.		Strategic aim 12 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	13. Gaining value from innovation.	These strategic aims can therefore be removed from further assessment. However, the actions (Tier 1) that underlie them require further assessment to ensure any possible adverse effects are identified.	Strategic aim 13 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required
	14. Securing long-term funding		Strategic aim 14 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required



### 6.4.3 Actions of the WSSP

An assessment of the actions that come under the strategic objectives and strategic aims can be seen in Table 6-4, Table 6-5, Table 6-6 and Table 6-7.

Colour coding is used in the AA tables in to indicate where effects may occur, and mitigation measures be required as below.

	Actions concluded to have no conceivable effects on European Sites.
	No conceivable effects, but lower tier plans/interventions would be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations.
	Existing mitigation measures already identified in lower tier plans require to be complied with to avoid adverse effects on European Sites.
	Actions concluded to potentially have beneficial effects on European Sites.

For 18 actions it was concluded that there would be no conceivable effects on European Sites and no actions were identified as resulting in adverse effects. However, 15 actions were associated with the production of lower tier plans, the development of interventions, or the identification of a need for interventions, and it was conceivable that such lower tier plans/interventions could result in effects on sites and, as a result, the need for a requirement to comply with the Habitats Regulations was identified as mitigation i.e. undergo AA Screening/AA where identified and appropriate. Two actions were identified where mitigation measures were already in place to prevent adverse effects. Seven actions were also identified where it was concluded that beneficial effects on European Sites were likely, although outcomes of three of these actions could also conceivably result in adverse effects on European sites. Further details are given below for each strategic objective.

#### Actions of Strategic Objective 1

For three of the nine actions associated with *strategic objective 1: Safe and Reliable Drinking Water* no mitigation was identified as there would be no conceivable effects from these actions (Table 6-4). This was because all elements of the proposed actions did not lead to development or other change which might have a conceivable effect on European Sites; no links or pathways to sites and their qualifying interests could be identified.

Five actions were identified as requiring lower tier plans and/or interventions to comply with the Habitats Regulations (i.e. undergo AA Screening/AA as appropriate). This included one action (action 1.9) which was also identified as having the potential to result in a positive effect on European Sites through a reduction in water abstraction. This would be potentially beneficial to those sites with habitats and species dependent on surface water or groundwater.

For one action (action 1.4) it was recognised that existing mitigation measures already identified within a lower tier plan would need to be adhered to.

#### Actions of Strategic Objective 2

For five of the eight actions associated with *strategic objective 2: Supporting our Customers, Community and the Economy* no mitigation was identified as there would be no conceivable effects from these actions (Table 6-5).

Three actions were identified as requiring lower tier plans and/or interventions to comply with the Habitats Regulations.

One action (*action 2.5: Continue to develop amenity value in UÉ assets with local communities*) could conceivably result in effects on European Sites although the action does not identify which assets might be developed. However, the action will be identifying such assets as part of its outcomes and therefore there is clearly a link

to possible effects, although how, where or when those effects may occur cannot be established. Therefore, no specific mitigation can be applied beyond any developments that might result from the Action being required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA Screening/AA where necessary.

No actions were identified as having the potential to result in positive effects on European Sites.

### **Actions of Strategic Objective 3**

The *strategic objective 3: Protect and Restore our Environment* is aimed at delivering a reliable water and wastewater service that protects the environment as well as supporting a healthy environment by enhancing habitats and ecosystems. The eight actions associated with it would therefore be expected to likely to generally present opportunities to improvements to the condition of European Sites. Furthermore, given that some waterbodies – for example Lough Melvin SAC, River Finn/River Foyle and Tributaries SAC, Lough Oughter and Associated Loughs/Upper Lough Erne SAC – have transboundary connectivity there are implications for sites in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Six of the eight actions were identified as potentially having beneficial effects on European Sites (Table 6-6). However, for three of these actions (action 3.3, 3.5 and action 3.6) outcomes of the action(s) may result in new plans which could conceivably result in adverse effects. For these actions, lower tier plans and/or interventions would be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.

For two actions (action 3.1 and action 3.2) it was concluded that they would, in themselves, be unlikely to result in any conceivable effects on European Sites. However, both actions required the development of lower tier frameworks/plans/outcomes which could conceivably result in effects, although it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur. For these two actions, lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.

### **Actions of Strategic Objective 4**

For eight of the 10 actions associated with *strategic objective 4: Sustainable Services Fit for the Future* no mitigation was identified as there would be no conceivable effects from these actions (Table 6-7). This was because the actions were aimed at developing strategies or administrative approaches.

This included *action 4.9: Quantify and articulate long-term capital and operational financial investment needs for our water and wastewater assets*. This action is primarily administrative and would not be identifying the need for new infrastructure/development itself. However, it is likely that outcomes of the action would impact on other actions of the WSSP 2050 where development or other changes comprise part of those actions' outcomes. Such new infrastructure/development would be subject to examination in lower tier plans, prior to the identification of the new infrastructure/development itself, and might conceivably have the potential for effects on European Sites and would therefore require AA Screening/AA where necessary. However, that process would be undertaken as part of the other actions of the WSSP 2050 and not as part of action 4.9.

One action (action 4.1) was identified as requiring lower tier plans and/or interventions to comply with the Habitats Regulations. Action 4.1 sets out a framework for the development of a Net Zero Road Map. Whilst the action is mainly aimed at developing a strategy and associated initiatives, it is likely to result in the development of lower tier plans (as a result of the initiatives for instance) which would require to be assessed under the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.

One Action (*Action 4.3: Review and implement the National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan*) was of note as this involved the National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan (NWSMP) which itself has been subject to NIS (in 2016) and was produced as part of the previous iteration of the WSSP. The NIS identified various mitigation measures including ensuring that "*any project and any associated works, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity (defined by the structure and function) of any Natura 2000 site(s) and that the requirements of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive are fully satisfied.*" Action 4.3 of the Draft



WSSP 2050 will be required to conform with existing mitigation measures of the NWSMP and it was concluded that with that in place, further effects on European Sites would not be likely and no additional mitigation measures would be required.



**Table 6-4: Appropriate Assessment of Actions of Strategic Objective 1: Safe and Reliable Drinking Water**

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
<b>1: Ensuring safe drinking water:</b> We will manage the safety and quality of drinking water from source to tap to protect human health.	<b>Action 1.1:</b> Undertake risk assessments across our supplies and implement appropriate measures to manage risk.	<p>The action provides for the development and implementation of Drinking Water Safety Plans (DWSPs) to assess risk. The plans, including Asset Management Plans, will be used to inform the operational, maintenance, or capital interventions that will mitigate the identified risks.</p> <p>The development and implementation of such plans do not in themselves result in effects on European Sites, although the recommendations of the plans, particularly the Asset Management Plans, may require further work/proposals such as new infrastructure. Such new infrastructure could conceivably result in effects on European Sites but it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur. Furthermore, such proposals would be required to conform to the protection of European Sites. In addition, the Draft WSSP 2050 does not constrain how the DWSPs, or other plans, would be drafted and implemented.</p>	Action 1.1 will have no effects on any European Site, although lower tier proposals and/or interventions may conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier proposals and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.
	<b>Action 1.2:</b> Conform to Drinking Water Directive and other legislative requirements.	<p>The action provides for the development of monitoring programmes to extend beyond compliance aspects. The programme will be tailored to the outcomes of hazard identification and risk assessments within the supply system undertaken as part of the DWSPs. The action will also allow the development of procedures to investigate and evaluate contaminants of emerging concern.</p> <p>The development and implementation of such programmes and procedures will not have any effects on European Sites, although the information gathered may assist in understanding potential risks and impacts to such sites and furthermore could inform the need for mitigation which may be outside the remit of UÉ.</p>	Action 1.2 will have no effects on any European Site, although lower tier plans and/or interventions may conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.
	<b>Action 1.3:</b> Coordinate catchment management measures and champion nature-based solutions for improving source water quality.	<p>UÉ will prioritise nature-based solutions and develop and deliver a communication campaign to champion source protection. As part of this aim, UÉ will conduct a pilot study employing a catchment management approach for source protection that encompasses nature-based solutions. The development of such solutions including conducting a pilot study could conceivably have an effect on a European Site(s) but it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur as it is not known how or where such a pilot study may take place. Furthermore, the initiative will be undertaken in collaboration with stakeholders and will be subject to its our assessment under the Habitats Regulations. In addition, the Draft WSSP 2050 does not constrain how the solutions and pilot study will be implemented.</p>	Action 1.3 will have no effects on any European Site, although lower tier plans and/or interventions may conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.
<b>2: Delivering Reliable water supplies:</b> We will improve our assets and sources to ensure our supplies are robust enough to meet our customers' needs at the target level of service	<b>Action 1.4:</b> Implement and continue to review our NWRP, delivering improvements in water supply infrastructure to ensure resilient supplies into the future.	<p>The NWRP was completed in December 2023 and is a long-term plan designed to secure a safe, sustainable and reliable drinking water supply for customers across Ireland over the next 25 years. The NWRP Framework Plan was subject to the Habitats Regulations through an AA which concluded no AESI with mitigation in place. The Regional Plans which sit below the Framework Plan were also subject to SEA and AA. Any review (and continued implementation) of the NWRP, including the Regional Plans, will be required to take into account the conclusions and recommendations of the NIS and future AA.</p>	Action 1.4 will have no effects on any European Site, although the NWRP itself could result in adverse effects if mitigation was not in place.	Existing mitigation measures within the NWRP should be adhered to.
	<b>Action 1.5:</b> Develop contingency plans to improve reliability of our water supplies.	<p>The action requires the development of contingency plans, to enhance the reliability of water supplies, particularly in light of vulnerabilities to extreme weather events. As part of the NWRP the supplies at risk during dry weather events was identified and UÉ is currently in the process of developing drought plans for these supplies with a target completion date of 2030. Other contingency plans are/will be developed to address various scenarios, and are committed to a review of flood/extreme weather risk to existing infrastructure/operations. The development of such plans do not in themselves result in effects on European Sites.</p>	Action 1.5 will have no effects on any European Site, although lower tier plans and/or interventions may conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
	<b>Action 1.6:</b> Improve operational resilience through preventative measures and developing and implementing improved incident response processes.	The action plans to minimise disruption to supplies through a combination of asset design and operational plans and by implementing enhanced incident response processes. This will include design stages as well as developing operational plans, real-time data and monitoring capabilities, and cyber security improvements.	Action 1.6 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
<b>3: Conserving our precious resources:</b> We will take pressure off our resources through leakage reduction and helping our customers to conserve water.	<b>Action 1.7:</b> Use less water through promoting water conservation to help customers reduce their use.	UÉ is developing a Demand Management Strategy that incorporates our existing water conservation activities and additional demand management initiatives and provides a framework to address water demand. The strategy will seek to better understand demand profile and will include better metering systems.	Action 1.7 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
	<b>Action 1.8:</b> Use less water through developing and implementing an enhanced Water Stewardship Programme.	The action aims to further develop the existing Water Stewardship Programme (which includes identifying on-site water waste or upgrading to water efficient devices) to offer further metrics and work with new cohorts of customers. UÉ will also explore technologies for rainwater harvesting and greywater recycling.  The development of the programme, including new metrics, and the exploration of new technologies, would not result in effects on European Sites.	Action 1.8 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
	<b>Action 1.9:</b> Lose less water through delivering leakage reduction.	Since 2018, UÉ have been working with local authority partners to address the high leakage rate of almost 50% of Ireland's drinking water supplies. UÉ's aim is to further reduce leakage to sustainable levels, reaching a national target of 25% by 2050. The action intends to build on the existing programme of works/management and develop them further through innovation and new technologies.  The continuing management, including reduction, in leaks has the potential to have a positive effect on European Sites through a reduction in water abstraction. However, construction works may be required to reduce leakage and such works could conceivably affect European sites. However, it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur. Furthermore, such interventions would be required to conform to the protection of European Sites.	Action 1.9 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites, especially groundwater or surface-water dependent sites, through reduced abstraction. However, new infrastructure may conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.



**Table 6-5: Appropriate Assessment of Actions of Strategic Objective 2: Supporting our Customers, Community and the Economy**

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	Action and AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
<b>4: Delivering for customers:</b> We will put our customers at the heart of what we do and deliver on their needs.	<b>Action 2.1:</b> Understand customer needs and expectations.	<p>UÉ intends to engage with cohorts of the domestic and non-domestic customer base to understand their preferences and expectations. UÉ will develop targeted communication campaigns and share information and will provide a digital self-service platform.</p> <p>None of the elements of the action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 2.1 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
	<b>Action 2.2:</b> Enhance customer communications to address our customer expectations and provide real-time information to customers on usage, incidents, and water quality.	<p>UÉ intend to enhance their communications with customers. They will develop a customer communications strategy which will include areas such as Planned Works; maintenance, upgrades and infrastructure projects. During unplanned Incidents UÉ will keep customers informed about the situation, its impact and the steps to be taken.</p> <p>Whilst action 2.2 makes reference to possible projects, they are not informed by the action. As a result, no elements of the action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 2.2 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
	<b>Action 2.3:</b> Support our customers to play their part in protecting water as a precious resource and enabling better water services.	<p>The action aims to raise public awareness of the value of water resources and the benefits they deliver for the environment, communities and the economy. The action will provide customers with real time information and self-serve options including the technology to do this.</p> <p>None of the elements of the action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 2.3 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
<b>5: Engaging with communities:</b> We will engage with communities at a local level to realise the value from our shared water resources.	<b>Action 2.4:</b> Develop a community education and engagement programme to raise awareness on the value of water and the water services we provide.	<p>UÉ are committed to building upon their community engagement and education activities and programmes, including supporting the education and engagement of primary and secondary school students in water conservation and efficiency. UÉ intend to build on these engagement programmes on projects at assessment, preplanning, planning, build and completion stages.</p> <p>Whilst action 2.4 makes reference to possible projects, they are not informed by the action. As a result, no elements of the action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 2.4 will have no conceivable effects on any European Site.	None required.
	<b>Action 2.5:</b> Continue to develop amenity value in our assets with local communities, where safe and appropriate.	<p>The Action aims to seek opportunities to explore how UÉ can develop amenity value in suitable UÉ assets where this can be done safely and without compromising their core function of delivering quality water and wastewater services.</p> <p>Whilst action 2.5 does not identify specific assets, it is conceivable that effects on European Sites could occur depending on the location and type of the amenity and the possible development, The Action could have transboundary implications.</p>	Action 2.5 does not itself result in effects on European Sites, but opportunities for increased amenity value could lead to increased access and new development.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.
<b>6: Providing for growth:</b> We will manage the availability of capacity to support social and economic growth in line with national policy.	<b>Action 2.6:</b> Engage and collaborate with key stakeholders to support national, regional and local planning policy.	<p>UÉ will invest in infrastructure that facilitates well-planned social and economic growth that is based on principles of environmental sustainability and enhanced liveability. Action 2.6 involves designing infrastructure with foresight, and actively engaging with national, regional and local planning authorities, recognising the importance of aligning UÉ investments with Planning Policy. UÉ will support the National Planning Framework (NPF) and its subsidiary plans.</p> <p>Whilst action 2.6 makes reference to possible developments, they are not informed by the Action. However, outcomes of the Action may result in new infrastructure at a later stage. These outcomes could conceivably result in effects on European Sites but it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur. Furthermore, such lower tier plans and/or interventions would be required to conform to the protection of European Sites.</p>	Action 2.6 does not itself result in effects on European Sites, but developments informed by the action may result in new infrastructure which could conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	Action and AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
	<p><b>Action 2.7:</b> Engage with developers and industry to support delivery of new homes and economic growth.</p>	<p>UÉ will engage with housing and industry stakeholders to support efficient growth. They will establish a collaborative partnership with industry stakeholders, to identify capacity requirements for development of sustainable and inclusive communities and will continue to support new development connections.</p> <p>Whilst action 2.7 makes reference to possible developments, they are not informed by the action. However, outcomes of the Action may result in new infrastructure at a later stage. These outcomes could conceivably result in effects on European Sites but it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur. Furthermore, such lower tier plans and/or interventions would be required to conform to the protection of European Sites.</p>	<p>Action 2.7 does not itself result in effects on European Sites, but outcomes of the action may result in new infrastructure which could conceivably result in adverse effects.</p>	<p>Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.</p>
	<p><b>Action 2.8:</b> Develop and embed demand analysis capability to inform, forecast and plan for future investment requirements.</p>	<p>UÉ will undertake a pilot demand analysis study initially and thereafter embed capability, to ensure adequate monitoring and ability to act upon changes in demand. This will inform demand management measures and allow for future forecasting. Robust data will underpin demand analysis and forecasts and help inform investment plans.</p> <p>Whilst the elements of this Action will not conceivably lead to effects on European Sites, information resulting from it could have implications for them in the identification and development of infrastructure at a later stage. However, such developments are not themselves intended outcomes of the Action nor constrained by the Action.</p>	<p>Action 2.8 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.</p>	<p>None required.</p>





**Table 6-6: Appropriate Assessment of Actions of Strategic Objective 3: Protect and Restore the Environment**

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
<p><b>7: Protecting our water environment:</b> We will play our part in protecting and restoring our water environment.</p>	<p><b>Action 3.1:</b> Work with regulators and stakeholders to develop a Wastewater Strategy Framework.</p>	<p>UÉ is developing a national drainage and wastewater strategy framework, to manage the collection, treatment and return of treated wastewater to the environment. The framework will provide an understanding of strategic needs and drivers, including environmental priorities. The framework will also help indicate investment needs.</p> <p>This Action itself will not lead to any effects on European Sites; the framework will set out approaches and methodologies to develop drainage and wastewater management plans on appropriate spatial scales. However, outcomes of these lower tier plans could conceivably result in effects although it is not known where, when or how such effects may occur.</p>	<p>Action 3.1 does not itself result in effects on any European site, but outcomes of the action may result in new plans which could conceivably result in adverse effects.</p>	<p>Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.</p>
	<p><b>Action 3.2:</b> Develop and implement Integrated Urban Wastewater Management Plans.</p>	<p>UÉ in collaboration with local authorities will develop and introduce Integrated Urban Wastewater Management Plans, with shared aims of reducing the pollution load from storm water overflows and urban run-off, developing capacity for growth, and improving climate resilience. UÉ will develop new approaches including modelling, nature based sustainable urban drainage and smart network control.</p> <p>This Action itself will not lead to any effects on European Sites. However, the Action entails the development of lower tier plans which would conceivably have an effect on European Sites, including transboundary effects.</p>	<p>Action 3.2 does not itself result in effects on any European site, but outcomes of the action may result in new plans which could conceivably result in adverse effects.</p>	<p>Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.</p>
	<p><b>Action 3.3:</b> Ensure sustainable abstractions and manage water treatment residuals.</p>	<p>UÉ will work across their drinking water service to identify and implement sustainable practices. This includes applying for abstraction licences under the new Abstraction legislation. The Act sets out a system of controls to protect the environment and to ensure full compliance with Ireland’s responsibilities under the Water Framework Directive. Work also includes data collection and risk assessments to inform interventions where needed.</p> <p>This Action itself will not lead to effects on European Sites. However, the Action includes the development of lower tier plans/interventions which would conceivably have an effect on European Sites, including positive effects through a reduction in abstraction in groundwater sensitive locations.</p>	<p>Action 3.3 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites as a result of reduced impacts at groundwater sensitive locations.</p> <p>However, outcomes of the action may result in new infrastructure which could conceivably result in adverse effects.</p>	<p>Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.</p>
<p><b>8: Playing our part under the Water Framework Directive:</b> We will work with others to progressively deliver on the WFD objectives.</p>	<p><b>Action 3.4:</b> Protect and restore water bodies through collaboration.</p>	<p>UÉ will work with stakeholders, including data sharing and the development of shared catchment models, to establish the most cost-effective combination of measures to protect and restore water bodies to at least good status.</p> <p>The Action itself will not lead to any effects on European Sites. However, outcomes of the Action are aimed at helping to achieve WFD environmental objectives. This would likely benefit European Sites although it is acknowledged that it may not be possible in all cases to achieve WFD objectives. These benefits may have transboundary implications.</p>	<p>Action 3.4 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites. These positive effects may have transboundary implications.</p>	<p>None required.</p>
	<p><b>Action 3.5:</b> Manage wastewater services throughout the asset lifecycle to achieve regulatory requirements.</p>	<p>UÉ will manage wastewater assets to achieve regulatory requirements including compliance with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD) and Waste Water Discharge Authorisations. UÉ will also collaborate with stakeholders to develop and implement a monitoring programme to understand the water quality risks to bathing waters and shellfish habitats. UÉ will implement actions to prioritise works and accelerate compliance with UWWTD requirements.</p> <p>The Action will not lead to adverse effects on European Sites. However, outcomes of the Action have the potential for improvements to the condition of European Sites as a result of improvements in water quality, . These benefits may have transboundary implications.</p>	<p>Action 3.5 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites. These positive effects may have transboundary implications.</p> <p>However, outcomes of the action may result in new infrastructure which could conceivably result in adverse effects.</p>	<p>Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.</p>

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
	<p><b>Action 3.6:</b> Manage water services throughout the asset lifecycle to achieve regulatory requirements.</p>	<p>UÉ will be required to apply to the EPA for licences above certain thresholds for both new and existing abstractions. UÉ will also have to manage abstractions so they are sustainable and meet the requirements of licence conditions including in-stream flow requirements necessary to support healthy ecosystems. This Action is linked to Action 3.3. UÉ are also developing a Fish Pass Programme in consultation with Inland Fisheries Ireland to improve local hydromorphological conditions.</p> <p>The Action will not lead to adverse effects on European Sites. However, outcomes of the Action have the potential for improvements to the condition of European Sites from reduced impacts at groundwater sensitive locations and the improvement of fish passage. These effects may have transboundary implications.</p>	<p>Action 3.6 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites as a result of reduced impacts at groundwater sensitive locations and the improvement of fish passage. These positive effects may have transboundary implications.</p> <p>However, outcomes of the action may result in new plans which could conceivably result in adverse effects.</p>	<p>Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.</p>
<p><b>9: Contributing to positive biodiversity:</b> We will manage our assets to have biodiversity net gain.</p>	<p><b>Action 3.7:</b> Manage our assets to have biodiversity 'net gain'.</p>	<p>UÉ developed its own Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) to detail specific objectives and actions for UÉ to undertake. UÉ is working to ensure biodiversity net gain is achieved across infrastructure projects and will collaborate with stakeholders to deliver projects and activities that promote biodiversity enhancements. The BAP states that, UÉ is obligated to ensure that abstractions and/or discharges do not impact on SACs/SPAs and their nature conservation interests.</p> <p>The Action will not lead to adverse effects on European Sites. However, outcomes of the Action have the potential for improvements to the condition of European Sites.</p>	<p>Action 3.7 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites as a result of biodiversity enhancements.</p>	<p>None required,</p>
	<p><b>Action 3.8:</b> Champion nature-based solutions and catchment measures in the delivery of water and wastewater projects.</p>	<p>UÉ will encourage and promote the identification of opportunities for the incorporation of integrated constructed wetlands, sludge drying reed beds, and other nature-based solutions into wastewater treatment sites. They will collaborate with external stakeholders, landowners and community groups on wider catchment management-based initiatives that result in source water protection.</p> <p>The Action will not lead to adverse effects on European Sites. However, outcomes of the Action are aimed at improving water quality and therefore the condition of receiving waterbodies. There is therefore the potential for improvements to the condition of European Sites including transboundary locations.</p>	<p>Action 3.8 has the potential for a positive effect on European Sites, especially surface-water sites. These positive effects may have transboundary implications.</p>	<p>None required.</p>

**Table 6-7: Appropriate Assessment of Actions of Strategic Objective 4: Sustainable Services Fit for the Future**

Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
<b>10: Achieving net zero carbon:</b> We will progressively work towards achieving net zero carbon services.	<b>Action 4.1:</b> Develop and implement a Net Zero Road Map.	<p>A Net Zero Working Group has been established to develop a Net Zero Roadmap to achieve Net Zero by 2040. The roadmap will set out a strategic plan for eliminating or offsetting greenhouse gas emissions across UÉ's operations. It will include initiatives such as energy efficiency, renewable energy adoption, carbon-offsetting measures such as tree planting.</p> <p>The Action itself will not lead to any effects on European Sites as it requires the development of a strategic plan and initiatives and will not itself lead to development or other change. There are therefore no conceivable effects on European Sites.</p>	Action 4.1 does not itself result in effects on any European site, but outcomes of the action may result in new plans which could conceivably result in adverse effects.	Lower tier plans and/or interventions will be required to comply with the Habitats Regulations and undergo AA where necessary.
	<b>Action 4.2:</b> Work with our supply chain to embed sustainability in the delivery of water and wastewater infrastructure.	<p>UÉ is committed to collaborating with their supply chain to help meet their Net Zero targets. They will encourage innovation within the supply chain and continue to build collaborative partnerships and are committed to clear and transparent communication with their suppliers. UÉ will work with our suppliers to support them through guidance on sustainable practices.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.2 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.
<b>11: Adopting circular approaches:</b> We manage our assets to maximise resource recovery and resource efficiency and minimise waste.	<b>Action 4.3:</b> Review and implement the National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan.	<p>UÉ will review and implement the NWSMP. UÉ will explore new and innovative ways to use the materials recovered from treatment processes (bioresources) and consider advanced technologies and processes to extract more value from sludge.</p> <p>The NWSMP underwent AA and the NIS was published in 2016. Mitigation measures were proposed for actions of the NWSMP including a requirement to undertake AA where appropriate, to ensure that <i>"any project and any associated works, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity (defined by the structure and function) of any Natura 2000 site(s) and that the requirements of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive are fully satisfied."</i> Since the NWSMP is a lower tier plan to the WSSSP 2050 and it is therefore concluded that whilst outcomes of Action 4.3 could have effects on European Sites these have already been fully assessed and addressed.</p>	Action 4.3 will not have any <i>further</i> effects on European Sites, although without mitigation the existing NWSMP has been identified as having the potential to result in adverse effects.	<p>Existing mitigation measures within the NWSMP NIS, including additional AA where required, should be complied with.</p> <p>No additional mitigation required.</p>
	<b>Action 4.4:</b> Maximise circular economy benefits.	<p>UÉ's ambition is to embed a circular economy philosophy. This includes the development and implementation of a new Circular Economy Design Standard which will cover the entire life-cycle of managing water and wastewater assets.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.4 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.
<b>12: Managing our assets:</b> We will manage the risk and resilience of our services through best practice asset management.	<b>Action 4.5:</b> Manage activities on our assets in a coordinated manner across their full lifecycle, with the aim of achieving ISO55000 certification.	<p>UÉ will apply an ISO55000 Asset Management approach to all activities on their assets. This includes the development of the culture, organisational structure, policies, strategies, plans, processes the information systems required to manage assets effectively. The Action includes the collection of data on all assets.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.5 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.
	<b>Action 4.6:</b> Ensure risk and value-based decision making across the lifecycle of assets.	<p>UÉ use risk and value-based whole life-cycle decision-making systems for their investment planning processes.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.6 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.



Strategic Aims (Priorities)	Action	AA Commentary	AA Conclusion	Mitigation
<b>13: Gaining value from innovation:</b> We will drive research and innovation to deliver value and meet future challenges.	<b>Action 4.7:</b> Develop a culture of innovation in the water services sector to enable a sustainable future.	<p>The Action aims to ensure that UÉ remain committed to driving research and innovation activities to enable a sustainable future. Their innovation strategy addresses knowledge gaps. The Action is linked to Action 4.10.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.7 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.
	<b>Action 4.8:</b> Continue to develop foresight and horizon scanning capability.	<p>UÉ will undertake a horizon scanning exercise to facilitate forward planning. It will build on their Vision 2050 work, improving their long-term vision.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.8 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.
<b>14: Securing long-term funding:</b> We will work with our stakeholders to secure long-term funding for efficient and resilient services.	<b>Action 4.9:</b> Quantify and articulate long-term investment needs for our water and wastewater assets.	<p>UÉ need to continue to undertake sustained capital investment. UÉ will also need to manage this investment and continue the long-term investment planning. This will include working with funding stakeholders over multiple investment periods.</p> <p>The action is primarily administrative. None of the elements of the action will themselves lead to development and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified. However, outcomes of the action may lead to impacts on other actions of the WSSP 2050, such as development or other change which would take place at a lower tier. These developments/changes would be required to undergo AA Screening/AA where appropriate, but they are not a direct outcome of action 4.9; they would be captured by the AA on other actions where developments or other changes as outcomes are likely.</p>	Action 4.9 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.
	<b>Action 4.10:</b> Secure multi-annual funding approach.	<p>As regulated utility, UÉ's funding model presents challenges in the context of their capital investment program. Therefore, UÉ will be working to investigate more certainty on funding availability on a multi-annual basis.</p> <p>None of the elements of the Action will themselves lead to development or other change and there are no conceivable effects on European Sites, as no links or pathways can be identified.</p>	Action 4.10 will have no conceivable effects on any European site.	None required.




## 7 In Combination Assessment

Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, an assessment of 'in-combination' effects with other plans and projects is required. The assessment used the best available information at the time of writing.

Table 7-1 provides the list of national plans and programmes examined in the assessment. The items are listed but spatial hierarchy with the exception of the single UK-wide plan which is listed last. As stated in Section 6.2.2, only 'similar' high-level/strategic plans were included in the assessment i.e. plans at the same level in the planning hierarchy.

Given the strategic nature of the directives, plans and programmes it is recognised that the identification of tangible in-combination effects is limited. A much more in depth and comprehensive examination of in-combination effects will be required for plans and projects at a lower tier to the Draft WSSP 2050.

The in-combination assessment of plans and programmes was colour coded to indicate where effects may occur, and mitigation measures be required as below.

	Actions concluded to have no conceivable effects on European Sites.
	In-combination effects are conceivable but not identifiable.
	In-combination effects are on a specific European Site conceivable.

For four of the items considered, in-combination effects were conceivable, but it could not be determined how, when or where such effects may occur.

For a fifth item – the NI Draft Flood Risk Management Plan 2021-2027 – potential adverse effects on the River Foyle and Tributaries SAC (Northern Ireland) and therefore on the River Finn SAC (Ireland) were identified (the River Finn is a tributary of the River Foyle). A possible in-combination effect with the Draft WSSP 2050 was therefore identified at these sites. However, none of the actions of the Draft WSSP 2050 identify any specific locations where interventions may take place and therefore no precise in-combination effects can be identified. As a result, the mitigation identified in Tables 6-4 to 6-7 would be sufficient to avoid any adverse in-combination effects.

**Table 7-1: Directives, Plans and Programmes Examined in the In-Combination Assessment**

Plan and Author/Owner	Plan Purpose	Potential In-combination interactions/Effects	Conclusion
<b>National Plans</b>			
<p>Project Ireland 2040</p> <p>National Planning Framework, Project Ireland 2040</p> <p>DHPLG (2018)</p> <p>National Development Plan 2021-2030</p> <p>Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2021)</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09022006-project-ireland-2040/">https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09022006-project-ireland-2040/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.npf.ie/">https://www.npf.ie/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/774e2-national-development-plan-2021-2030/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/774e2-national-development-plan-2021-2030/</a></p>	<p>Project Ireland 2040 is the government’s long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. The strategy ensures the alignment of investment plans with the stated National Strategic Objectives for 2040 in a considered, cohesive and defined manner.</p> <p>The National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The NPF sets the vision and strategy for the development of our country to 2040 and the NDP provides the enabling investment to implement that strategy.</p> <p>The NPF is the Government’s high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of Ireland out to the year 2040. It is a framework to guide public and private investment, to create and promote opportunities for our people, and to protect and enhance the environment. Investment is outlined in the companion document, the NDP, and details key projects that will make plans within the NPF a reality.</p>	<p>The NPF and NDP together create a unified and coherent plan, the NPF setting the overarching spatial strategy for the next 20 years and the NDP setting out the 10-year investment strategy. The NDP, as a budget and financial plan, is not part of the physical planning process. Projects funded under the NDP will be subject to planning law and may require SEA and AA as appropriate. However, these requirements do not arise in relation to the NDP itself.</p> <p>A draft (pre-consultation) NIS was prepared having concluded that the NPF should be subject to AA. The pre-consultation NIS concluded that, subject to the mitigation proposed being incorporated into the NPF, there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of any European Sites.</p> <p>Following statutory consultation, modifications and amendments were made to the draft NPF and these were assessed in a new version of the NIS. This concluded that the NPF would not have any adverse effects on site integrity.</p> <p>The NPF is a strategic and high-level policy framework, to inform the preparation of subsidiary strategies (lower tier plans), such as Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and other statutory land-use plans such as city and county development plans and local area plans. The NPF does not determine the precise location of any development project or designate or allocate specific land uses, nor does it preclude the consideration of alternatives. Lower tier plans and their detailed objectives and policies will themselves be subject to appropriate assessment and will therefore be fully considered at that time.</p> <p>All subsidiary actions and policy preparation informed by the NPF shall be required to conform to the relevant regulatory provisions aimed at preventing pollution or other environmental effects likely to adversely affect the integrity of European Sites. For this reason, in considering whether the NPF will adversely affect the integrity of any European site, it has been recognised that the NPF does not, in and of itself, give direct effect to any specific projects nor does it authorise specific individual projects which might adversely affect the integrity of any European Site.</p> <p>A precautionary approach was applied in preparation of the NPF in order to ensure that lower tier plans and strategies do not themselves give rise to effects on the integrity of European Sites, by explicitly including a number of safeguards. The first of these safeguards (National Policy Objective (NPO) 59) states:</p> <p>Enhance the conservation status and improve the management of protected areas and protected species by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing relevant EU Directives to protect Ireland’s environment and wildlife;</li> <li>• Integrating policies and objectives for the protection and restoration of biodiversity in statutory development plans;</li> <li>• Developing and utilising licensing and consent systems to facilitate sustainable activities within Natura 2000 sites;</li> <li>• Continued research, survey programmes and monitoring of habitats and species.</li> </ul> <p>The second (NPO 75) states:</p> <p>Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the NPF are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>The NPF is a high-level plan and does not determine the precise location of any development project or designate or allocate specific land uses, nor does it preclude the consideration of alternatives.</p> <p>In addition, the NPF contains safeguards to ensure that all lower tier plans are subject to the relevant provisions of national law including a requirement that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the NPF are subject to AA as appropriate.</p>

Plan and Author/Owner	Plan Purpose	Potential In-combination interactions/Effects	Conclusion
<p>Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030</p> <p>NPWS (2024)</p> <p><a href="https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-action-plan">https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-action-plan</a></p>	<p>The plan sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2030 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to the ways in which Ireland values and protects nature.</p> <p>The plan includes objectives and actions seeking to ensure the protection of the Natura 2000 network.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 introduced a new public sector duty on biodiversity. The legislation provides that every public body, as listed in the Act, is obliged to have regard to the objectives and targets in the National Biodiversity Action Plan.</p>	<p>The NBAP states that: <i>"The NBAP works on the principle that existing regulations associated with EU Directives relating to the protection of biodiversity will be implemented. This includes Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) which obliges member states to undertake an 'appropriate assessment' (AA) for any plan or project which may have a likely significant effect on any European Site."</i></p> <p>In addition, the plan states that in support of <i>Outcome 2D: Biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine and freshwater environment are conserved and restored</i> the plan states that <i>"Uisce Éireann will implement its Water Services Strategic Plan (2015-2040), in particular its objective to protect and enhance the environment, together with its Biodiversity Action Plan"</i>.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>The NBAP aims include objectives and actions seeking to ensure the protection of the Natura 2000 network. Furthermore, it works on the principle that AA will be undertaken on plans/projects where required. This also includes implementation of the WSSP (2015-2040).</p>
<p>National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development 2030</p> <p>DAFM (2023)</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ece67-national-strategic-plan-for-sustainable-aquaculture-development-2030/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ece67-national-strategic-plan-for-sustainable-aquaculture-development-2030/</a></p>	<p>The National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development 2030 (NSPSA) is the successor plan to that developed in 2015 for the period up to 2020. The plan seeks to set the path for the Irish Aquaculture sector so that it is resilient, competitive and a global standard in sustainability and quality.</p>	<p>A draft NIS has been produced which acknowledges the high-level nature of the NSPSA and therefore recommends overarching mitigation measures to be included with the plan. These measures include commitments to implement other overarching policies aimed at protecting the environment and a recommendation that the draft plan shall include the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent for proposals must demonstrate that they can be implemented without adverse effects on the integrity of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Where adverse effects from proposals remain following mitigation, in line with Habitats Directive Article 6(3), consent for the proposals cannot be granted unless the prerequisites set by Article 6(4) are met.</li> <li>• All investigative and feasibility studies to be carried out to support decision making in relation to this strategic plan should also include an environmental appraisal which considers the potential effects on the wider environment, including specifically the Natura 2000 Network.</li> </ul> <p>The post-consultation NIS noted that all European Sites within the Island of Ireland should be included; sites for marine mammals within 100km of Ireland; SACs which discharge into the western and north-western coastal regions of the UK where anadromous fish or freshwater pearl mussel are identified as qualifying interests; sites within 100km of Ireland for pelagic seabird and wildfowl/wader sites.</p> <p>Mitigation strategies and measures were proposed in the document, including project level AA where required, to avoid adverse effects on site integrity.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>The strategic plan was subject to AA and potential effects were identified. Overarching mitigation measures were identified to be included with the plan. Given the high-level nature of the plan, and the implementation of the overarching mitigation measures, no in-combination effects are predicted.</p>
<p>Ag Climatise, A Roadmap towards Climate Neutrality</p> <p>DAFM (2020)</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/07fbc-ag-climatise-a-roadmap-towards-climate-neutrality/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/07fbc-ag-climatise-a-roadmap-towards-climate-neutrality/</a></p>	<p>Developed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) a roadmap designed to help all stakeholders to work together to tackle climate change and air pollution,</p>	<p>An AA was not undertaken as an assessment concluded it was not required as the purpose of the roadmap is to inform DAFM policy of the actions necessary to protect the environment and address climate change, and not to set out projects or propose specific measures.</p> <p>Furthermore, it was concluded that the roadmap will inform other future plans as its main output and these individual policies, strategies, plans and measures for, or related to, agriculture and forest must be considered under the AA process. where appropriate.</p> <p>While the primary focus of this roadmap is on GHG and ammonia emissions, it is clear that achieving our targets for climate and air will also have positive co-benefits for water quality and biodiversity.</p> <p>One of six main tasks to meet climate and environmental objectives, <i>Reduce nutrient loss to the environment and contribute to improved water quality and biodiversity.</i></p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>An AA was not required. However, given the aims of and objectives of the Roadmap, there is the potential for beneficial effects on the Natura 2000 network.</p>



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<p>Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme</p> <p>Funded and managed by the Office of Public Works</p>	<p>Ireland's CFRAM Programme is central to the medium and long-term strategy for the reduction and management of flood risk throughout Ireland. It delivers core components of the National Flood Policy whilst also meeting the requirements of the EU Floods Directive.</p> <p>The programme includes data collection, risk mapping, option testing and the development of Flood Risk Management Plans, the plans being subject to assessment under the Habitats Regulations.</p>	<p>The programme is an umbrella programme through which plans and projects can be delivered and is not a plan in of itself. Whilst it is conceivable that effects may occur as a result of various plans (such as River Basin Management Plans and Flood Risk Management Plans), the programme in of itself will not have any effects. There is therefore no potential for in-combination effects.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>CFRAM is an umbrella programme of other projects and plans and therefore, in of itself, will not have any effects on the Natura 2000 network.</p>
<p>Climate Action Plan</p> <p>Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (2023, 2024)</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7bd8c-climate-action-plan-2023/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7bd8c-climate-action-plan-2023/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/79659-climate-action-plan-2024/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/79659-climate-action-plan-2024/</a></p>	<p>The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) is the second annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 and was launched on 21 December 2022.</p> <p>The plan implements the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings and sets out a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve our emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050, as committed to in the Programme for Government.</p> <p>The Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) is the third annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan. It is currently open for public consultation and has been subject to SEA and AA.</p>	<p>The plan is a roadmap for taking decisive action for meeting Ireland's emissions reduction requirements and identified 180 actions. It is an update of the 2019 plan. The actions mainly look to develop and review policies and strategies, setting out how Ireland can accelerate the actions that are required. The plan also includes the continuation of the NWPS restoration programme of Natura 2000 (bog) sites.</p> <p>The plan lays out actions and objectives which themselves may lead to the developments of plans by other government departments.</p> <p>The third annual update was published in February 2024 for public consultation together with SEA/AA. An NIS has been undertaken for the plan. The NIS identified all sites with Ireland and Northern Ireland taking into account transboundary considerations. However, the NIS stated that it was not practical for the report to identify transboundary sites in any detail; AA on lower tier plans and sectoral plans would be in a position to consider transboundary issues in more detail where geographic context can be added.</p> <p>The AA identified CAP23/24 actions contained within the draft Plan which could have the potential for adverse effects and identified where mitigation was required. General overarching mitigation was the main measure identified and ongoing/in preparation plans, programmes and projects must be consistently screened for the AA processes as appropriate. Any mitigation measures identified must also be adhered to as well as existing guidance on avoiding negative environmental effects. Specific recommendations were made for some actions.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>The Climate Action Plan provides a roadmap and is therefore a high-level plan. Overarching mitigation measures were identified to be included with the plan. Given the high-level nature of the plan, and the implementation of the overarching mitigation measures, as well as specific recommendations, no in-combination effects are predicted.</p>
<p>Forest Strategy Implementation Plan including the Forestry Programme 2023-2027</p> <p>Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) (2023)</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1f6c6-forest-strategy-implementation-plan-including-the-forestry-programme-2023-2027/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1f6c6-forest-strategy-implementation-plan-including-the-forestry-programme-2023-2027/</a></p>	<p>A shared national vision for the role of forests, and trees in Ireland's future has been developed. In realising the vision, a new Forest Strategy for Ireland to 2030 has been developed which will underpin a new Forestry Programme for the period of 2023-2027.</p> <p>The Forest Strategy Implementation Plan sets out how Ireland's ambitions to expand its forests and to increase its role in helping address the climate and biodiversity objectives at both National and EU level can be realised. The plan contains a detailed Forest Action Plan, which includes the actions for each of the Enablers and Strategic Goals of the Forest Strategy. The plan will function as an enabler of the strategy for the 2023-2030 period.</p>	<p>The implementation plan for the Forestry Strategy underwent SEA and AA. The AA noted that all existing mandatory requirements of DAFM would be complied with. For many actions of the implementation plan, it was proposed that there should be a requirement that any future support scheme should be subject to AA Screening. For other actions, AA Screening and, where appropriate, Stage 2 NIS was also proposed. In addition, alignment to other national, regional and local plans (such as Biodiversity Action Plan) was recommended.</p> <p>Actions of the implementation plan also included the restoration and conservation of state-owned Natura 2000 sites as appropriate.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>The implementation plan was subject to AA and potential effects were identified. Overarching mitigation measures were identified to be included with the plan. Given the nature of the plan, and the implementation of the overarching mitigation measures, no in-combination effects are predicted.</p>

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<p>National Adaptation Framework, Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland DECC (2018) <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fbe331-national-adaptation-framework/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/fbe331-national-adaptation-framework/</a></p>	<p>In accordance with the 2015 Act, the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) specifies the national strategy for the application of adaptation measures in different sectors and by local authorities in their administrative areas in order to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of any positive effects that may occur.</p>	<p>The NAF was pre-screened for a requirement for AA and it was concluded that an AA was not required. As an assessment under the Habitats Regulations was not required there can be possibility of in-combination effects as the NAF would not lead to any effects on European Sites.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect. An AA was not required.</p>
<p>National Marine Planning Framework Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2021) <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60e57-national-marine-planning-framework/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60e57-national-marine-planning-framework/</a></p>	<p>The National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) brings together all marine-based human activities, outlining the government's vision, objectives and marine planning policies for each marine activity.  The NMPF details how these marine activities will interact with each other in an ocean space that is under increasing spatial pressure, ensuring the sustainable use of our marine resources to 2040.</p>	<p>The NMPF NIS study area considered all sites within the NMPF area as well as a 50km marine buffer and a 5km inland buffer. The 50km marine buffer also took into consideration transboundary Natura 2000 sites within other jurisdictions. Additional consideration was taken for specific species/species groups including otters, anadromous fish and pelagic seabirds. In considering the potential for adverse effects, the NIS noted that the NMPF is a strategic and high-level policy framework, to inform the preparation of subsequent strategies. Furthermore, it was noted that the lower tier strategies and plans would themselves be subject to appropriate assessment as necessary.  The NIS determined that the plan would have no adverse effects on site integrity with mitigation in place. This mitigation included requirements to do AA Screening/AA where appropriate, as well as good practice approaches to environmental protection. These policies/approaches addressed the need to better integrate biodiversity protection and management of protected habitats and species into marine planning. They also set the scene for a cascading hierarchy of protection by explicitly ensuring that all plans, projects and activities informed by the NMPF must take account of the wider biodiversity agenda.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.  The framework was subject to AA and potential effects were identified. Overarching mitigation measures/policies were identified to be included with the framework. Given the nature of the framework, and the implementation of the overarching mitigation measures, no in-combination effects are predicted.</p>
<p>National Peatlands Strategy 2015 NPWS (2015) <a href="https://www.npws.ie/peatlands-and-turf-cutting/peatlands-council/national-peatlands-strategy">https://www.npws.ie/peatlands-and-turf-cutting/peatlands-council/national-peatlands-strategy</a></p>	<p>The plan is a national strategy on Peatlands conservation and management, in consultation with bog owners and other stakeholders, to deal with long-term issues such as land management, restoration, conservation, tourism potential, carbon accounting and community participation in managing this resource.</p>	<p>The National Peatland Strategy sets out a cross-governmental approach to managing issues that relate to peatlands including compliance with relevant national and international environmental legislation, agreements, plans and policies; climate change; forestry; water quality; flood control; energy; nature conservation and restoration; land use planning; and agriculture.  The strategy set out areas where Appropriate Assessment was likely to be required with respect to the protection of peatlands.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.  Given the high-level nature of the strategy and the way it sets out a cross-governmental approach to managing peatland issues, no in-combination effects are predicted.</p>
<p>River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022 – 2027 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle, Draft) DHLGH (2021) <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/2bda0-public-consultation-on-the-draft-river-basin-management-plan-for-ireland-2022-2027/">https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/2bda0-public-consultation-on-the-draft-river-basin-management-plan-for-ireland-2022-2027/</a></p>	<p>The RBMP sets out the measures that are necessary to protect and restore water quality in Ireland. The overall aim of the plan is to ensure that our natural waters are sustainably managed and that freshwater resources are protected so as to maintain and improve Ireland's water environment.  The RBMP remains in draft.</p>	<p>The NIS noted that the draft RBMP is a strategic plan which sets the framework for and relies to a significant degree on programme and project initiatives to deliver measures on the ground. Furthermore, it was noted that many of these measures have already undergone AA or will undergo AA with the development of specific measures. Those measures committed to in these other plans would be essential to ensuring that the objectives of the RBMP are met and that the RBMP does not have adverse effects on the integrity any European Site. In addition, overarching mitigation measures were also proposed.  The NIS for the draft RBMP also identified that within the WSSP 2015 there was a requirement for additional plan/project environmental assessments would be carried out at the tier 2 and tier 3 level to avoid adverse effects, and that there would be no in-combination effects. The NIS also stated that Uisce Éireann would review their WSSP and that the review and update would be subject to AA as the WSSP 2015 identified potential for LSEs. It was recommended that Uisce Éireann review the mitigation measures within the WSSP 2015 NIS "to establish their implementation and effectiveness in order to inform the next plan which will be required to engage with the AA process" and, furthermore, that the WSSP take cognisance of the 46 Catchment Management Plans as soon as they are available.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.  The Draft RBMP was subject to AA and potential effects were identified. Overarching mitigation measures were identified to be included with the plan as well as noting that measures were already committed to. Given the nature of the plan, and the implementation of the various mitigation measures, no in-combination effects are predicted.</p>

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<b>NI Plans</b>			
<p>Sustainable Water – A Long term water strategy for Northern Ireland (2015 –2040)</p> <p>Department for Regional Development (2016)</p> <p><a href="https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/long-term-water-strategy-northern-ireland">https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/long-term-water-strategy-northern-ireland</a></p>	<p>The Strategy presents a framework for action which will facilitate implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at delivering the long-term vision to have a sustainable water sector in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The Strategy encourages a sustainable and integrated approach to managing all different water needs in a way which promotes regional development, without compromising the environment or increasing flood risk.</p>	<p>The strategy is a high-level plan that identified 18 aims and 68 individual policies (including ones aiming at protecting biodiversity). The measures were proposed to be set out in a Strategy Implementation Plan.</p> <p>No assessment under the Habitats Regulations has been identified. However, some aims within the strategy indicate a requirement to ensure compliance with the Habitats, Birds and Water Framework Directives. Given the absence of a HRA it is concluded that no effects on European Sites/UK Site Network were identified.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p>
<p>Northern Ireland Water – Our Draft Strategy 2021-2046</p> <p>Northern Ireland (NI) Water (2020)</p> <p><a href="https://www.niwater.com/ourstrategy/">https://www.niwater.com/ourstrategy/</a></p>	<p>The strategy designed to make Northern Ireland a more healthy, sustainable and prosperous place in which to live. The strategy comprises centres around five strategic priorities: Customer, Water, Economy, Nature and People. NI Water intend that their services always contribute to a flourishing natural environment.</p>	<p>No assessment against the Habitats Regulations has been undertaken. However, conceivably there is the potential for effects given that improvements to the water and sewerage infrastructure are possible outcomes of the Strategy. Conversely, enhancements to the natural environment are likely to occur as a result, for example, the disconnection of surface areas from existing combined sewers. Given that an ambition of NI Water is that their services always contribute to a flourishing natural environment. In the absence of an assessment against the Habitats Regulations, it is not possible to confirm potential in-combination effects at this time.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>Whilst effects (both negative and positive) are conceivable, in the absence of an assessment under the Habitats Regulations it is not possible to accurately determine what these effects might be.</p>
<p>Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan (WR&amp;SRP)</p> <p>NI Water (2020)</p> <p><a href="https://www.niwater.com/managing-northern-irelands-water-resources/">https://www.niwater.com/managing-northern-irelands-water-resources/</a></p>	<p>The WR&amp;SR Plan sets out how NI Water intends to maintain the balance between supply and demand for water for all its customers over the long-term and the operational and management options and activities available to respond to short-term critical events such as drought and freeze-thaw. A key strategic aim of this plan is to improve the resilience of Northern Ireland's water supply system. WR&amp;SRP includes a Drought Plan.</p> <p>The WR&amp;SRP takes 2014/15 as its base year and has a planning horizon up to 2042/43 for the Water Resource Management element</p>	<p>A Stage 1 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening assessment of the WR&amp;SRP to identify potential for likely significant effects screened out all options in the preferred Plan as requiring Stage 2 AA with the exception of the Castor Bay WTW expansion within the Lough Neagh Ramsar site. As part of the WR&amp;SRP a high-level AA would be required. Where AA identified the potential for likely significant effects on the Ramsar site or SPA there would need to be a commitment to replace this option to avoid Stage 3 and 4 HRA being required.</p> <p>Many of the WR&amp;SRP options would require project level HRA to be undertaken to take account of detailed design and final route or site location. The Drought Plan included short-term actions with potential significant effects on the UK Site Network. These would be likely to require Stage 2 AA.</p> <p>Eight SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites were screened in for the Stage 2 AA of which two – River Foyle and Tributaries SAC, Lough Foyle SPA – had direct connectivity with sites in Ireland. The HRA concluded that with standard good practice construction methods, and sensitive siting of the works the potential for likely significant effects would be avoided/eliminated.</p> <p>It is conceivable that in-combination effects could occur as a result of options where project level HRA would be undertaken. This includes the Drought Plan where four broad types if measures were identified including increased abstractions which could lead to reduced flow/water levels. However, the locations for where increased abstractions (outwith existing licence conditions) have not been identified.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>Potential effects on sites identified that have connectivity with sites in Ireland can be avoided/eliminated with standard good practice construction methods and other standard approaches.</p> <p>Other potential effects cannot be determined in any detail as the location of options have not been identified.</p>
<p>Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland DAERA (2021)</p> <p><a href="https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/environment-strategy-consultation">https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/environment-strategy-consultation</a></p>	<p>The Environment Strategy is intended to be an overarching document setting out Northern Ireland's environmental priorities for the coming decades and will form part of the Green Growth agenda.</p> <p>The Environment Strategy will form the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can deliver real improvements in the quality of the</p>	<p>No assessment against the Habitats Regulations has been undertaken; the Environment Strategy is a high-level strategy setting the Northern Ireland Executive's direction of travel for the environment, greater detail on actions, targets and desired future outcomes will be provided during the development and implementation of the various Strategies, Action Plans and Programmes which will sit under the umbrella of the Environment Strategy. The detail around the various Impact Assessments to be completed will therefore be contained within those resultant Strategies, Action Plans and Programmes as it was deemed not be practicable to have them accompany the Strategy.</p>	<p>No in-combination effect.</p> <p>The Environment Strategy is a high-level strategy and all impact assessments (including against the Habitats Regulations) will be undertaken at a lower tier of plans.</p>



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	<p>environment and thereby improve the health and well-being of all who live and work in Northern Ireland; elevate Northern Ireland to an environmental leader; create opportunities to develop the economy; and enable Northern Ireland to play its part in protecting the global environment for decades to come.</p>		
<p>NI Draft Flood Risk Management Plan 2021-2027 Department for Infrastructure (2021) <a href="https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/second-cycle-northern-ireland-flood-risk-management-plan-2021-2027">https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/second-cycle-northern-ireland-flood-risk-management-plan-2021-2027</a></p>	<p>A Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP) is a requirement of the Floods Directive Regulations. It highlights the flood hazards and risks in the Areas of Potential Significant Flood Risk in NI from rivers, the sea and surface water. The plan identifies the Objectives and Measures that will be undertaken to manage the risk of flooding and sets out how the relevant authorities will work together with communities to manage flood risks.</p> <p>The FRMP takes into account the policy objectives set out in the NI Executive's long-term vision for the sustainable development of the water sector: <i>Sustainable Water – A Long term water strategy for Northern Ireland (2015 – 2040)</i>.</p>	<p>A HRA including Appropriate Assessment of the plan has been undertaken. The HRA set out a zone of influence of measures within the plan which included European Sites within Ireland (five SACs, three SPAs): Carlingford Shore SAC, Carlingford Mountains SAC, Dundalk Bay SAC, River Finn SAC, Lough Swilly SAC, Lough Foyle SPA, Lough Swilly SPA, Carlingford Lough SPA. Potential adverse effects resulting from habitat loss, water quality and habitat deterioration, and disturbance and displacement were identified. Specific issues were identified as a result of two Areas of Potential Significant Flood Risk; habitat loss, and disturbance and displacement LSEs on the River Finn SAC; water quality and habitat deterioration LSEs on Lough Foyle SPA, Lough Swilly SPA and SAC, Carlingford Shore SAC and Carlingford Lough SPA. No LSEs were identified on the Carlingford Mountains SAC or the Dundalk Bay SAC. In-combination effects were assessed with plans at a similar level i.e. river basin and flood risk management plans, and land-use plans; this included Ireland Flood Risk Management Plans (CFRAMS) 2016.</p> <p>AA of individual projects would be required, but measures included within the NI FRMP included standard good construction practices including Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plans, Water Pollution Prevention and Environmental Emergency Response Plans, appropriate timing of works, screening, adherence to noise disturbance guidance, and best practice protocols and Standard Operating Procedures.</p> <p>The Derry/Londonderry Area of Potential Significant Flood Risk was identified as having a potential habitat loss effect on River Foyle and Tributaries SAC (NI), which is downstream of the River Finn SAC (Ireland) for which, taking the precautionary approach, habitat loss was also identified. As mitigation for this effect "<i>Direct habitat loss within European Sites will be avoided for new-build infrastructure and avoided where reasonably practicable for refurbishment of infrastructure within European Sites</i>" was proposed together with other, good practice, measures. Furthermore, it was accepted that AA of individual projects would be required. Whilst UÉ does not have responsibility for the management of flood-risk in Ireland, any UÉ infrastructure/management developments which might impact on the River Finn SAC could have cumulative effects on that site and also on the River Foyle and Tributaries SAC.</p>	<p>Potential for in-combination effects.</p> <p>In-combination effects possible, especially on the River Finn SAC where standard good construction practices/best practice protocols might not be sufficient to avoid adverse effects.</p> <p>As none of the actions of the Draft WSSP 2050 identify any specific locations where interventions may take place no precise in-combination effects can be identified. Therefore, the mitigation identified in Section 6 (further AA Screening/AA for lower tier plans/interventions as appropriate) will be sufficient to avoid any adverse effects.</p>
<p>Draft 3rd cycle River Basin Management Plan 2021-2027 DAERA (2021)</p>	<p>The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 require the production and implementation of a River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) in six yearly cycles. The RBMP takes an integrated approach, identifying those water bodies which can be classified as being at 'good or better' status. It also sets the objectives and a programme of measures for the next six-year cycle to help improve those water bodies which are classified as below 'good' status. The 3rd cycle RBMP period runs from 2021-2027. The plan is currently in Draft.</p>	<p>An SEA was conducted for the first set of plans in 2009 and a Habitats Directive Article 6 Assessment was carried out in parallel. It was identified in the 2009 HRA that there were potential effects which could accrue from other Policies, Plans and Programmes, but that these could not be assessed in combination with the 2009 Plans as the specific implementation details of the Plans and these other Policies, Plans and Programmes at the water body level, were undefined at that time. It was therefore the recommendation of the assessment that screening for potential impacts under the Habitats Directive Article 6 process be put in place once the details of the implementation of the Programme of Measures (POMs) under the 2009 Plans were known, so as to ensure no 'in combination' effects with other Plans and Programmes at the time of implementation.</p> <p>A Test of Likely Significance was carried out to determine if there are any likely significant effects of the modifications contained in the new Plan (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle RBMP) on the conservation objectives of designated UK national site network sites. European Sites within Ireland were not included in the assessment.</p>	<p>In-combination effects are conceivable but not identifiable to a location.</p> <p>Further screening/assessment was recommended to be undertaken, particularly for SPAs, once implementation details were known as the implications for individual waterbodies could not be defined.</p> <p>European Sites within Ireland were not included in the assessment and, therefore, potential in-combination effects on those sites cannot be identified.</p>



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		<p>The findings of the screening exercise indicated that the modifications proposed for inclusion in the Plans were unlikely to have any significant [detrimental] effects (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the UK national site network, at this stage, subject to the recommendation of further screening and assessment, where required, when POM implementation details become known at a site-specific level. The purpose of the River Basin Management Plans is to improve water quality and are therefore unlikely to result in any detrimental environmental impacts that may affect this habitat. However, a potentially indirect significant effect on SPAs was identified resulting from the potential improvements in water quality resulting in a potential reduction in food availability. Such effects, if they were to occur, would be site specific and as the specific details of the POMs were not known it was not possible to carry out further assessment, and such potential effects were therefore screened out stage with the recommendation that further screening be carried out once implementation details were known.</p>	<p>However, the purpose of River Basin Management Plans is to improve water quality and therefore, in general, they are unlikely to result in detrimental environmental impacts on aquatic habitats.</p>
<b>UK Plans</b>			
<p>UK Marine Policy Statement HM Government (2011) <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-marine-policy-statement">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-marine-policy-statement</a></p>	<p>The Marine Policy Statement (MPS) is a framework for preparing Marine Plans and taking decisions affecting the marine environment in the UK. It was prepared and adopted for the purposes of section 44 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.</p> <p>The Secretary of State, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers and the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland are jointly adopting the MPS and is a key step towards achieving the vision shared by the UK Administrations of having 'clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas'.</p> <p>The MPS will facilitate and support the formulation of Marine Plans, ensuring that marine resources are used in a sustainable way in line with the high-level marine objectives.</p>	<p>The MPS has been subject to, and informed by, an Appraisal of Sustainability (AoS). This incorporated the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. A HRA was also carried out.</p> <p>The HRA reflected the strategic, high-level nature of the MPS and so identified high level impacts only. It concluded that it was not possible to exclude the possibility that the integrity of one or more European Sites could be adversely affected by activities identified in the MPS. For this reason, an assessment of alternative solutions and Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI) was undertaken. All Marine Plans and projects carried out in accordance with the MPS may be subject to the appropriate assessment procedure. If, following this procedure, an AA would be required and this concluded that the Marine Plan or project may affect the integrity of any European site, issues relating to IROPI, site integrity and compensation would need to be addressed in accordance with the relevant legislation and guidance.</p>	<p>In-combination effects are conceivable but not identifiable.</p> <p>The MPS is a high-level framework and high-level impacts only could be identified. The HRA concluded that it was not possible to exclude the possibility that European Sites could be affected. However, all Marine Plans and projects carried out in accordance with the MPS would be subject to AA where appropriate.</p>

## 8 Concluding Statement

Mitigation measures presented in the AA (Section 6) have been proposed to ensure that the Draft WSSP 2050 will have no adverse effects on any European Site(s) either alone or in-combination with other plans and programmes.

This conclusion does not remove the need for any other plans, strategies or projects, or permissions associated with, or arising from the Draft WSSP 2050 to be subject to Screening for AA/AA where appropriate. Furthermore, any project(s) etc. arising from the implementation of the Draft WSSP 2050 will be required to conform to the mitigation measures and key principles for protecting European Sites identified within this NIS.

The conclusion of the NIS for the Draft WSSP 2050 is that the WSSP will have no adverse effects on any European Site(s), either alone or in-combination with other plans and programmes.



## 9 References

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