



Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Stage 1 - Appropriate Assessment Screening

Conclusion Statement

Introduction:

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) are the Irish state body responsible for the protection, management and conservation of the inland fisheries and sea angling resources. In accordance with the EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (BIRDS AND NATURAL HABITATS) REGULATIONS 2011, as amended, IFI are required to determine if plans or projects that they propose, or wish to adopt, could act either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects to cause a significant effect on a European site.

This determination is carried out following a review of the Appropriate Assessment Screening document submitted to IFI for review, and is the result of the Inland Fisheries Ireland comprehensive and objective Appropriate Assessment determination process.

This process is aligned with the IFI vision to position Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources as sustainably as possible for the benefit of future generations. This document informs stakeholders of this commitment and its rationale by outlining the decision-making process and IFI's final determination on the specific plan or project below, with a clear and transparent justification.

Synopsis:

This review is carried out by an independent external environmental expert agency that provides professional advice if an Appropriate Assessment (NIS) is required for the plan or project, or not. A further review of this process is then carried out by a relevant Inland Fisheries Ireland Head of Function who will either validate the conclusion of the determination, or not, as appropriate.

As part of the EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (BIRDS AND NATURAL HABITATS) REGULATIONS 2011, as amended, and in accordance with Regulation (18) (a) Inland Fisheries Ireland as a public authority shall make available for inspection any determination that it makes in relation to a plan or project and provide reasons for that determination, as soon as may be after the making of the determination or giving the notice, as appropriate, by members of the public during office hours of the offices of the authority and shall also make the determination or notice available in electronic form including by placing the documents on the authority's website.

This determination will be available on the IFI website at <https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/what-we-do/conservation-and-development/determinations>.

Project Reference	DET-2026-000199
Project Name	Lough Ree Commercial Netting Engine
Project Description	Commercial netting on Lough Ree has a long cultural tradition, carried out for generations by local families along various parts of the shoreline. In recent years, netting has primarily taken place in the southern section of the lake, particularly around King's Island and Inchmore Island, with occasional netting activity extending northwards as far as Shanballymore. In 2023, eleven licences were issued for the activity, valid from 15th February to 31st July. Netting is prohibited from 06:00 on Saturday to 06:00 on Monday during the period from season opening (11th February) to 11th May. Under current legislation, the capture and retention of trout under 30 cm is prohibited, and a minimum legal mesh size is specified for the nets. The Electricity Supply Board (ESB), as fishery owner of Lough Ree, holds statutory responsibility for the management, conservation, and protection of the Lough Ree fisheries and fisheries throughout the Shannon catchment. In parallel, IFI staff carry out inspections and monitoring of the Lough Ree fishery as part of their statutory remit. The activity relates to the operation of traditional commercial draft netting for trout on Lough Ree. Netting is carried out from the shoreline at designated draws during daylight hours only. Unlike drift or survey netting, the draft net is never left unattended or set overnight. The method involves one end of the net being held ashore while a boat carries the other end out onto the lake, sweeps in a semi-circular arc, and returns to shore, thereby enclosing a section of water. The fishermen then haul the net ashore to complete the operation. While up to 15 trout have occasionally been taken in a single haul, typical catch volumes are generally much lower and some between zero and single figures.
Accompanying Report	25731-ZZ-ZZZ-RP-EC-6001_Lough_Ree_Rev0.pdf,
Consultations	
Agency	Observations
(1) NPWS	A consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) was undertaken on 17th June 2025 to identify any areas of concern within Lough Ree that should be considered as part of the assessment. In its response, NPWS highlighted a number of sensitive locations. These include: ▪ Islands: Inchmadermot, Inchenag, Goat Island, Clawinch, King's Island, the Black Islands, Nun's Island, Saits Island, Inch Boffin, Inchturk, Inch Mor, and Ramon's Island. ▪ Shoals: Iskeraulin Shoal and Wood Shoal. ▪ Other features: Pollagh Point, the spit on the eastern side and Welch Rocks.
European Sites	
Assessment & Determination	
Assessment of likely significance of effects	

Based on the best scientific information available, including long-term monitoring data provided by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the commercial draft-net trout fishery on Lough Ree is characterised as a low-frequency, spatially limited activity that has historically coexisted with the qualifying interests of both Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC. The principal potential interaction pathway between the activity and the European sites relates to short-term disturbance arising from boat movements and shoreline net retrieval, rather than permanent habitat loss or sustained displacement of birds.

In the absence of any mitigation, the potential impacts of commercial draft-net fishing are limited to temporary and localised disturbance of birds using shoreline and nearshore habitats for foraging or resting. Available NPWS datasets do not indicate that the activity has resulted in displacement, reduced breeding success, or degradation of wetland habitats. No evidence has been identified to suggest that draft-net fishing has caused measurable habitat alteration within the SAC or adverse effects on the breeding or non-breeding populations of SCI species within the SPA.

The ecological receptors relevant to the assessment include wetland habitats and waterbird species associated with the SPA, including Common Tern, Common Scoter, Lapwing, Golden Plover, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Coot, and other waterbirds that utilise the lake for foraging, roosting, or breeding. Long-term monitoring demonstrates that these species remain widely distributed across the lake and continue to breed successfully in areas that overlap with traditional draw locations.

With the implementation of the precautionary mitigation measures outlined in Section 4.8, which focus on awareness, operational good practice, liaison with NPWS and conservation projects, and adaptive management, any potential for disturbance is further reduced. These measures are proportionate to the scale and nature of the activity and are consistent with NPWS recommendations that knowledge exchange and cooperative management represent the most effective approach to safeguarding breeding birds on Lough Ree.

Taking account of the nature of the activity, the available evidence base, and the mitigation proposed, it is objectively concluded that the commercial draft-net fishery will not result in significant adverse residual effects on the conservation objectives or integrity of Lough Ree SPA or Lough Ree SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Determination

The Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC provides legal protection for species and habitats of European importance via the selection of geographical areas considered to be of particular importance to a region's most valuable and threatened species. This pan-European Natura 2000 network of protected areas, otherwise known in Ireland as 'European sites', includes Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated for habitats, plants and non-avian species, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated for avifauna and their habitats (under the Birds Directive (79/409/ECC as codified by Directive 2009/147/EC)). To ensure the longevity of these European sites and to maintain or restore the favourable conservation statuses of the habitats and species within them, Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out a series of steps/stages that must be applied to plans and projects that may have a significant effect on a European site.

A Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1) was undertaken to identify whether the commercial netting is likely to have significant direct or indirect impacts (or significant impacts could not be ruled out) on European sites identified as being within the zone of impact influence of the commercial netting. The zone of impact was ascertained through the application of the Source-Pathway-Receptor (SPR) model and as a precautionary measure, all European sites located within 15 kilometres of the Lough Ree site were considered. The screening process concluded that the commercial netting activity was not likely to have significant direct or indirect effects, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on 27 European sites within the zone of influence. However, the same conclusion could not be reached with regards two European sites, namely Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC, and significant effects because of the commercial netting could not be ruled out. Consequently, the project proceeded to Stage 2 of the Appropriate Assessment process and a Natura Impact Statement was produced.

This Natura Impact Statement (Stage 2) has considered the impact of the commercial netting on the integrity of two European sites, namely Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in relation to the structure, function and conservation objectives of each site. Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and best scientific knowledge, including in particular the nature of the predicted impacts from the commercial netting activity, and with the implementation of the mitigation measures proposed, it has been determined the commercial netting in Lough Ree and will not adversely affect (either directly or indirectly) the integrity of either Lough Ree SPA or Lough Ree SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in light of the specific conservation objectives of each site.

Note on consultation:- In undertaking an Appropriate Assessment, IFI consulted with stakeholders relevant to this low intensity and historical fishery project. To that end, consultation was undertaken with landowners, commercial draft net fishermen and the NPWS.

Conclusion: NIS Required, effect on European site or protected species likely or uncertain without implementing mitigation measures necessary for the protection of Natura 2000 sites.

We, the undersigned, having carefully considered the information referred to above, agree with and adopt the reasoning and conclusions presented

Validated by: Milton Matthews

Date: 07-08-2026

Inland Fisheries Ireland, Head of Function



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