

Report

Kilkenny County Council Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

Appropriate Assessment Screening

For Kilkenny County Council

20 December 2024

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report has been prepared by Logika Consultants Ltd. on behalf of Noise Consultants for the Action Planning Authority (APA), Kilkenny County Council (KCC), and provides Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the Kilkenny County Council Noise Action Plan (NAP) 2024-2028 dated 15th December 2024 (Ref: 15794A-20-R01-04-F02).

This document provides information relating to the NAP with respect to its potential for Likely Significant Effects upon Natura 2000 sites.

The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law¹ and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the national competent authority responsible for implementing the END and will ultimately report noise mapping and action planning to the European Commission.

Within Ireland the 31 Local Planning Authorities are designated as APAs responsible for making and approving NAPs in consultation. The entire administrative area within KCC is covered by the KCC NAP and is the focus of this AA report.

The purpose of the NAP is to provide a strategic overview of the management of noise issues and effects within County Kilkenny. The NAP aims to develop clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to prevent environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health. The NAP also identifies areas to preserve environmental acoustic quality where the baseline is favourable. The temporal framework for the NAP is 4 years², at which time the noise mapping and NAP will be reviewed, and where necessary revised. Further details are set out within **Section 4** of this report.

The AA process includes provisions for screening, scoping, and assessment, where relevant. The process of AA screening is required as part of the proposed NAP, to determine whether further assessment is required. Therefore, the overall purpose of this report is to establish whether AA should be carried out within County Kilkenny. The outcome of this screening is to determine whether significant negative environmental effects will arise from implementation of the NAP.

The report provides:

- The methodology used to define the scope of the assessment and identify potential effects on Natura 2000 sites associated with the NAP (Stage 1: screening);
- A list of the Natura 2000 sites and their designated features that may be subject to Likely Significant Effects due to the NAPs, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects; and,

¹ The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006¹ (S.I. 140/2006) (the "Regulations"). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018² (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021³ (S.I. 663/2021).

² The European Commission allowed for one additional year for the Round 4 NAPs, reducing the five-year implementation period to four-years (2024-2028).

- An assessment (to inform the competent authority's AA) of which Likely Significant Effects may result in an Adverse Effect on the Integrity (AEOI) of one or more Natura 2000 sites, taking in to account the type, timing and securing mechanisms for proposed mitigation.

This AA Screening Report has been undertaken in accordance with the Department of Environment, Heritage, and Local Government (DEHLG) guidance (2009)³.

1.2 Legislative Context

The requirement for AA for plans and projects is outlined in European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'.

The overarching goal of the Habitats and Birds directives are to uphold or restore the "favourable conservation status" of habitats and species recognised as of European Community Interest. These specific habitats and species are outlined in the Habitats and Birds directives, with the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) aimed at safeguarding the most vulnerable among them. Together, these designations are commonly referred to as European Sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites.

In Ireland, the habitats and/or species which are the reason(s) for designation of an SAC are referred to as the 'Qualifying Interest(s)' (QI) of that site. In relation to SPAs, the bird species for which a particular site is designated are referred to as the 'Special Conservation Interests' (SCI).

The Nature 2000 network in Ireland is made up of European sites which include:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC);
- Special Protection Areas (SPA);
- Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC); and
- Proposed Special Protection Areas (pSPA).

Under article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site but would be likely to have a Likely Significant Effect on such a site, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to an AA. Plans or projects can only be authorised if it can be concluded that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the Nature 2000 site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The exception to this is where there are Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI) and there are no other feasible alternatives, which would not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site. In this case the Competent Authority must assess all compensatory measures required to ensure the protection of the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network.

In fulfilling its role as Competent Authority, KCC is required to apply the precautionary principle to Natura 2000 sites and can only grant adoption once it has been ascertained that the proposed NAP will not adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site. The word 'likely' is regarded as a description of a risk (or possibility) rather than in a sense an expression of probability.

³ Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) guidance (2009) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities.

2 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

AA is a systematic process designed to determine whether a plan or project will have any effects or likely environmental significance.

The AA process can involve up to four stages:

- **Stage One: Screening:** The process that identifies the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.
- **Stage Two: AA:** The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts. If adequate mitigation is proposed to ensure no significant adverse impacts on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites, then the process may end at this stage. However, if the likelihood of significant impacts remains, then the process must proceed to Stage Three.
- **Stage Three: Assessment of Alternative Solutions:** The process that examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.
- **Stage Four:** Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain: An assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Regulation 42 of the Habitats Regulations requires the competent authority to undertake Stage 1 Screening for AA and where necessary Stage 2 AA of any plan or project. Stage 3 and 4 are included under Regulations 43 and 45 respectively.

A Likely Significant Effect is, in this context, any appreciable effect that may reasonably be predicted as a consequence of a plan or project that may affect the conservation objectives of the features for which the site was designated but excluding trivial or inconsequential effects.

2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening assessment is being undertaken concurrently with the AA process to determine whether the European Union (EU) Directive 2001/42/EC⁷ (the 'SEA Directive') and European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations S.I.435/2004⁴ as amended 2011, apply to the NAP, and if further SEA beyond formal screening is required.

This AA Screening report has informed the SEA Screening process as this AA Screening does not indicate that there are likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of the NAP, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans. On this basis there is no automatic trigger for the requirement of SEA for the plan.

⁴ [S.I. No. 435/2004 - European Communities \(Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes\) Regulations 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

3 AA Screening Methodology

3.1 Overview

Guidance on the screening stage has been provided by the Government⁵, who describe it as a preliminary assessment to check if a proposal:

- is directly connected with or necessary for the conservation management of a Natura 2000 site;
- is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site on its own or in combination with other proposals.

The screening process has two potential conclusions, namely that a project or plan, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could result in:

- No Likely Significant Effects on any of the Qualifying Interest (QI)/ Special Conservation Interest (SCI) of the Natura 2000 site; or
- Likely Significant Effects are identified, or cannot be ruled out, on one or more of the QI/SCI of the Natura 2000 site.

Only the second of these outcomes will trigger an AA. If one or more Likely Significant Effects are identified, or cannot be ruled out, it is then necessary to proceed to Stage 2 and undertake an AA.

3.1.1 Baseline Data Collection

A desk-based assessment of the Kilkenny County Council NAP was undertaken, focussing on its potential to have effects on habitats and species that are listed as QIs (for SACs) and SCIs (for SPAs) in the designations for the European sites.

3.1.2 Legislation and Guidance

This AA Screening Report has been prepared taking into account aforementioned legislation and guidance including the following:

Legislation

- Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora;
- Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds, codified version;
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended;
- Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended; and,
- Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

Guidance

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010, including Appendix 5: AA Checklist);

⁵ [Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland \(npws.ie\)](https://www.npws.ie)

- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10;
- Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC", European Commission Environment DG, 2002;
- Commission Notice: Managing Natura 2000 sites - The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC", European Commission 2018;
- Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive. Findings of an international workshop on Appropriate Assessment in Oxford, December 2009;
- Managing Natura 2000 sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC", European Commission, 2000; and
- OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management, March 2021.

Other Sources

- Environmental Protection Agency ENVision maps and water data — www.epa.ie;
- Format for a Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 (DAHG, 2014) www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/PAF-IE-2014.pdf;
- Ireland's Article 1.2 submission to the EU Commission on the Status and Trends of Bird Species (2008-2012);
- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 (DAHG, 2017);
- National Parks and Wildlife Service — Article 17 Status of EU protected habitats in Ireland reporting (NPWS 2013a & 2013b);
- National Parks and Wildlife Service online European Site information — www.npws.ie; and,
- The state of nature in the European Union Report on the status and trends in 2013 - 2018 of species and habitat types protected by the Birds and Habitats Directives.

The AA has been undertaken in consideration of European Union (CJEU) judgment on Case C323/17 (People over Wind, Peter Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta); *"it is not appropriate, at the screening stage, to take account of the measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects [mitigation] of the plan or project on that site."*

Other caselaw relevant to Screening are Waddenzee (C127/02), Holohan and Others v An Bord Pleanála (C461/17) and Court of Appeal case C1/2009/0041/QBACF Citation No [2009] EWCA Civ. 1061.

4 Stage 1: Screening

4.1 Description of the Plan: Kilkenny County Council Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

4.1.1 Background of the Plan/Overview

Once adopted the KCC NAP will replace the current NAP 2018-2023. The NAP seeks to provide a framework for long-term management of environmental noise from transport systems referring to the results of the strategic noise maps to inform assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise. As part of this management, the protection of Quiet Areas in open country within County Kilkenny is also set out within the NAP.

As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, as set out in the NAP's Noise Policy Statement and Responsible Aims reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2017, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. The NAP also provides the basis for feedback and input from statutory authorities and the public to help inform the NAP in relation to the assessment and management of environmental noise.

4.1.2 Scope of the NAP

The scope of the NAPs include the identification of existing noise emissions, priority important areas based on an assessment of harmful effects and details of noise management measures for consideration and evaluation at implementation stage.

4.1.3 Noise Policy Statement

The Noise Policy Statement for the County Kilkenny is detailed as follows:

"Kilkenny County Council will adopt a strategic approach to managing environmental noise from roads within its functional area, and will aim to:

- **Prevention** – manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where it is likely to have significant adverse impact on health and quality of life.
- **Protection** - protect areas which are desirably quiet, or which offer a sense of tranquillity through a process of identification and validation followed by formal designation of 'Quiet Areas in open country'.
- **Mitigation** – identify, and prioritise, appropriate mitigation measures to reduce noise levels where they are potentially harmful."

4.1.4 Responsible Aims

The Responsible Aims that underpin the Noise Policy Statement and are set out within the NAP, are as follows:

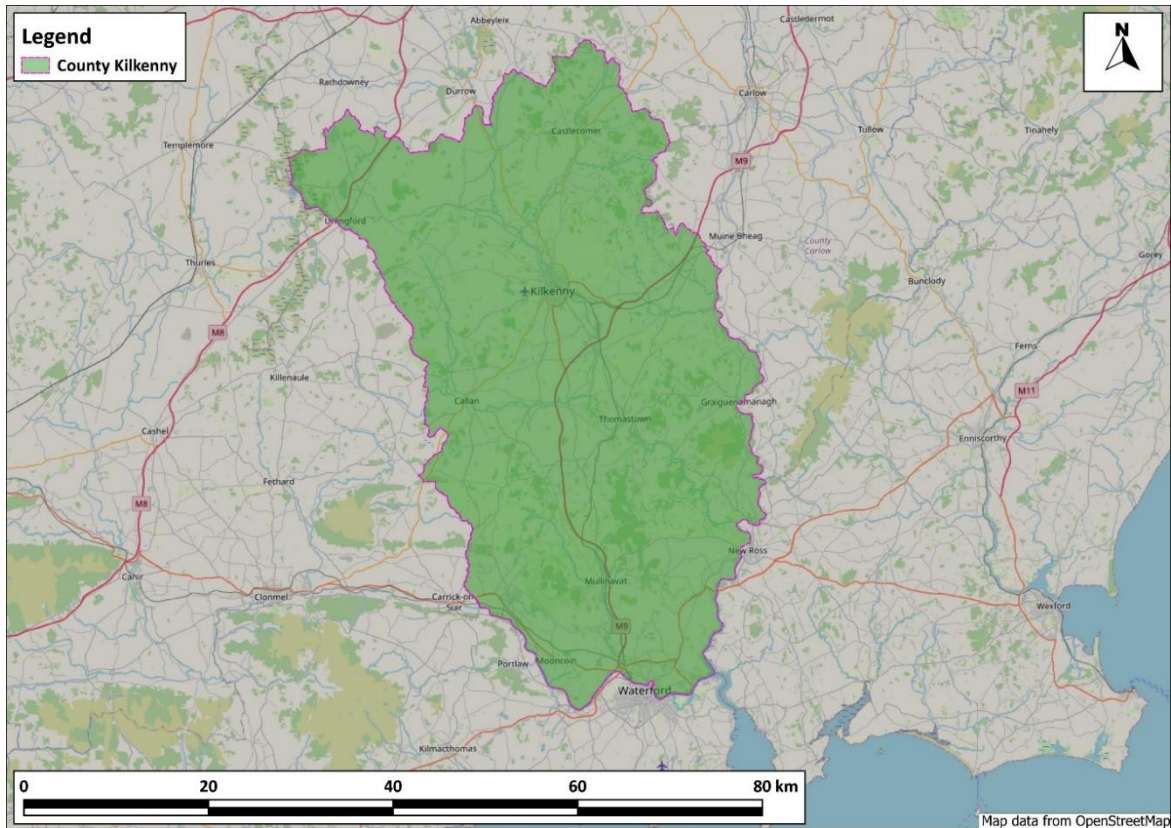
- **"RA_1 - Policy and Guidance Development** – Encourage the integration of noise considerations into the ongoing process of policy and guidance development, and actively promote existing policies and guidance related to noise.

- **RA_2 - Working Groups** – Participate in technical working groups pertinent to the implementation of the Environmental Noise Directive and with the assistance of the Environmental Protection Agency, a Round 4 Noise Action Plan Implementation Working Group shall be established.
- **RA_3 - Noise Mitigation** – In collaboration and consultation with relevant Noise Mapping Bodies, noise management interventions shall be applied on a priority basis during existing maintenance and improvement programs, where appropriate. This application will be based on a relevant evaluation of whole-life costs and benefits.
- **RA_4 - Protection** – Assess and, where appropriate, propose Candidate Quiet Areas in open country to the Environmental Protection Agency for designation as Quiet Areas in open country by the Minister.
- **RA_5 - Prevention** – Evaluate and condition planning proposals for noise sensitive development near major noise sources.
- **RA_6 - Community Engagement** – Commit to proactive and inclusive engagement with communities and collaboratively address noise issues for the improvement of our shared living environment.
- **RA_7 - Manage Noise Complaints** – Review and respond to all environmental noise complaints in accordance with their Customer Charter.
- **RA_8 - Regulatory Engagement** – Report the progress on the implementation of Noise Action Plans, including the investigation and implementation of noise management measures in Priority Important Areas, and the assessment of Candidate Quiet Areas in open country for preservation of environmental noise quality, to the Environmental Protection Agency on an annual basis."

4.1.5 Description of County Kilkenny

County Kilkenny is defined in the Regulations and covers an area of 2,073km² with a population of 104,160 and is shown in **Figure 4-1**.

Figure 4-1: County Kilkenny Boundaries



As detailed in the NAP, the total population of County Kilkenny is approximately 104,160. In terms of noise sources, there are approximately 182,086 metres of road (including major roads) in County Kilkenny. There are also a total of 64 noise sensitive buildings (schools and hospitals) located within County Kilkenny.

4.2 Identification of Relevant Natura 2000 sites

4.2.1 Natura 2000 sites

A total of 5 SPAs and 16 SACs have been identified, as shown on **Figure 4.2** and **Figure 4.3** within or adjacent to County Kilkenny, or within the likely zone of impact which have been considered within this AA. In this instance the likely zone of impact is 15km from the KCC boundary in accordance with Government guidance.

Further details on Natura 2000 sites identified are provided in **Table 4.1**, including the Site Code, location (County) and QI/SCI.

Figure 4-2: SPA Sites within County Kilkenny

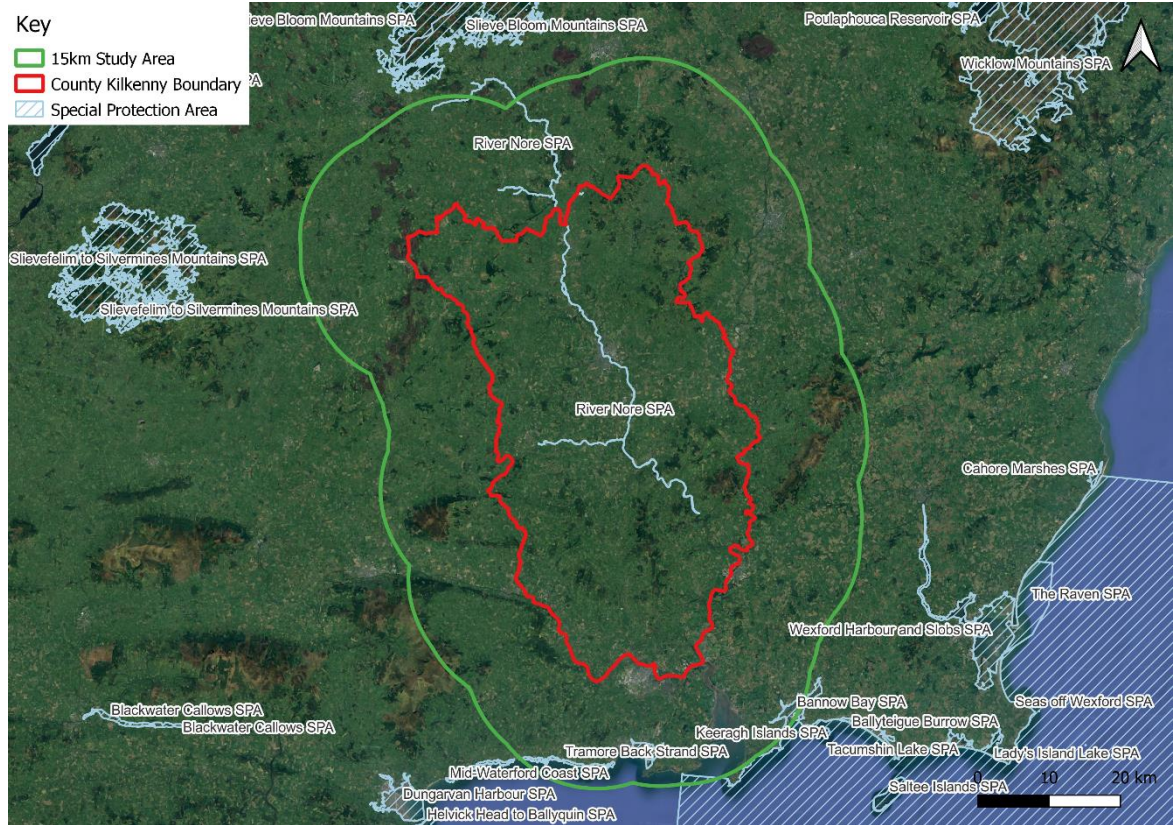


Figure 4-3: SAC Sites within County Kilkenny

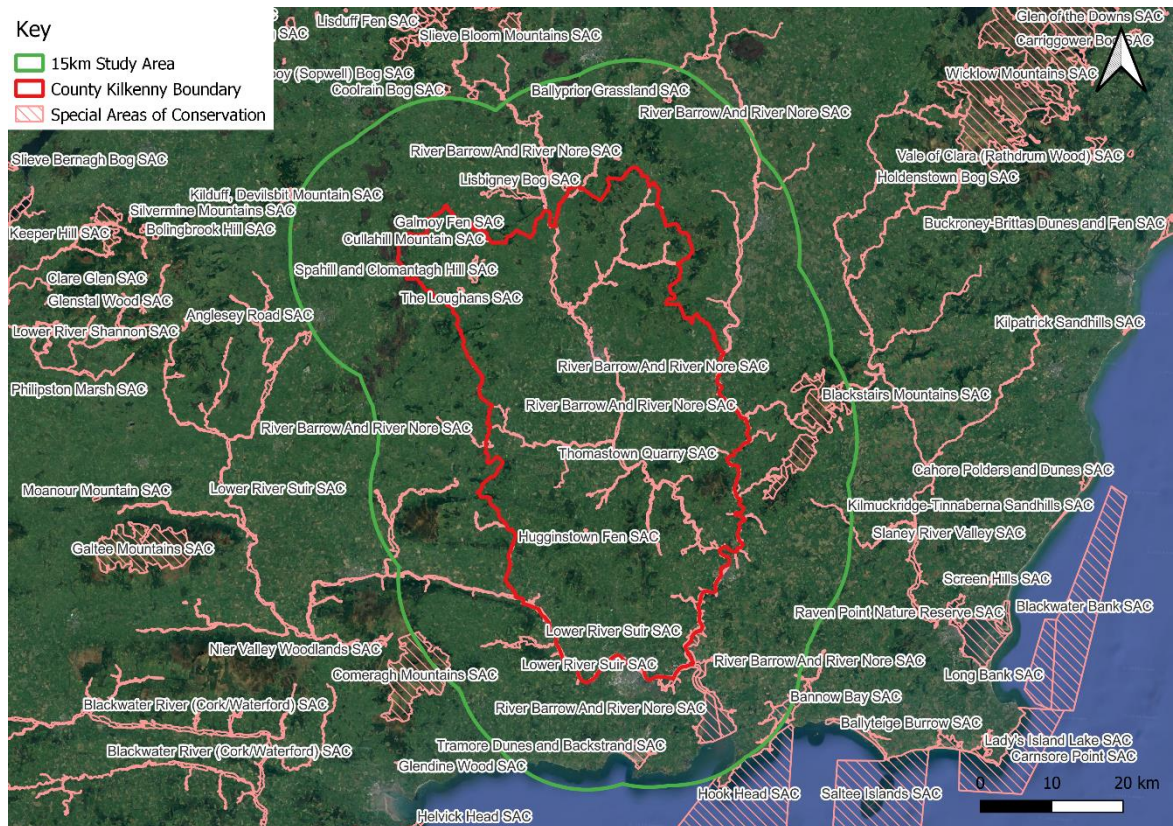


Table 4-1: Natura 2000 sites

Natura 2000 Site	Site Code	Qualifying Interests / Species of Conservation Importance
Tramore Back Strand SPA	4027	Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) [A046] Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>) [A141] Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>) [A149] Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156] Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>) [A157] Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>) [A160] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]
Bannow Bay SPA	4033	Light-bellied Brent Goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) [A046] Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>) [A048] Pintail (<i>Anas acuta</i>) [A054] Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) [A130] Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] Grey Plover (<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>) [A141] Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>) [A143] Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>) [A149] Black-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa limosa</i>) [A156] Bar-tailed Godwit (<i>Limosa lapponica</i>) [A157] Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>) [A160] Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>) [A162] Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]
Mid-Waterford Coast SPA	4193	Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) [A017] Peregrine (<i>Falco peregrinus</i>) [A103] Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) [A184] Chough (<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>) [A346]
River Nore SPA	4233	Kingfisher (<i>Alcedo atthis</i>) [A229]
Seas off Wexford SPA	4237	Red-throated Diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>) [A001] Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>) [A009] Manx Shearwater (<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>) [A013] Gannet (<i>Morus bassanus</i>) [A016] Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) [A017] Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>) [A018] Common Scoter (<i>Melanitta nigra</i>) [A065] Mediterranean Gull (<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>) [A176] Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179] Lesser Black-backed Gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>) [A183] Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>) [A184] Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>) [A188] Sandwich Tern (<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>) [A191] Roseate Tern (<i>Sterna dougallii</i>) [A192] Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193] Arctic Tern (<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>) [A194] Little Tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>) [A195] Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>) [A199] Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>) [A200] Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>) [A204]
Lower River Suir SAC	2137	Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) [1330]

Natura 2000 Site	Site Code	Qualifying Interests / Species of Conservation Importance
		Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculon fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260] Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] Taxus baccata woods of the British Isles [91J0] Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092] Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095] Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096] Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099] Alosa fallax fallax (Twaite Shad) [1103] Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106] Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]
River Barrow And River Nore SAC	2162	estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Reefs [1170] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculon fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260] European dry heaths [4030] Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels [6430] Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] Vertigo moulinsiana (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016] Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092] Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095] Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096] Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099] Alosa fallax fallax (Twaite Shad) [1103] Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106] Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355] Trichomanes speciosum (Killarney Fern) [1421]
Lisbigney Bog SAC	869	Calcareous fens with Cladium mariscus and species of the Caricion davalliana [7210]

Natura 2000 Site	Site Code	Qualifying Interests / Species of Conservation Importance
		Vertigo moulinsiana (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]
Ballyprior Grassland SAC	2256	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]
Hugginstown Fen SAC	404	Alkaline fens [7230]
The Loughans SAC	407	Turloughs [3180]
Galmoy Fen SAC	1858	Alkaline fens [7230]
Thomastown Quarry SAC	2252	Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]
Cullahill Mountain SAC	831	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]
Hook Head SAC	764	Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Tursiops truncatus (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] Phocoena phocoena (Harbour Porpoise) [1351]
Tramore Dunes and Backstrand SAC	671	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410] Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120] Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]
Bannow Bay SAC	697	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Annual vegetation of drift lines [1210] Perennial vegetation of stony banks [1220] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410] Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (Sarcocornetea fruticosi) [1420] Embryonic shifting dunes [2110] Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120]

Natura 2000 Site	Site Code	Qualifying Interests / Species of Conservation Importance
		Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]
Blackstairs Mountains SAC	770	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix [4010] European dry heaths [4030]
Spahill and Clomantagh Hill SAC	849	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]
Comeragh Mountains SAC	1952	Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) [3110] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) [8110] Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210] Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220] Hamatocaulis vernicosus (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]
Staney River Valley SAC	781	Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260] Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095] Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096] Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099] Alosa fallax fallax (Twaité Shad) [1103] Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106] Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355] Phoca vitulina (Harbour Seal) [1365]

4.3 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

A Screening Matrix is presented in **Table 4-2** based on the guidance provided in “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”.

Table 4-2: Screening Matrix

Screening Matrix	Overview
Description of the Plan	An overview of the NAP, including background and context are provided in Section 4 of this document.
Identification of Natura 2000 sites	Natura 2000 sites identified within the Zone of Influence (Zol) of the NAP are provided in Section 4.1 of this document.
Is the plan directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the Natura 2000 site(s)?	The Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to, the conservation management objectives of the above listed Natura 2000 sites in Section 4.1 and therefore further consideration of Likely Significant Effects is required.
What are the individual elements of the plan (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 site?	<p>Noise is a principal source of disturbance for QI and SCI features of Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>The aim of the NAP is to reduce noise sources within KCC and protect ‘Quiet Areas in open country’, whereby existing baseline noise levels will be maintained, or reduced.</p> <p>If Candidate Quiet Areas are designated, they will not offset noise elsewhere that might affect Natura 2000 sites, and it is likely that many of the Quiet Areas in open country will also coincide with the Natura 2000 sites. For other identified sites, there are no policies or requirements that would directly offset noise elsewhere that could give rise to Likely Significant Effects to Natura 2000 sites, or the QI/SCI of that site.</p> <p>Therefore, there is no pathway for potential Likely Significant Effects as the plan does not propose any measures which could increase or negatively affect existing noise levels. The reduction in noise in areas near to, or within Natura 2000 sites will ultimately contribute to a beneficial effect of Natura 2000 sites and their QI/SCI features.</p> <p>The potential noise impacts that arise from future development works will be assessed in their own right through Planning and Licensing processes, including through Environmental Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments, Appropriate Assessments and application of relevant Guidance relating to noise.</p>
What are the likely effects on the Natura 2000 sites in view of the specific conservation objectives set out for the designating features?	None – the NAP does not provide a specific framework for development; they provide a strategy to reduce noise emissions and identify Quiet Areas in open country where either baseline noise emissions will be protected, therefore there is no pathway for potential Likely Significant Effects on Natura 2000 sites in view of their conservation objectives.

Screening Matrix	Overview
Describe how the project or plan (alone or in-combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site(s).	The effects of the NAPs are considered to be beneficial, however no pathway for Likely Significant Effects is identified.
Explain why these effects are not considered to be significant.	The proposals in the NAP will ultimately seek to reduce noise emission levels of road traffic, rail traffic and at industrial activity sites, including ports. The reduction in noise at these locations across KCC will ultimately result in the reduction or retention of baseline noise emissions within and adjacent to Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, there is no pathway for adverse effect and so it cannot be significant. The reduction in noise emissions will be indirectly beneficial for species associated with Natura 2000 sites albeit not significantly, as it is well documented that noise can have detrimental effects on a species ability to reproduce (timing, frequency and hatching success) and communicate ⁶ . It is acknowledged that some species may be habituated to current noise levels, and it is considered that their function within the Natura 2000 sites would only be improved by reduced noise levels.
Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site?	<p>The following other Plans have been considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027; • Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region; • Kilkenny County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029. <p>The NAP present a framework for the identification and reduction of potential noise sources and the identification or proposed 'Quiet Areas in open country'. There are no additional sources for effects to Natura 2000 sites in combination with other projects or plans.</p>

4.4 Screening Statement

The NAP is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site.

The NAP establishes a framework for identifying and mitigating noise pollution sources within KCC. Any project resulting from the NAP must adhere to relevant levels within the National Planning Framework, such as the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027, along with other applicable legislation and policy requirements.

The potential noise impact of development is overseen through the Planning and Licensing processes, encompassing Environmental Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments, Appropriate Assessments and adherence to pertinent guidance on noise.

The primary trigger for AA would be if the NAP was likely to significantly affect a Natura 2000 site. However, the NAP elements are not identified as having any direct or indirect impacts on Natura 2000 sites. The actions contained within the NAP do not constitute a source of impact to any identified Natura 2000 site.

⁶ Masayuki., S *et al* (2020) Sensory pollutants alter bird phenology and fitness across a continent. Nature.

Stage 1 Screening has concluded that the NAP and its associated actions is not predicted, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, to have Likely Significant Effects upon the 21 Natura 2000 sites identified in Section 4.2.

Therefore, in alignment with the Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, it is determined that the NAP will generate no potential for Likely Significant Effects. Consequently, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required.

The statement as above is still valid following consultation responses to the NAP and associated SEA and AA screenings. Should there be further changes to the NAP, which may affect the conclusions presented herein, then a further screening of the potential for Likely Significant Effects upon Natura 2000 sites will be required.



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